

Examining the Impact of Perceived Quality, Aesthetics, and Durability on Customer Satisfaction: Empirical Evidence and Implications

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to investigate the relationships between perceived quality, aesthetics of products, the durability of products, and customer satisfaction. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested: H1 proposed a relationship between perceived quality products and customer satisfaction; H2 posited a relationship between aesthetics of products and customer satisfaction; H3 hypothesized a relationship between durability of products and customer satisfaction. The study utilized a quantitative approach and collected data through a survey instrument distributed among participants. The research findings confirmed all three hypotheses, revealing significant relationships between perceived quality, aesthetics, durability of products, and customer satisfaction. These results highlight the importance of product attributes in shaping customer satisfaction, providing valuable insights for businesses aiming to enhance customer experiences and strengthen brand loyalty.

1. Introduction

Counterfeit items are illicitly crafted, inexpensive products designed to mimic authentic goods. They are manufactured to appear similar to genuine products but lack the same level of quality, dependability, performance, and durability (Wilcox et al., 2009). Counterfeiting involves the replication of a branded product in a manner that closely resembles or is indistinguishable from genuine items. This includes duplicating packaging, labels, and trademarks with the intention of creating a strong resemblance to the original product (Ahmed et al., 2020). Counterfeiting emerges as a noteworthy and burgeoning concern in both developing and well-established nations (Lybecker, 2007). It constitutes a criminal transgression encompassing the fraudulent production and distribution of an item possessing lower value than the legitimate product, typically pursued with the aim of achieving financial gain (Pickett and Pickett, 2002).

In contemporary times, the trend of donning luxury brands has extended to encompass individuals of various economic backgrounds, including those who aren't particularly affluent. This has led manufacturers to produce near-identical replicas of the authentic items, catering to a less affluent demographic and pricing these duplicates at fifty percent or even lower than the original cost. However, such actions are both deceptive and unlawful in accordance with legal regulations. Counterfeit products typically exhibit a questionable quality, featuring inexpensive alternatives in lieu of the authentic materials. These substitutes often encompass low-grade plastic, synthetic leather, economical glass, subpar fabric, and even outdated or pre-owned components in electronic appliances and devices (Amar et al., 2018).

While imitation purses, timepieces, athletic shoes, or electronic gadgets contribute to illicit underground economies and transnational criminal activities worldwide (Kennedy et al., 2019), consumers typically do not frequently experience illness or harm due to the usage of such replicated goods; however, the consumption of counterfeit pharmaceuticals and cosmetics can inflict substantial harm on consumers. Students at various educational stages might display an inclination towards using cosmetics, driven by the desire to adhere to modern beauty standards and showcase

their unique talents or creativity; notably, the utilization of cosmetics is especially widespread among girls in middle school, often being regarded as a symbolic step into adolescence (Thyne et al., 2016).

Petaling Street's Chinatown is particularly famous for its all-day street stalls, vending counterfeit products including branded cosmetics, wallets, handbags, clothing, timepieces, footwear, and various other items, attracting a multitude of locals and tourists seeking affordable goods, but the declining preservation of Chinese cultural identity in Kuala Lumpur has been caused by external influences and reduced participation of younger generations in cultural activities. Kuala Lumpur's Chinatown, divided into two "layers" on opposite sides of the street, features a primary layer of stalls vending primarily counterfeit designer items such as watches, bags, scarves, and accessories from numerous luxury brands, while the secondary layer comprises shops and lodgings, offering authentic and unique products. However, the use of counterfeit cosmetics poses significant risks to health due to the inclusion of harmful chemicals by untrained individuals, with such products often containing dangerous elements like mercury that can lead to severe health issues, revealing the growing concern of counterfeit goods in the personal care industry despite its substantial economic contribution.

This research presents three hypotheses. The first hypothesis asserts a connection between perceived quality and customer satisfaction, while the second hypothesis posits a connection between aesthetic attributes of products and customer satisfaction. The third hypothesis suggests a relationship between product durability and customer satisfaction. The hypotheses are as follows:

H1: There is a relationship between perceived quality products and customer satisfaction.

H2: There is a relationship between aesthetics of products and customer satisfaction.

H3: There is a relationship between durability of products and customer satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Impact of Counterfeiting on Global Cosmetics Industry

The Cosmetics Manufacturing industry on a global scale consists of 17,969 enterprises, featuring a market valuation of \$451 billion and providing employment opportunities for a workforce totalling 671,743 individuals ("IBISWorld - Industry Market Research, Reports, and Statistics," 2023). Counterfeiting has a substantial impact on the worldwide cosmetics sector, resulting in diverse repercussions for both genuine enterprises and consumers. The global cosmetics sector experiences significant financial setbacks due to counterfeiting, impacting not only authentic cosmetics manufacturers but also exerting a broader influence on the industry as a whole (Elasrag, 2016). According to a piece in Forbes, counterfeiting affects every sector, as counterfeiters rely on the popularity of established brands and products to create inexpensive replicas, deceiving consumers into purchasing them (Jones, 2023). A research study investigates the factors and outcomes behind the widespread growth of fake cosmetics, emphasizing the potential hazards to public health and safety connected with counterfeit items (Amankwah-Amoah, 2022).

2.2 The Impact of Counterfeit Cosmetics

The usage of counterfeit products can have adverse effects on both the body and skin, as those involved in producing these illicit items prioritize replicating the external appearance of genuine products rather than focusing on their actual composition, with these actors lacking formal scientific knowledge and credentials and being motivated primarily by financial gain (Khan and Alam, 2019). Counterfeit products commonly contain elevated levels of the hazardous element mercury (Murphy et al., 2015), which, although naturally occurring, is highly toxic and has the potential to adversely affect various bodily functions such as the heart (Genchi et al., 2017), kidneys (Bridges and Zalups, 2017), immune system (Boening, 2000), lungs (Miao et al., 2023), and brain (Akiyama et al., 2020), while also leading to conditions like skin rashes, muscle weakness, headaches, and insomnia, and in the context of eye cosmetics, it can cause permanent damage to one's vision (Zhao et al., 2022). Counterfeit cosmetics are commonly manufactured in substandard and unsanitary conditions overseas, where dangerous temperatures and high levels of harmful bacteria are left uncontrolled (Enayetullah, 1995). Retailers often distinguish genuine and counterfeit products within similar

establishments, identical shelves, and impose comparable prices, constituting a substantial deception to consumers, even though the variance in quality is minimal to the extent that individuals unfamiliar with authentic items would be unable to discern if they inadvertently purchase a counterfeit one (Viot et al., 2014).

2.3 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality entails the evaluation made by the consumer regarding the overall excellence or reputation of the product, service, or brand, particularly concerning its intended purpose in comparison to other available alternatives (Stylidis et al., 2020). Consumers' perception of product superiority is measured against their anticipations, with individuals gauging the level of product superiority based on the satisfaction derived from its usage (Nagle and Müller, 2018). It proves challenging to inquire about customer loyalty from prospective clients due to the fact that, as outlined by (Grönroos, 2008), customer loyalty is established upon a series of successful and repetitive interactions between the brand and the customer.

2.4 Aesthetics

Aesthetics is typically characterized as the examination of beauty, along with its contrasting concept, ugliness (Huron, 2008). The concept of product aesthetics often plays a significant role in discussions related to the sensory nature of products (Haley and Pittman, 2022). Furthermore, aesthetics stands as one of the most crucial factors impacting consumer perception from various angles. A distinctive product design aids in setting products apart from their competitors and facilitates creating a unique market presence (Al Hamli and Sobaih, 2023).

2.5 Durability

Durability refers to the period during which an item, component, material, or system can fulfill its performance criteria (Fletcher, 2012). The longevity of cosmetics can wield a substantial influence on the choices consumers make when buying products (Hu et al., 2014). Cosmetics that exhibit durability are perceived as having superior quality and economic efficiency, given their reduced need for frequent replacement (Tang et al., 2020). This dynamic can foster heightened customer loyalty and recurrent purchases (Liu-Thompkins et al., 2022). In particular, enduring cosmetics are associated with enhanced quality due to their employment of superior ingredients and heightened effectiveness (Santos et al., 2019). They also confer financial savings in the long term by diminishing the need for frequent replacements (Bergman and Foxon, 2020).

2.6 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction (CSAT) is a metric employed to gauge the level of contentment a customer derives from a product, service, or encounter. Typically obtained through customer satisfaction surveys, this metric involves inquiring about a customer's sentiment on a five or seven-point scale concerning their engagement with a service, purchase, or overall customer interaction, encompassing response choices spanning from "extremely dissatisfied" to "very satisfied" (Bennett and Molisani, 2020). Customer satisfaction information, encompassing surveys and evaluations, can provide an organization with insights to effectively enhance or modify its products and services. The central focus of any entity should revolve around ensuring customer contentment (Swift, 2001).

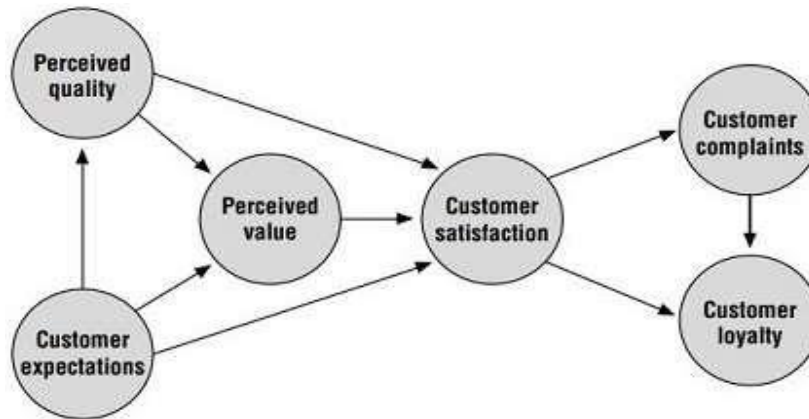


Figure 1: Customer Satisfaction model (Fourie, 2015)

3. Methodology

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is designed with have perceived qualities, aesthetics and durability as independent variables and customer satisfaction as dependent variable. The conceptual framework is as follows:

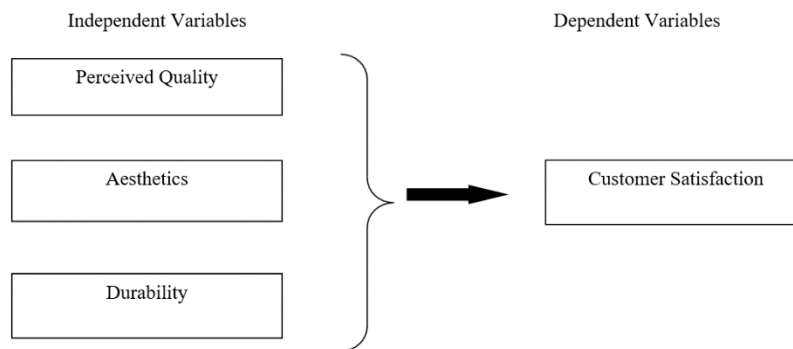


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

3.2 Data Collection

The participants selected for this study are quantitatively oriented, which is particularly suitable for conducting descriptive research involving a large population. The survey was disseminated online, garnering 94 respondents. These participants spanned various age groups, genders, educational backgrounds, and geographic locations across the globe. To conduct the preliminary survey, a Google Form questionnaire was distributed via an online link to a random group of students from LUCT. The questionnaire comprises five sections. Section A entails demographic information and encompasses ten questions. Section B pertains to perceived product quality and includes five questions. Section C focuses on aesthetic aspects of products, containing five questions. Section D delves into product durability, with five questions. Lastly, Section E concentrates on customer satisfaction, featuring five questions.

Participants completed a comprehensive questionnaire spanning ten pages, featuring two distinct sections. The initial section encompassed demographic details, consisting of ten multiple-choice questions. The subsequent section was divided into four parts: Perceived Quality Products, Aesthetics Products, Durability Products, and Customer Satisfaction. Each of these divisions contained five questions. Responses were rated on a seven-point scale, where respondents indicated their level of contentment/discontentment with each statement, ranging from "Strongly Satisfied" (1) to "Strongly Dissatisfied" (7).

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Data Analysis

In the process of data analysis, the main resources employed consist of the results and conclusions derived from the survey conducted for this study. Furthermore, the inputs obtained from the preliminary testing of the questionnaire survey are also incorporated into this analysis. The data analysis tool expounds on the research instrument employed to scrutinize the acquired data. The data analysis for this study was performed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 20.0 Software.

4.2 Demographic Profile Analysis of Respondents

Regarding the age distribution, the frequency analysis revealed that 28.7 percent of participants were under 20 years old. Respondents aged between 20 and 25 accounted for 30.9 percent, those aged between 26 and 30 constituted 9.6 percent, individuals between 31 and 35 years old comprised 18.1 percent, participants aged 36 to 40 made up 7.4 percent, and the remaining 5.3 percent represented respondents above 40 years of age. A total of 94 individuals participated in this section of the survey. The examination indicated that 68.1 percent of participants identified as female, while 31.9 percent identified as male. An exploration into the educational background of the participants was conducted, revealing that 7.4 percent held diploma certificates, 29.8 percent possessed bachelor's degrees, 23.4 percent had master's degrees, 9.6 percent held PhDs, and 29.8 percent had other academic backgrounds. Conducting a frequency analysis to explore participants' enrolment status revealed that 48.3 percent were registered as part-time students, while 51.7 percent were enrolled as full-time students. Conducting a frequency analysis on participants' purchase history of counterfeit cosmetics revealed that 61.3 percent acknowledged buying such products, while 38.7 percent stated they had not made such purchases. Utilizing frequency analysis, the investigation into participants' residential areas revealed the following distribution: 14.9 percent lived on campus, 52.1 percent lived off campus, and 33 percent had different residential arrangements. Conducting a frequency analysis to investigate participants' preferences for counterfeit brands revealed the subsequent distribution: 5.6 percent favoured KYLE brand fake cosmetics, 14.4 percent favoured CHANEL brand fake cosmetics, 27.8 percent favoured HUDA BEAUTY brand fake cosmetics, 14.4 percent favoured DIOR brand fake cosmetics, and 37.8 percent favoured other brand fake cosmetics.

4.3 Likert-scale Questions Analysis

4.3.1 Perceived Quality

Within the category of perceived quality, five questions addressing customer satisfaction were posed, each offering a 1 to 7 scale option. When inquired about the significance of counterfeit cosmetics or fragrances, merely 8.7% of respondents expressed strong satisfaction, whereas 28.3% indicated strong dissatisfaction. Similarly, concerning the conformity of counterfeit products to standard quality for daily use, only 5.6% displayed strong satisfaction, and 11.1% conveyed strong dissatisfaction, with the majority at 33.3% marking "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied". Additionally, in relation to the perceived quality of a specific product like Huda Beauty brand eyeliner, merely 9% demonstrated strong satisfaction, while 24.7% exhibited strong dissatisfaction.

4.3.2 Aesthetics

Within the context of the aesthetics aspect, five questions pertaining to customer satisfaction were administered, each featuring a 1 to 7 scale option. Regarding the significance of aesthetics in counterfeit cosmetics or fragrance, merely 2.2% of respondents expressed strong satisfaction, contrasting with 26.7% indicating strong dissatisfaction. Similarly, when inquired about the aesthetic appeal of counterfeit body spray or perfume, a meager 3.3% displayed strong satisfaction, in contrast with 33% registering strong dissatisfaction, alongside 16.5% indicating both "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, when evaluating the importance of design in counterfeit cosmetics or fragrance, a mere 2.3% demonstrated strong satisfaction, with 28.4% revealing strong dissatisfaction.

4.3.3 Durability

In the context of the durability factor, five questions addressing customer satisfaction were presented with a 1 to 7 scale option. When questioned about the significance of quality in counterfeit cosmetics/fragrance like deodorant, only 10.3% of respondents expressed strong satisfaction, contrasting with a higher rate of 23% indicating strong dissatisfaction. Additionally, inquiring about the durability of counterfeit face foundation in comparison to other products, only 5.7% registered strong satisfaction and satisfaction equally, while 31% exhibited strong dissatisfaction, with 18.4% indicating "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" or dissatisfaction equally. Similarly, when assessing the importance of high serviceability in counterfeit cosmetic products, merely 3.4% demonstrated strong satisfaction (the lowest rate), yet 22.7% conveyed strong dissatisfaction, while 26.1% indicated higher dissatisfaction.

4.3.4 Customer Satisfaction

Within the customer satisfaction factor, five questions were presented, each associated with customer satisfaction and utilizing a 1 to 7 scale option. When queried about the importance of a robust focus on counterfeit cosmetics, a mere 5.7% of respondents expressed strong satisfaction, in contrast to a higher rate of 27.3% indicating strong dissatisfaction. Similarly, regarding the significance of counterfeit cosmetics design, only 3.5% of respondents displayed strong satisfaction, while 24.4% registered strong dissatisfaction. Additionally, concerning the importance of employee motivation for customer satisfaction in the realm of counterfeit cosmetics, a notably low 5.6% demonstrated strong satisfaction, while 19.1% expressed the same level of strong dissatisfaction as for slightly dissatisfied responses. Furthermore, inquiring about the consistent monitoring of customer satisfaction by fake cosmetics suppliers, only 6.7% conveyed strong satisfaction (and satisfaction), with a notably higher 25.6% indicating strong dissatisfaction.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

Parameter coefficients are derived using standardized coefficients, and path coefficients are computed via the ordinary least square (OLS) method; the hypotheses will undergo testing using multiple analytical techniques, commencing with reliability analysis to assess internal consistency of variable items, followed by correlation and regression analyses if the variables demonstrate reliability, to determine parameter and path coefficients.

4.4.1 Reliability Analysis

Utilizing SPSS 20.0, the reliability assessment was carried out employing Cronbach's alpha method. The outcome of the reliability test is indicated by the alpha value, with a threshold of 0.6 and higher being deemed reliable. The results of the reliability assessment are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Variable Measurement	Hypothesis	Number of indicators	Cronbach's alpha
Perceived quality	H1	5	0.771
Aesthetics	H2	5	0.854
Durability	H3	5	0.889

4.4.2 Correlation Analysis

Utilizing SPSS 20.0, the reliability assessment was carried out employing Cronbach's alpha method. The outcome of the reliability test is indicated by the alpha value, with a threshold of 0.6 and higher being deemed reliable. The results of the reliability assessment are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variable Measurement	Hypothesis	Correlation Coefficient	Significance
Perceived quality	H1	0.729	At 0.01
Aesthetics	H2	0.748	At 0.01
Durability	H3	0.771	At 0.01

4.4.3 Regression Analysis

Linear regression analysis was executed to compute the path coefficients, yielding a linear equation that facilitates the prediction of dependent variable values when the independent variable is known. The findings of the linear regression analysis are succinctly outlined in table 3.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Variable Measurement	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	Adjusted R Square	Sig	Result	Regression Equation
Perceived Quality	H1	0.729	0.525	0.000	significant	$Y=0.778X+1.136$
Aesthetics	H2	0.748	0.554	0.000	significant	$Y=0.752X+1.147$
Durability	H3	0.771	0.589	0.000	significant	$Y=0.749X+1.124$

4.4.4 Portraying the hypothesized path model

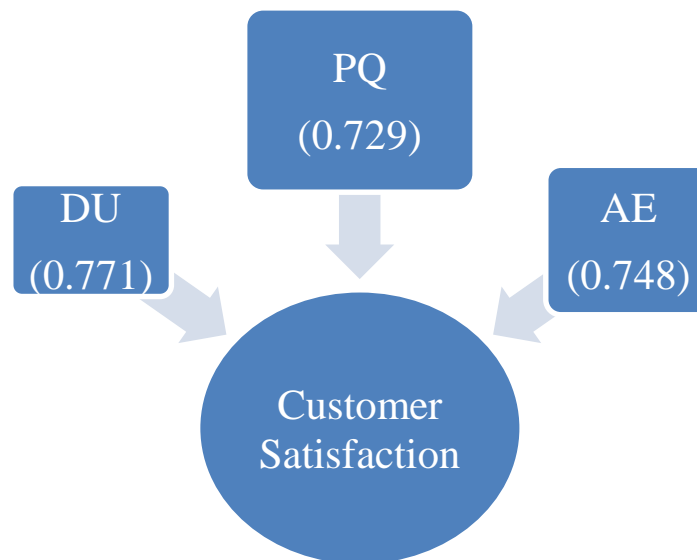


Figure 3: Hypothesized Path Model

4.5 Results

Based on the results of the path analysis, as shown in the above table (Table 1), it can be affirmed that the hypothesis regarding acceptable perceived quality stands validated. The factor of perceived quality demonstrates a positive impact on attitudes towards acquiring counterfeit products, as well as on the relationship between customer satisfaction. The path coefficient (representing the standardized regression weight estimate) between perceived quality and customer satisfaction concerning counterfeit product purchases is 0.729 and holds statistical significance ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the attribute of value consciousness exhibits an even more pronounced positive effect on customer satisfaction when purchasing counterfeit products with perceived quality. Similarly, the aesthetic qualities of cosmetic products exert a positive influence on customer satisfaction in relation to acquiring counterfeit products, as well as on the connection between aesthetics products and customer satisfaction. The path coefficient between aesthetics products and customer satisfaction regarding counterfeit product purchases is 0.748, also reaching statistical significance ($p < 0.01$). Moreover, value consciousness demonstrates an amplified positive effect on customer satisfaction when purchasing counterfeit aesthetics products. Additionally, the durability of cosmetic products manifests a favourable impact on customer satisfaction with regard to acquiring counterfeit products, as well as on the association between product durability and customer satisfaction. The path coefficient between product durability and customer satisfaction concerning counterfeit product purchases is 0.771, and it is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, value consciousness holds an even stronger positive effect on customer satisfaction when purchasing durable counterfeit products.

Table 4: Summary the proven and unproven hypothesis

No	Hypothesis	Proved	Unproved
1	Perceived quality of counterfeit products positively relation with costumes satisfaction	✓	
2	Aesthetics of counterfeit products positively relation with costumes satisfaction	✓	
3	Durability of counterfeit products positively relation with costumes satisfaction	✓	

5. Conclusion

Numerous studies have underscored the adverse impact of counterfeiting across various dimensions, including economic repercussions for host and home countries, as well as its societal and individual consequences. This study specifically examines the influence of counterfeit product quality on customer satisfaction, investigating three hypotheses through path analysis and standardized regression weights. The research identifies that acceptable perceived quality, aesthetics, and durability of counterfeit products significantly contribute to customer satisfaction, emphasizing the intricate consumer dynamics involved in decision-making amidst a counterfeit culture.

This study presents several limitations. Firstly, the sample size is constrained due to time limitations, resulting in responses from only 94 participants. Secondly, data collection occurred at different times, potentially affecting the study's outcomes. Data was collected during weekends, month-ends, and the Movement Control Order (MCO) period, which might have influenced results. Moreover, not all respondents provided complete answers to all survey questions, potentially affecting the completeness of the data. The study's scope is confined to students of Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, limiting the generalizability of findings to a broader student population in Malaysia. Additionally, the research focuses exclusively on counterfeit products, and future investigations should explore a wider array of counterfeit items to comprehensively grasp consumer perceptions and purchasing intentions. To address these limitations, future researchers are advised to increase sample sizes for better accuracy, study demographic-specific purchasing attitudes, and consider factors contributing to increased inclination towards purchasing counterfeit products. It is also recommended to examine and enhance the penalties imposed on counterfeit trading and to utilize media for raising awareness about the negative consequences of counterfeit products.

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