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Typicality impact on brand imitations evaluation and categorization

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose:

This research aims at exploring the impact of an overlooked variable, typicality, on the brand evaluation and the categorization of counterfeits and imitations.

Design/Methodology:

The research design is a 2x2x2 mixed factorial design with repeated measures on a convenience sample of 301 respondents. Data are analyzed using ANOVA.

Findings:

Results show that typicality as well as brand name and packaging manipulations impact brand evaluation. Interactions effects analyses show that typicality manipulation affects both brand name and packaging manipulations. Two categorization schemas emerge from the results: under high typicality conditions, any deviation from the brand codes in terms of name and packaging is unacceptable and results in stimuli categorization as fakes. Under low typicality conditions, brand name manipulation impacts brand evaluation, while packaging manipulation is ineffective. Variations in packaging are acceptable and result in stimuli categorization as a genuine item, or a legitimate imitation from a competitor or a private label.

Originality/value:

This research demonstrates the impact of typicality on both evaluation and categorization of brand variations according name and packaging. It also shows that brands and product classes are not equal face to counterfeiting and imitation. Findings are discussed regarding brand vulnerability to imitation and counterfeiting, the importance of considering competitive context, brand management, and brand strategy.

Key Words: typicality, counterfeiting, imitation, brand evaluation, categorization, brand management, brand strategy

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1 Introduction

Counterfeiting represents a major issue for brands. According to a Chinese expert, half of the Chateau Lafite sold in China, a Bordeaux red wine that can trade up to 10,000 Euros a bottle for a 1982 vintage, would be fake¹. The Swiss Clock Industry Federation indicates that about a million of fake Swiss watches were seized and destroyed in 2013, causing an estimated loss of CHF 800 million (about USD 855 million)². In 2012, Hermes obtained a USD 100 million repair fine from Internet sites that sold counterfeit products from this famous luggage and clothing brand³. Initially considered as marginal, the phenomenon has been continually expanding for years. Although many manufacturing parts are counterfeited each year (Naim, 2006), counterfeiting mostly concerns brands and branded products. In addition to fakes, brands are confronted to products that look similar to their own items. These products are called copycats and lookalikes. This practice is widespread too: half of the store brands in national US supermarkets imitates a leader brand package at least in color, size and shape (Scott-Morton and Zettelmeyer, 2004). Two third of shoppers report that imitations confused them, one third admit being fouled by similar packaging (Satomura, Wedel and Pieters, 2014). Counterfeiting and imitation threaten hard-won competitive positions, dilute brand equity, and undermine the status associated with products. Counterfeiting and imitation are thus vital issues for brands.

Marketing literature has addressed diverse topics such as the motivations for purchasing counterfeit products (Ang, Cheng, Lim and Tambyah, 2001; Gistri, Romani, Pace, Gabrieli and Grapi, 2009; Wilcox, Kim and Sen, 2009; Viot, Le Roux and Kremer, 2014), the consequences of counterfeiting on original brands (Nia and Zaichkowsky, 2000), and on original brand owners (Commuri, 2009). Zaichkowsky (2006) covered comprehensively the topic of counterfeiting. Regarding imitation, authors focus on confusion between leading brands and imitators (Miaoulis and d'Amato, 1978; Kapferer, 1995; Loken, Ross and Hinkle, 1986), or on similarity, (Howard, Kerin and Gengler 2000, Van Horen and Pieters, 2012a,b). Although counterfeiting and imitation have been extensively covered in literature (Lai and Zaichkowsky, 1999; Hilton, Choi and Chen, 2004; Zaichkowsky, 2006), the definition of

¹ La moitié des bouteilles de Château Lafite vendues en Chine seraient des fausses, La Tribune, May 16th, 2014, Paris

² Près d'un million de fausses montres suisses détruites en 2013 (FHS), AFP, Agence France Presse, June 26th, 2014, Paris

³ Hermès gagne une bataille contre la contrefaçon, Le Parisien, May 3rd, 2012, Paris.

what is a counterfeit or an imitation, their forms, characteristics and boundaries are not obvious. Recently, a conceptual framework regarding brand counterfeiting and imitation has been proposed (Authors, 2012). Relying on a semiotic approach to the brand, authors propose a taxonomy of forms and levels of counterfeiting and imitation and test consumers' reactions to stimuli developed according to the proposed typology. Results show a dominant categorization schema based on brand name and identifies two different situations, electronics versus spirits. Authors suggest that typicality may explain the dichotomy observed in these results.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to test the impact of typicality on consumer brand evaluation and categorization of counterfeits and imitations thanks to an experimental design. Results suggest that typicality is a crucial variable in consumers' evaluation of counterfeiting and imitation. This paper is concluded with a discussion of the results and a brief presentation of future research possibilities.

2 Literature review

2.1 Defining counterfeiting and imitation:

In the literature, counterfeits are referred to as exact replicas of branded products. According to Bian and Moutinho (2009), "counterfeit brands are those bearing a trade mark that is identical to, or indistinguishable from, a trade mark registered to another party and infringes on the right of the holder of the mark" (p. 368). Lai and Zaichkowsky (1999) consider that "a counterfeit is a 100% direct copy usually having inferior quality, although not always"(p. 180). For Wilcox et al., (2009) "counterfeit goods are illegal, low-priced and often lower-quality replicas of products that typically possess high brand value" (p. 259).

Imitations, also called copycats, lookalikes or me-too products are products that look similar to other branded products, but are not identical. Balabanis and Craven (1997) define lookalikes as "a new generation of own brand products that have similar packaging characteristics to leading brands products" (p. 299). According to Lai and Zaichkowsky (1999), an imitation is a "product or service, though not identical, (which) is viewed as similar in substance, name, shape, form, meaning or intent to an acknowledged and widely known product or service currently in the marketplace" (p. 180). Copycats "imitate the name, logo, and/or package design of a leading national brand to take advantage of the latter's positive associations and marketing efforts" (Van Horen and Pieters 2012b, p. 83). Therefore, counterfeiting and imitation are clear distinct concepts in the literature. A counterfeit is an exact copy of an original item. Imitation looks similar to another product but is not identical.

Exact reproduction creates clear infringement and is by law never allowed. In the case of imitation, the Court decides on the existence of transgression, depending on the likelihood of confusion (Zaichkowsky, 2006). Moreover, some imitation strategies are fully legitimate (me-too products and some private labels).

Still, some authors envision different forms of counterfeiting. Lai and Zaichkowsky (1999) distinguish two types of fakes, counterfeit and piracy, depending on the intention of counterfeiters: "Piracy is counterfeiting. However, the intention is not always to deceive the consumer. The customer is aware that the product he is buying is an unauthorized copy of the original product. The consumer consciously seeks out and purchases the fake product through purchase location, price, obvious differences in design, quality, or other feature realized by the customer" (p.180). This concept of piracy corresponds to the distinction between deceptive and non-deceptive counterfeiting, depending on consumer's awareness that he is buying a non-genuine item (Bamossy and Scammon, 1985; Bloch, Bush and Campbell, 1993; Bian and Veloutsou, 2007). Besides, Lai and Zaichkowsky (1999) define an additional category: gray marketing, which is "when manufacturers produce more than the quantity required by Western companies and subsequently sell the overruns to the market illegally". Hilton, Choi and Chen (2004) distinguish between four different types of counterfeit products in the fashion industry: "vanity fakes or low intrinsic, low perceived value product, overruns or copies made from leftover material, condoned copies made by other designers or fashion houses, copies made by the fashion houses themselves" (p.349). Therefore, counterfeiting is not a homogeneous category. As for counterfeiting, imitation comprises several levels and forms. A product may imitate the whole trade-mark (brand name, logo) and/or trade-dress (shape, design, colors), or only some of these elements.

Recently, a taxonomy of counterfeiting and imitation has been proposed (Authors, 2012), based on the semiotic approach wherein a brand is considered to be a poly-sensorial set of organized signs (Greimas and Courtès, 1979). This typology combines two dimensions: the logotype, operationalized as the brand name, and the product appearance, operationalized as product design or packaging. Based on the principle of semiotic commutation (Helmjslev, 1943; Greimas, 1966), variations are operated on each dimension independently, on three levels of modalities: identical, similar, and different. These variations create a nine-cell matrix that accounts for various types of counterfeiting and imitation and legitimate products, based on the degree of similarity to the genuine product. The proposed taxonomy better defines the boundaries between original, private label, imitation and counterfeit.

A test on stimuli developed according to this typology show that brand name is the main cue in product recognition and categorization. An identical name favors stimulus acceptance through recognition and categorization as a national brand product, and induces purchase intentions. Identical name and packaging entails the highest acceptance rates. Different name and packaging induces categorization as a legitimate product alternative: private label or national brand. Proximity on either of the dimensions, name or packaging, harms categorization and assimilates the product to a counterfeit.

2.2 The role of typicality in brand counterfeiting and imitation categorization

Authors (2012) note that perceptions and categorization of counterfeits and imitations are different across product classes. In product classes such as electronics, perceptions are clear-cut: a product is either genuine or counterfeit. In such product classes, respondents mostly identify products on the basis of their name. An identical name results mostly in a categorization as national brand. Regarding spirits, however, identification is blurred, with respondents perceiving stimuli presenting a similar or different name, and/or a different packaging as credible alternatives (national brands or private labels).

Typicality may explain these contrasted situations. Typicality is "defined as the degree to which an item is perceived as representing a category" (Loken and Ward 1990, p. 112).

Typical instances of a category are better remembered, classified more quickly, learned more rapidly and used more often as cognitive reference points (Mervis and Rosch, 1981; Nedungadi and Hutchinson, 1980; Loken and Ward, 1990). Typicality judgments are holistic processes (Cohen and Basu, 1987). Such judgments allow simplifying information organization and storage in memory (Ladwein 1994). When a consumer is confronted to a product for which he/she has few experience, association of the unknown item to a cognitive category comprising more familiar elements through typicality judgments allow making inferences and evaluative judgments on this unknown item through comparisons (Cohen and Basu 1987; Changeur and Chandon, 1995).

Categories can refer to brands or product classes. In typicality judgments, brands and product classes are considered as cognitive categories. A cognitive category comprises similar elements, i.e. competing brands within a product class or products within a brand range, as well as knowledge associated to them (Changeur and Chandon, 1995). The determinants of typicality judgments are similarity, familiarity and frequency of exposure to the cognitive category (Loken and Ward, 1990). According to Ladwein (1994), consumer judgments of

typicality are also determined by the structure of cognitive categories: the competitive intensity within a product class and the width of the brand product range.

Authors (2012) remark that perception and categorization of counterfeits and imitations are different according product classes. Electronics correspond to product classes comprising prototypical brands (e.g. Apple), where product ranges are narrow and the items within them are clearly identified regarding design and attributes. This product class is a high-typicality one. Spirits belong to low-typicality product classes in which brands and names are numerous, product ranges are wide, me-too products are very present, and designs are similar across brands, resulting in a dilution of typicality within the product class. Thus, typicality may explain the different categorization schema identified by Authors (2012).

3 Methodology

This research aims at validating the effect of brand typicality within a product class on stimuli evaluation and categorization.

In this research four brands belonging to different product classes were selected in order to increase external validity. The selected brands are: Apple iPod MP3 reader and energetic drinks Red Bull for high typicality brands, Vodka Smirnoff and Perfume CK One for low typicality ones (see exhibit 1). A pre-test checked brand typicality within the product class on a 7 point-scale (not at all/very representative of the product class).

The research involves a 2x2x2 mixed factorial design with repeated measures (see table 1) on a convenience sample of 301 respondents (men: 35.9%, women: 64.1%, average age: 24,36 years). The factorial design involves 3 inter-subject factors (brand typicality: high: Apple iPod, Red Bull; vs low: CK One, Smirnoff; brand name: identical vs different; and packaging: identical vs different) and 1 intra-subject repeated factor (brand). A pre-test assessed categorization and packaging evaluation as identical and different. Dependent variable is brand evaluation measured on a 7-point scale (not at all/very favorable). The final part of the questionnaire measures stimuli categorization: genuine brand, competitor imitating a well-known brand, private label, counterfeit. Besides, prior to stimuli exposition, brand typicality within the product class was measured on 7-point scales (not at all/very representative of the product class).

Brand Typicality	Name	Packaging	Stimuli
High	Identical	Identical	Apple iPod
		Different	Red Bull
	Different	Identical	
		Different	
Low	Identical	Identical	Smirnoff
		Different	CK One
	Different	Identical	
		Different	

Table 1: Factorial design used in the research

4 Results

Analysis of variance assesses the impact of typicality on brand attitude. Manipulated variables were: brand typicality within product class, logotype (i.e. brand name), appearance (i.e. packaging or design). ANOVA on pre-exposition typicality scores with brand as independent variable checked for differences of typicality between brands. Typicality scores were significantly different across brands ($F(2,489; 721,016) = 74,073; p = 0,000$). Typicality hierarchy is consistent to expectations (see table 2).

	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Red Bull	6,589	1,0087	285
Apple iPod	5,855	1,6471	283
Smirnoff	5,658	1,7337	278
CK One	4,642	2,0864	279
Total	5,613	1,8039	2243

Table2: Scores of Brand typicality within the product class

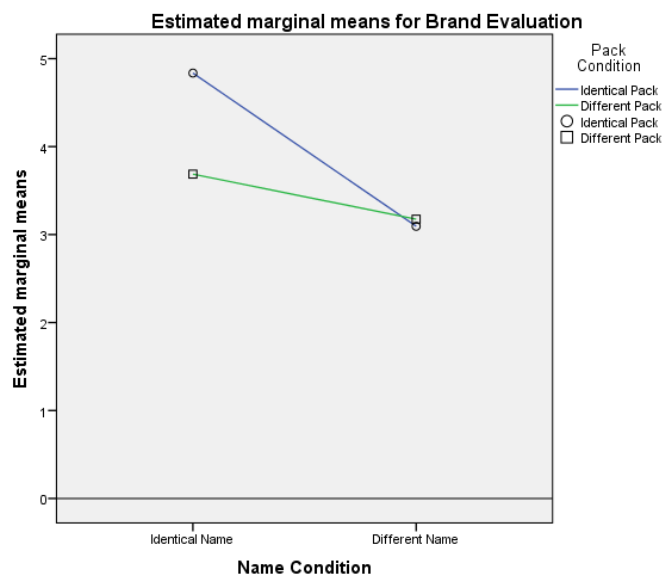
Three-way mixed ANOVA with repeated measures show three significant main effects and three significant interaction effects. The interaction effects will be interpreted using categorization results.

4.1 ANOVA Main effects

In typicality main effect, brand evaluation is more favorable in low typicality conditions compared to high typicality ($M_{high\ typicality} = 3.3$, $SD = .1$ vs. $M_{low\ typicality} = 4.1$ $SD = .1$, $F(1,291) = 32.770$, $p = .000$). High typicality stimuli present a clear split between genuine (identical name and packaging) and copies (all other conditions); low typicality stimuli have more averaged evaluations across conditions. In brand name main effect, brand evaluation is more favorable in identical name conditions compared to different name ones ($M_{Identical\ Name} = 4.2$ $SD = 0.1$ vs. $M_{Different\ Name} = 3.1$ $SD = .1$, $F(1,291) = 58.0120$, $p = .000$). In packaging main effect, brand evaluation is more favorable in identical packaging conditions compared to different packaging ones ($M_{Identical\ Pack} = 4.0$ $SD = .1$ vs. $M_{Different\ Pack} = 3.4$ $SD = .1$, $F(1,291) = 13.045$, $p = .000$). The three significant main effects confirm that the manipulated variables influence brand evaluation. Typicality significantly impacts stimuli evaluation. However, the forms of these influences as well as the possibility of interaction between predictors need investigation.

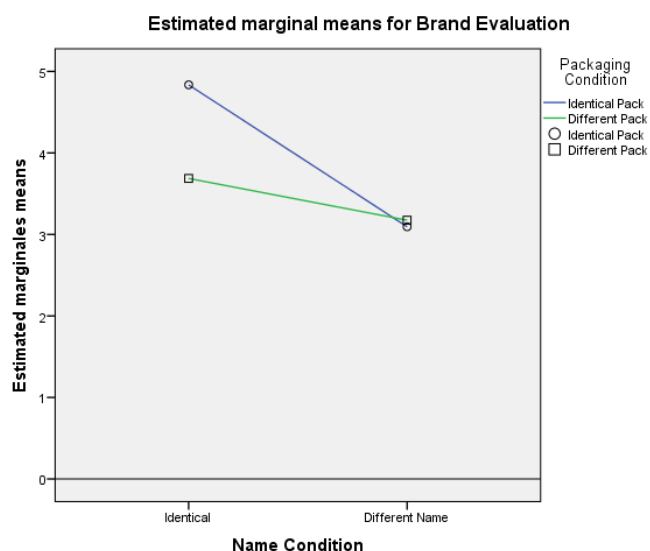
4.2 ANOVA Interactions

The typicality x packaging interaction significantly impacts brand evaluation (High Typicality: $M_{Identical\ Pack} = 3.8$ $SD = .2$ vs. $M_{Different\ Pack} = 2.8$ $SD = .2$; Low Typicality: $M_{Identical\ Pack} = 4.2$ $SD = .2$ vs $M_{Different\ Pack} = 4.1$ $SD = .1$, $F(1,291) = 10.522$, $p = 0.001$). The effect of packaging manipulation is different for high typicality brands versus low typicality ones. In high typicality conditions, packaging manipulation results in a dramatic decrease of stimuli evaluation. Any change in product appearance leads to strong rejection. Apple iPod and Red Bull are examples of this situation. However, in low typicality conditions, packaging manipulation does not affect brand evaluation. In such condition a different packaging is as acceptable as an identical one. Smirnoff exemplifies this situation: a modification in the codes of the brand through packaging is tolerated.



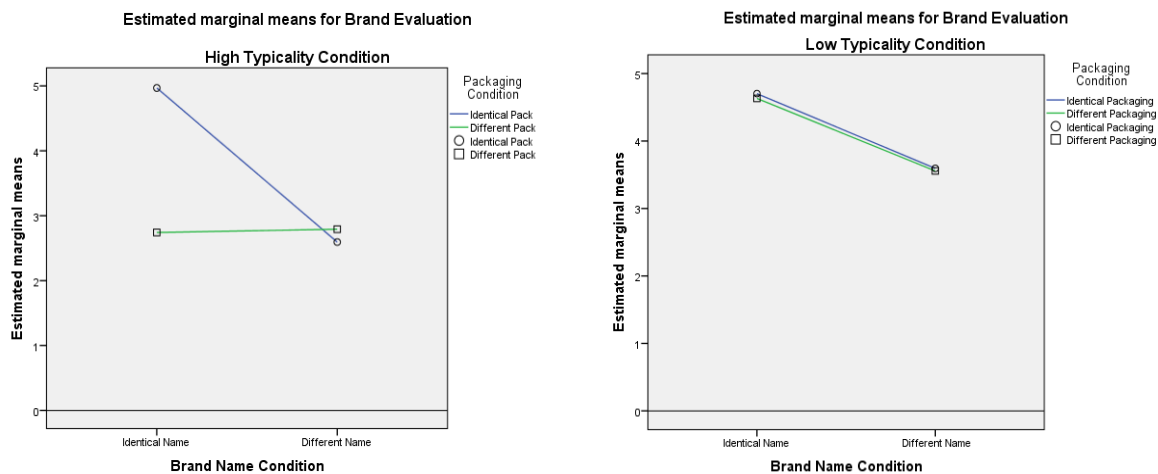
Graph 1: interaction effect of Typicality x Packaging

The name x packaging interaction significantly affects brand attitude (Identical name: $M_{\text{identical packaging}} = 4.8$, $SD = .2$ vs $M_{\text{different packaging}} = 3.7$, $SD = .2$; Different name: $M_{\text{identical packaging}} = 3.1$, $SD = .2$ vs $M_{\text{different packaging}} = 3.2$, $SD = .1$, $F(1,291) = 17.253$, $P = .000$). Brand name manipulation and packaging manipulation have opposite effects. Under identical name conditions, the modified packaging exhibits a lower evaluation. Respondents prefer the original packaging. Under different name conditions, the identical packaging presents a lower evaluation. Respondents find a different packaging more acceptable.



Graph 2: interaction effect of Name x Packaging

The typicality x brand name x packaging interaction significantly impacts brand attitude (High Typicality and Identical Name: $M_{Identical\ Pack} = 5.0$, $SD = .2$ vs. $M_{Different\ Pack} = 2.7$, $SD = .2$; High Typicality and Different Name: $M_{Identical\ Pack} = 2.6$, $SD = .2$ vs. $M_{Different\ Pack} = 2.8$, $SD = .2$; Low Typicality and Identical Name: $M_{Identical\ Pack} = 4.7$, $SD = .2$ vs. $M_{Different\ Pack} = 4.6$, $SD = .2$; Low Typicality and Different Name: $M_{Identical\ Pack} = 3.6$, $SD = .2$ vs. $M_{Different\ Pack} = 3.5$, $SD = .2$; $F(1,291) = 16.330$, $p = .000$). Typicality manipulation affects both brand name and packaging manipulations. Under high typicality conditions, brand name and packaging manipulations are unacceptable. Any deviation from genuine characteristics, either in brand name or in packaging results in a low brand evaluation. It corresponds to the cases of Apple iPod and Red Bull. Under low typicality conditions, brand name manipulation impacts significantly brand evaluation, while packaging manipulation seems ineffective. CK One and Smirnoff represent this situation.



Graph 3: interaction effect of Typicality x Name x Packaging

4.3 Categorization results

Along with brand evaluation, respondents were asked to categorize stimuli as either a genuine item, a competitor imitating a well-known brand, a private label or a copy /a counterfeit of a well-known brand (see table 3).

%	Identical Name Identical Appearance	Identical Name Different Appearance	Different Name Identical Appearance	Different Name Different Appearance
High Typicality : Apple Ipod				
A copy, a counterfeit of a well-known brand	3	73	81	81
A private label	0	0	0	0
A competitor imitating a well-known brand	0	18	14	12
A genuine item	97	9	5	7
High Typicality : Red Bull				
A copy, a counterfeit of a well-known brand	0	61	70	10
A private label	3	18	5	32
A competitor imitating a well-known brand	6	9	24	44
A genuine item	91	12	0	15
Low Typicality : CK One				
A copy, a counterfeit of a well-known brand	11	26	65	59
A private label	5	0	8	5
A competitor imitating a well-known brand	5	8	16	23
A genuine item	78	67	11	14
Low Typicality : Smirnoff				
A copy, a counterfeit of a well-known brand	6	28	27	14
A private label	3	3	11	9
A competitor imitating a well-known brand	11	39	51	59
A genuine item	81	31	11	18

Table 3: Categorization scores of Brands

Regarding categorization, stimuli bearing an identical name and an identical design are overwhelmingly classified as genuine items, whatever their typicality is. Stimuli bearing either a different package or a different name are categorized as counterfeits in high typicality condition. Categorization of these stimuli is less clear cut in low typicality condition. For CK One, a product bearing an identical name and a different appearance is mostly classified as a genuine item, and marginally as a counterfeit. For Smirnoff, it is classified evenly as a competitor imitating a well-known brand, a genuine item or a counterfeit. For Smirnoff, a stimulus bearing a different name and an identical appearance is mostly classified as a competitor imitating a well-known brand and marginally as a counterfeit. Stimuli bearing a different name and a different appearance are mostly categorized as counterfeits for Apple and CK One, as a competitor imitating a well-known brand for Smirnoff, and as either a competitor imitating a well-known brand or a private label for Red Bull.

5 Discussion

This research introduces a variable so far not considered in literature on counterfeiting and imitation: typicality. Product classes having different degrees of typicality have been selected. Regarding spirits and perfumes, brands and products are numerous and have very diverse characteristics. This situation results in a dilution of typicality within the product class.

Regarding electronics or energetic drinks, product classes are narrower in terms of competing brands and products. This situation favors a higher typicality. Brands corresponding to different levels of typicality have been selected, thanks to a pre-test: Apple iPod and Red Bull for high typicality categories, Smirnoff and CK One for low typicality ones.

This research demonstrates the impact of typicality on both evaluation and categorization of brand variations according name and packaging. Under high typicality conditions, any variation in name and/or packaging results in an unfavorable brand evaluation and a categorization essentially as a counterfeit. Under low typicality conditions, packaging modification does not impact the evaluation. Categorization corresponds either to a genuine product or a legitimate imitation from a competitor. Brand attitude is only negatively impacted by name variation.

In this general pattern, Red Bull presents a deviation: the different name and different appearance stimulus is categorized as a private label or a competitive imitation. As Red Bull belongs to a high typicality category, this stimulus should be categorized as a counterfeit. It can be pointed out that Red Bull recently introduced new special editions (the Blue, Silver and Red edition) that deviated from its color packaging code, and that may have diluted its typicality.

Regarding spirits and perfumes, brands and products are numerous and have very diverse characteristics. This situation results in a dilution of typicality within the product class. Hence, acceptance of new brands or products as legitimate members of the product class, being a genuine brand or a counterfeit is easier.

			Mean	Standard Error
High Typicality	Identical Name	Identical Pack	4,969	,225
		Different Pack	2,742	,222
	Different Name	Identical Pack	2,595	,209
		Different Pack	2,793	,199
Low Typicality	Identical Name	Identical Pack	4,703	,209
		Different Pack	4,632	,206
	Different Name	Identical Pack	3,595	,209
		Different Pack	3,557	,192

Table 4: Estimated means interaction effect of Typicality x Name x Packaging

Besides, consideration of typicality highlights that brands and product classes are not equal face to counterfeiting and imitation. Some are more vulnerable. Brands like Apple developed strong brand equity strategies that seem to render them almost immune to counterfeiting

thanks to their high typicality. In this research, any deviation from brand codes in high typicality condition (brand name, appearance), results in stimulus rejection as a counterfeit. On the other hand, low typicality product classes permit easy inroads. Compliance to some of the product class codes, such as similar names or packaging, eases in categorization as a legitimate competitor. Consumers assimilate an imitation based on an identical name and a different appearance to a special series, a new model or version, or a legitimate competitive imitation. Therefore, considering typicality is vital for a brand if one is to understand the threats it faces, its vulnerability to copy, imitation and confusion.

From a managerial standpoint, this research makes several contributions. This research allows better understanding consumer reactions thanks to typicality, and emphasizes both the necessity of conceiving and analyzing counterfeiting and imitations according the competitive context and the breadth of brand range. Besides, this research provides an objective test of imitative stimuli, and operational guidelines for definition of marketing strategies in response to imitation threats.

5.1 Limitations and future research

This research presents several limits as it is based on a limited number of product classes and brands. Results are drawn from a convenience sample that impairs generalization to the entire population. However, convenience samples are justified due to the exploratory dimension of the research and therefore represent a relevant population (Calder and al., 1982). The research tests only one characteristic of each dimension: brand name for the logotype, design or packaging for product appearance, and does not investigate the impact of other characteristics, such as color, lettering or symbols.

Future research avenues pertain to the test of new product classes and brands that will increase external validity. So far, this research considers only a dichotomy high versus low typicality. The question of a gradation in typicality of product classes as well as brands represents a promising avenue for research. Similarly, introducing new characteristics in the two dimensions, such as the role of color, lettering or symbol in identification and categorization is a logical development of this research.

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Exhibit 1 Stimuli used in the research



Apple iPod: identical name identical appearance



Apple iPod: different name identical appearance



Apple iPod: different name identical appearance



Apple iPod: different name different appearance



Red Bull: identical name identical appearance



Red Bull: different name identical appearance



Red Bull: identical name different appearance



Red Bull: different name different appearance



Smirnoff: identical name identical appearance



Smirnoff: different name identical appearance



Smirnoff: identical name different appearance



Smirnoff: different name different appearance



CK One: identical name identical appearance



CK One: different name identical appearance



CK One: identical name different appearance



CK One: different name different appearance

