# INVESTIGATING THE PURCHASE INTENTION OF COUNTERFEIT FASHION PRODUCTS AMONG VIETNAMESE CONSUMERS: AN APPLICATION OF THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

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**Abstract:** ***This study examines socio-psychological factors influencing the intention to purchase counterfeit fashion in Vietnam, a prominent issue in developing economies. Extending the Theory of Planned Behavior by incorporating Modern Status Orientation (MSO), data from 304 consumers were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling. Results show that attitude and subjective norms are the strongest predictors of purchase intention, while perceived behavioral control and MSO have no significant direct effects. Further analysis suggests that in the Vietnamese context, where counterfeit products are widely accessible, availability no longer differentiates behavior. Instead, status-seeking motives play an indirect role by shaping attitudes rather than directly driving intention. These findings challenge traditional TPB assumptions and offer deeper insights with practical implications for brand managers and policymakers in emerging markets.***

• Keywords: *couterfeit, purchase intention, theory of planned behavior, modern status orientation.*

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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the market for counterfeit products, especially fashion goods, has expanded rapidly, becoming a serious global concern. It not only erodes brand value and business revenue but also threatens consumer safety and weakens intellectual property protection. In transitional economies like Vietnam, counterfeit fashion consumption is particularly prevalent, driven by limited income alongside growing needs for social status expression.

Vietnam currently serves as a representative environment for studying counterfeit fashion consumption. Evidence shows that many consumers are not deceived by counterfeit fashion products; rather, they actively choose to buy them as a symbolic substitute - a low-cost means of expressing status or achieving social integration. In this context, the consumption of counterfeit fashion is not merely a result of ignorance or deception, but a careful consideration guided by psychological, social, and cultural factors.

Although the issue of counterfeit fashion products has received significant attention from policymakers and businesses, the majority of current research still focuses on the supply side, including production, distribution, and legal sanctions (Tang et al. 2014). Conversely, research on the demand side, especially studies exploring the factors affecting the attitude and intention to deliberately purchase counterfeit fashion, remains relatively limited (Teah and Phau 2008). Furthermore, existing studies have mainly been conducted in Western contexts or limited to a few Asian countries with more developed research in this field, such as Singapore, Taiwan, or Hong Kong (Tseng et al. 2021; Triandewi and Tjiptono 2013). This situation reveals a significant research gap in exploring counterfeit consumption behavior in non-Western cultural contexts, where social characteristics, cultural values, and community norms may distinctly influence the consumer decision-making process.

To explain this behavior across cultural contexts, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is widely used to analyze unethical consumer actions, including counterfeit fashion purchases. TPB posits that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intention. While prior studies in Asian contexts have applied TPB to counterfeit consumption, they often lack sensitivity to local cultural factors, particularly in explaining symbolic consumption driven by social values.

To fill this gap, this study extends TPB by incorporating Modern Status Orientation (MSO), a sociological construct reflecting consumption patterns in Vietnam's transitional economy. The research focuses on

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intentional counterfeit purchases rather than unintentional consumption, aiming to offer a more contextually grounded perspective for developing countries.

This study contributes to the academic literature in three main ways: (1) Extending the TPB model with a cultural variable relevant to the Vietnamese context; (2) Clarifying counterfeit consumption behavior from the perspective of a symbolic strategy rather than a purely ethical issue; and (3) Proposing practical implications for businesses and policymakers in developing communication and anti-counterfeiting management strategies that are better aligned with consumer psychology, especially as the government enters a more decisive phase against counterfeit fashion.

## 2. Theoretical background and Hypotheses development

### *2.1. Counterfeit Products*

Counterfeit products are illegal copies of registered trademarks, typically produced to deceive consumers or substitute for genuine goods for illegal commercial gain (Grossman and Shapiro, 1988). From a market perspective, counterfeit products cause revenue loss, damage brand reputation, and undermine consumer trust. However, from a consumer behavior perspective, counterfeit fashion items are not always reluctant substitutes; they can also be deliberate choices driven by social, psychological, and symbolic motivations (Penz and Stöttinger, 2005).

From this perspective, counterfeit products can be categorized into two types: deceptive and non-deceptive counterfeiting (Grossman and Shapiro, 1988; Staake et al., 2009). This classification is based on consumers' awareness of the counterfeit nature of the product rather than its technical characteristics.

Deceptive counterfeit products are purchased without consumers knowing they are fake, often because of sophisticated imitation and seemingly reliable sellers. This type frequently occurs in sectors such as auto parts, pharmaceuticals, or cosmetics, where packaging and technical quality can closely resemble genuine products.

In contrast, for non-deceptive counterfeits, consumers are aware of the product's inauthenticity and recognize differences in price, distribution, and quality. This is common in the luxury fashion sector, where consumers seek symbolic benefits such as social status while avoiding the high cost of genuine goods (Wilcox et al., 2009). In developing countries like Vietnam, limited income and strong social pressure on personal image further reinforce this behavior (Eisend & Schuchert-Güler, 2006).

Understanding this distinction is important because policy and managerial responses differ. If consumers are deceived, solutions should focus on improving product authentication and information transparency. If purchases are intentional, interventions should address attitudes, social norms, and ethical perceptions. Therefore, this study focuses on the intentional purchase of non-deceptive counterfeit fashion products.

### *2.1. Intention to Purchase Counterfeit Products*

Over the past two decades, much research has focused on exploring the motivations and psychological factors behind counterfeit consumption, primarily in emerging market contexts where intellectual property protection is limited and social norms are not clearly defined. Research in this area can be divided into three main approaches:

Ethics-based Approach: This perspective emphasizes perceptions of right and wrong, personal moral norms, and ethical barriers to consuming counterfeit products (Wilcox et al. 2009). However, prior studies suggest that ethical concerns alone are often insufficient to discourage counterfeit consumption, especially when consumers justify their choices with economic or social benefits.

Social-cultural Approach: This line of research focuses on the influence of social norms, perceived community acceptance, and the desire to signal social status through consumption (Khan et al. 2023). Within this perspective, counterfeit goods are viewed as symbolic alternatives that enable consumers to achieve social recognition at a lower cost.

Rational Behavior Approach: This approach applies behavioral theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen 1991) to explain counterfeit consumption through constructs including attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. TPB has been widely used in consumer behavior research because it allows systematic and quantifiable analysis of socio-psychological factors. Studies conducted in several Asian markets have shown that TPB effectively explains counterfeit consumption in societies where social image and symbolic consumption are highly valued.

According to TPB, behavioral intention is the most immediate predictor of actual behavior. Intention becomes stronger when individuals hold favorable attitudes, perceive supportive social norms, and believe they have sufficient control over the behavior. In consumer research, purchase intention refers to the consumer's willingness to buy a product (Elbeck and Tirtiroglu 2008). In the context of counterfeit fashion, purchase

intention represents the deliberate willingness to buy and use counterfeit products. This study adopts this concept while extending the TPB framework by incorporating the MSO variable, which reflects social characteristics relevant to the Vietnamese consumer context.

### *2.3. Factors Affecting the Intention to Purchase Counterfeit Fashion Products*

As mentioned, the model in this study is built on the three core factors of TPB, extended with the MSO variable, reflecting the growing trend of image-driven and self-affirming consumption in Vietnam. This factor has not been addressed in traditional TPB studies but is highly prevalent among young consumers in developing nations.

#### *2.3.1. Attitude (ATT)*

Attitude toward a behavior refers to an individual's favorable or unfavorable evaluation of that specific behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). According to TPB, attitude positively impacts behavioral intention. Attitude is influenced by two factors: the individual's belief about the consequences of the behavior and their evaluation of those consequences.

In the context of counterfeit consumption, many studies show that a positive attitude is a strong driver of the deliberate intention to purchase counterfeits (Penz and Stöttinger 2005; Eisend et al. 2017). The products being counterfeited are typically high-end, luxury, and symbolic fashion brands. The need for self-expression, the desire for social integration, or simply the wish to own a fashion symbol reinforces a positive attitude toward counterfeit products (Wilcox et al. 2009; Eisend and Schuchert-Güler 2006). Those with positive attitudes often believe that buying and using these products can better convey their status, help them overcome personal feelings of shame or guilt. Recent studies in developing countries, such as Vietnam and India, also show that consumers feel less guilt when purchasing counterfeits if the behavior is normalized by society (Purwanto et al. 2019; Tran et al. 2022). Therefore, a positive attitude is considered a key predictor in forming the strategic intention to consume counterfeits. Based on this, the study proposes:

*H1: Attitude has a positive relationship with the intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products.*

#### *2.3.2. Subjective Norms (SN)*

Subjective norms (SN) are an individual's perception of how significant others (e.g., family, friends, colleagues) would judge their performance of a certain behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). This social pressure forces consumers to perform certain actions to gain approval in social situations.

In counterfeit fashion consumption, SN often plays a critical role. Research by Jiang and Cova (2012) and more recently by Shepherd et al. (2023) indicates that if the act of buying counterfeits is supported by friends or social media communities, consumers feel the behavior is more rational, less ethically risky, and more socially acceptable. Particularly in collectivist cultures like Vietnam, the influence of reference groups is stronger, especially among youth who are sensitive to trends and social recognition (Nguyen and Tambyah 2011). SN is therefore not just a predictor of behavior but also a manifestation of a shift in social norms toward rationalizing counterfeit consumption. Accordingly, the study proposes:

*H2: Subjective norms have a positive relationship with the intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products.*

#### *2.3.3. Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)*

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) refers to the extent to which individuals believe they can control and easily perform a particular behavior based on their abilities and external facilitating conditions (Ajzen, 1991). Unlike attitude, which reflects emotional evaluation, and subjective norms, which represent social pressure, PBC captures a more practical dimension related to perceived resources and self-confidence in performing the behavior.

In counterfeit consumption, PBC is reflected in consumers' beliefs that counterfeit products are easily accessible through channels such as online markets, social media, or traditional marketplaces, and that purchasing them involves few obstacles (Penz and Stöttinger, 2005; Eisend et al., 2017). In environments where counterfeits are widespread and enforcement is weak, consumers may feel that the risks are manageable, which further strengthens their perceived control (Purwanto et al., 2019). When individuals believe they have sufficient resources and opportunities to obtain counterfeit products, their purchase intention is likely to increase. Therefore, the study proposes:

*H3: Perceived Behavioral Control has a positive relationship with the intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products.*

#### *2.3.4. Modern Status Orientation (MSO)*

Status Orientation (SO) is a concept developed by Tambyah et al. (2009) in the context of transitional economies like Vietnam. It refers to the consumer's tendency to emphasize the importance of status symbols and the belief that acquiring these symbols can help them achieve a desired social position. SO comprises

two sub-concepts: Modern Status Orientation (MSO), which emphasizes modern (post-transition) status symbols, and Traditional Status Orientation (TSO), which values traditional (pre-transition) symbols.

In transitional economies like Vietnam, the rise of the middle class and increasing pressure for self-expression have made symbolic consumption more prevalent. According to symbolic consumption and social signaling theories, products carry social meaning beyond functional value, reflecting desired self-image. When authentic goods are unaffordable, high-end counterfeits serve as symbolic substitutes, enabling similar status expression at lower cost.

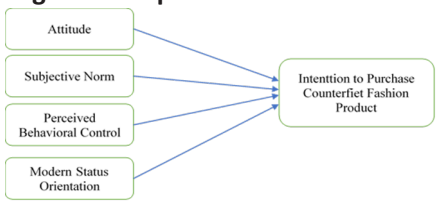
In a high power-distance culture like Vietnam, where counterfeits are relatively tolerated, such behavior may be viewed as rational and less criticized. Therefore, individuals with high Modern Status Orientation (MSO) are more likely to develop stronger intentions to purchase counterfeits as a means of maintaining a modern and socially integrated image. Based on this, the study proposes:

*H4: Modern Status Orientation has a positive relationship with the intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products.*

### *2.4. Proposed Research Model*

Figure 1 presents the proposed research model illustrating the factors affecting the intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products. In addition to the three TPB factors and MSO, the model includes four control variables: gender, age, education and income.

**Figure 1: Proposed Research Model**




## 3. Methodology

### *3.1. Measures*

The concepts used in this study include purchase intention (PI), attitude (ATT), subjective norms (SN), perceived behavioral control (PBC), and modern status orientation (MSO). All scales were adapted from previous studies. The scales for PI, ATT, and SN were adapted from De Matos et al. (2007) . The PBC scale was adapted from Van den Putte et al. (2005) . The MSO scale was adapted from Tambyah et al. (2016) . All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = "Strongly disagree" and 5 = "Strongly agree".

Prior to the main survey, a pilot study was conducted with a small sample (n = 30) to test the initial reliability of the scales and ensure the clarity of the questions. Pilot study participants, who had demographic characteristics similar to the main target audience , were encouraged to provide feedback on clarity. The pilot results showed all questions were easily understood. Preliminary reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) for all scales exceeded the 0.7 threshold, indicating good internal consistency. Based on this positive feedback, the questionnaire was retained without significant adjustments for the main data collection.

### *3.2. Sampling Technique*

This study employed snowball sampling to reach consumers who purchase counterfeit fashion products, a group that is difficult to access through conventional methods. The online questionnaire was initially distributed to a seed group with experience purchasing counterfeit fashion items. Participants were then asked to share the survey link with eligible individuals in their social networks, generating a snowball effect. Data collection continued until the required sample size was reached.

## 4. Research findings

### *4.1. Sample Demographics*

The online questionnaire was distributed from February 10, 2025, to May 30, 2025. A total of 304 responses were collected. After data cleaning, 304 observations remained, representing a 100% usable response rate. The sample demographics are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Results of Descriptive Statistics**

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 197 | 64.8 |
| | Male | 106 | 34.9 |
| | Others | 1 | .3 |
| Age group | Under 20 | 36 | 11.8 |
| | 20 - 40 | 204 | 67.1 |
| | 41- 50 | 58 | 19.1 |
| | Over 50 | 6 | 2.0 |
| Occupation | Government employee | 41 | 13.5 |
| | Office staff | 114 | 37.5 |
| | Student | 122 | 40.1 |
| | Self-employed | 27 | 8.9 |

### *4.2. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity*

The study's scales were assessed for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha, and for convergent validity using Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to recommendations, Cronbach's Alpha and CR should be 0.7 or higher, and AVE should be 0.5 or higher.

The results (Table 2) show that all scales satisfied these criteria. Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.856 to 0.962, exceeding the 0.7 threshold. Similarly, CR values ranged from 0.860 to 0.963, and all AVE values were greater than 0.5 (ranging from 0.552 to

0.896), confirming the scales achieved appropriate reliability and convergent validity.

**Table 2: Construct Reliability and Validity Results**

| Construct | Cronbach's Alpha | CR | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Attitude (ATT) | 0.856 | 0.860 | 0.552 |
| Subjective Norms (SN) | 0.962 | 0.963 | 0.896 |
| Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) | 0.901 | 0.903 | 0.701 |
| Modern Status Orientation (MSO) | 0.941 | 0.943 | 0.768 |
| Intention to Purchase (PI) | 0.893 | 0.893 | 0.675 |

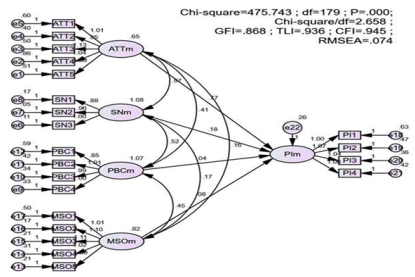
### *4.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)*

After confirming reliability and convergent validity, the measurement model was tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The CFA results indicated that the measurement model fit the data well: Chi-square/df (CMIN/df) = 2.7 (< 3); RMSEA = 0.075 (< 0.08); CFI = 0.956 (>= 0.90); TLI = 0.947 (>= 0.90). These indices are all within the acceptable thresholds, showing the measurement model has a good fit with the empirical data.

### *4.4. Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing*

Following the validation of the measurement model, the structural model was tested to evaluate the research hypotheses. The results indicated that the structural model had an acceptable fit with the collected data. Specifically, the fit indices were good: Chi-square/df = 2.658 (< 3); CFI = 0.945 (> 0.9); TLI = 0.936 (> 0.9); RMSEA = 0.074 (< 0.08) (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Results of the structural model**




The results of the hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 3. Hypothesis 1, which predicted that attitude positively impacts purchase intention, was strongly supported (β = 0.654, p < 0.001). Similarly, subjective norms also had a significant influence on purchase intention, supporting Hypothesis 2 (β = 0.195, p < 0.05). Hypothesis 3 predicted that perceived behavioral control (PBC) would have a positive relationship with purchase intention. However, the analysis showed this relationship was not statistically significant (β = 0.039, p = 0.488). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Likewise, hypothesis 4, which posited that modern status orientation (MSO) positively impacts purchase intention, also found no support from the empirical data. Although the coefficient was positive, it was very weak and not statistically signifi-cant (β = 0.073, p = 0.125). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was also rejected.

**Table 3: Results of Hyphothesis Testing**

| Hyphothesis | Relationship | Unstandardized Coef. | Standardized Coef. (β) | P_value | Conclusion |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | ATT → PI | .767 | .654 | *** | Supported |
| H2 | SN → PI | .177 | .195 | .002 | Supported |
| H3 | PBC → PI | .036 | .039 | .488 | Rejected |
| H4 | MSO → PI | .076 | .073 | .125 | Rejected |

The research model explained 26% of the variance in consumers' intention to purchase counterfeit fashion products ($R^2$ = 0.26). Although this figure may seem modest, in the field of consumer behavior research, where decisions are influenced by countless complex psychological and environmental factors, a model that can explain 26% of the variance is considered valuable and significant (Hair et al., 2017).

## 5. Discussion

This study examines factors influencing Vietnamese consumers' intention to purchase counterfeit fashion using an extended TPB framework. The findings both support existing theories and offer new insights into consumer behavior in an emerging market context.

The results strongly confirm that attitude and subjective norms are the two most important predictors of the intention to purchase counterfeit fashion. This finding is entirely consistent with previous research in the field (Penz and Stöttinger, 2005; Wilcox et al., 2009, Nguyen and Nguyen, 2017). This indicates that the purchase intention of Vietnamese consumers is primarily driven by two main forces: first, a positive personal evaluation of this behavior (viewing it as a smart cost-effective choice that still meets fashion needs), and second, the influence of social pressure, where the act of buying and using counterfeits is accepted or even normalized within their social circles (family, friends, colleagues).

Among these, attitude was the most powerful factor influencing purchase intention. This shows that the intention to buy counterfeits is not an impulsive act but the result of a deliberate, individual cost-benefit analysis. Consumers appear to focus on the benefits of counterfeit products (e.g., affordable price, satisfying fashion demands, expressing style) as more important than potential risks related to poor quality or ethical issues. This finding highlights that the core of counterfeit consumption originates from the consumers' own acceptance and rationalization.

Furthermore, the behavior is strongly governed by the social environment. When buying and using counterfeits is socially normalized, it reinforces positive attitudes and promotes purchase intention. The influence of subjective norms highlights the

importance of community and social factors in consumption decisions in Vietnam, a characteristic of collectivist cultures.

One of the most interesting and valuable results of this study is the rejection of the hypotheses regarding Perceived Behavioral Control (Hypothesis 3) and Modern Status Orientation (Hypothesis 4). These unexpected findings do not represent a limitation of the model; instead, they provide profound insights into the specific context of the Vietnamese market and the complex psychological mechanisms behind counterfeit purchasing. Regarding PBC (H3), TPB suggests that the easier a behavior is to perform, the higher the intention. However, in a market where counterfeit fashion products are widespread, easily accessible, and saturated, behavioral control is no longer a differentiating factor. The purchase intention no longer depends on whether consumers can easily buy fakes (as access is a given), but rather shifts to deeper psychological factors. This partly explains why the traditional TPB model cannot tell the whole story.

Second, the finding that MSO (Hypothesis 4) does not directly impact purchase intention is also significant. Instead of being a direct driver, MSO may function as an antecedent that shapes attitude. An individual with high MSO (a strong desire to signal status) will gradually cultivate a more tolerant or favorable attitude toward counterfeit products as a means to achieve their goal of status expression. This is an important theoretical contribution, suggesting the TPB model can be enriched by examining indirect relationships rather than just direct effects. This also helps explain why attitude was the strongest factor, as it may have already absorbed the influence of deeper value orientations like MSO. The fact that the current model did not test this indirect relationship also helps account for the 74% of unexplained variance. Future research should focus on testing more complex mediation models.

## 6. Contributions and future research

### *6.1. Contributions*

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to the consumer behavior literature in two ways. First, it demonstrates the limitation of the Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) in contexts where counterfeit products are available. Second, and more importantly, it proposes a new role for individual orientation variables like MSO - not as a direct predictor of intention, but as an antecedent variable that shapes attitude, suggesting the need to test more complex mediation models in the future.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings offer important suggestions for brand managers and policymakers. Anti-counterfeiting communication campaigns should prioritize changing consumer attitudes. There is a need for strong, persuasive messages focused on altering the cost-benefit calculation in consumers' minds - for example, by emphasizing the risks of poor quality, the lack of uniqueness in counterfeit products, and the emotional value and experience that only genuine products can provide. Concurrently, efforts to influence subjective norms, such as building social role models who view using counterfeits as undesirable or not proud, are also critical steps.

### *6.2. Future Research*

Despite achieving important results, this study has several limitations. The first limitation is the snowball sampling technique. While suitable for accessing hard-to-reach subjects, this technique can create a less diverse sample, as participants tend to refer others similar to themselves (friends, colleagues). This may affect the generalizability of the results ; the sample may not be fully representative of all Vietnamese consumers. Future research should aim to overcome this by recruiting participants from more diverse social groups or combining this method with others, such as random sampling based on geography or income, to enhance sample representativeness.

Second, the $R^2$ value of 26% indicates that while the model has predictive value, 74% of the variance remains unexplained. We suggest this variance could be further clarified by testing indirect relationships, particularly the mediating role of attitude in the relationship between MSO and purchase intention, as proposed in the discussion. Additionally, qualitative studies, such as in-depth interviews, could help explore the justifications and complex psychological mechanisms behind the decision to choose counterfeit products, further enriching our understanding of this challenging phenomenon.

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