The Effect of Brand Imitation on Consumer Brand Confusion, Brand Evaluation, and Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

For the international business, the global brands face the challenges from imitators. This study investigates how brand imitation and price influence consumers' brand confusion, brand evaluation, and purchase intention toward the imitating brand. A 2 (package similarity: high and low) x 3 (price: non-revealed, intermediate, and low) design was adopted. The results demonstrate that brand imitation and price have an interaction effect on brand confusion and brand evaluation. The imitating brand can get higher brand evaluation and brand confusion than other trailing brands. Moreover, the imitating brand with intermediate price would generate higher brand evaluation than that with low price. The low-priced imitating brand would decrease brand confusion. In addition, higher brand confusion would lead to higher evaluation of the imitating brand. We conclude that firms may use brand imitation as market entry strategy, but should be cautious of setting price.

Keywords: Brand Imitation, Price, Brand Confusion, Brand Evaluation, Purchase Intention

1. Introduction

In the international marketplace, global brands are gradually attractive to consumers all around the world (Gillespie, Krishna, & Jarvis, 2002; Popescu, 2009). International enterprises make their brands globally and enjoy the economies of scales in their business activities such as production, packaging, and marketing (Gillespie et al., 2002). However, in the dynamic world of the international business, global brands also face challenges such as imitation. For example, Proctor and Gamble, a well-known global brand, deemed imitating brands infringed upon the goodwill of their established brands and sued imitating brands in the shampoo category (Till & Priluck, 2000). Brand imitators, who provide the product with package containing visual cues similar to the global brands, try to draw consumers' attention (Burshteyn & Buff, 2008), arouse consumers' purchase intention (Alain & Ezzedine, 2001; Collins-Dodd & Zaichkowsky, 1999), and get the benefits that the global brand has built (Enrico & Alessandro, 2007).

This study is interested in investigating consumers' responses toward the imitating brand. According to research (Burshteyn & Buff, 2008; Till & Priluck, 2000; Zaichkowsky & Simpson, 1996), consumers' response and attitude toward one brand can be transferred to another brand. Due to this effect, consumers' attitude toward imitating brands would be affected based on the global brands. In addition, packaging is not the only factor when consumers make buying decisions. Price is also influential to consumers in judging and evaluating products (Boyle & Lathrop, 2009; Gopinath & Glassman, 2008; Lichtenstein & Burton, 1989; Völckner & Hofmann, 2007). Nevertheless, price is rarely discussed in the field of brand imitation. Therefore, this study tries to investigate the interaction effect of brand imitation and price on consumers' brand confusion and brand evaluation.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Imitation Strategy

In marketing, firms have four positioning strategies – leader, challenger, follower, and niche (McKechnie, Grant, & Katsioloudes, 2008). Leader has risk-taking spirit to expand the market, while follower stays at status quo and imitates the actions, products, and service offerings. Leader enjoys the first-mover advantage (Kerin, Varadarajan, & Peterson, 1992; Zhou, 2006). In marketing domain, first-mover would skim off early adopters and innovator (Peterson, 1992). However, leader takes the higher failure rate of product development – 47%, while imitator takes 8% (Golder and Tellis, 1993). Imitation strategy can be the extreme from pure clone (me-too) to creative imitation. Shankar, Carpenter, and Krishnamurthi (1998) argued that me-too firms get lower repurchase rates and cannot compete with leader, but creative imitation can make follower grow faster and even overtake leader (Shankar et al., 1998). Obviously, leader and follower have different ways to succeed.

2.2. Brand Imitation

Brand imitation is "the practice of intentionally integrating the name, shape, symbol, color, or "look and feel" of a leading brand to a new brand" (Wilke & Zaichkowsky, 1999, p. 9). Imitators not only imitate leader's product, but provide the imitating brands with visual cues similar to leading brands. Warlop and Alba (2004) discovered that when consumers face two brands, one is the imitating brand, and the other is the differentiated trailer (followers not imitating the leading brands), and they prefer the imitating brand more. In literature, this marketing conduct is called "copycat branding", "copycat strategies", or "brand imitation" (Alain & Ezzedine, 2001; Burshteyn & Buff, 2008; Till & Priluck, 2000; Warlop & Alba, 2004; Wilke & Zaichkowsky, 1999; Zaichkowsky & Simpson, 1996). Specifically, brand imitation refers to firms utilize the similarity between the imitating brand and leading brand (package, design, brand name, etc.) to make brand accept by consumers (Alain & Ezzedine, 2001) or perceived by consumers as certain brand (Wilke & Zaichkowsky, 1999). Most of the studies of brand imitation discussed package similarity (Alain & Ezzedine, 2001; Burshteyn & Buff, 2008; Balabanis & Craven, 1997; Loken, Ross, & Hinkle,1986; Miaoulis & D'Amato,1978; Mitchell, Walsh, & Yamin, 2005; Ward, James, Loken, Ross, & Hasapopoulos,1986; Wilke & Zaichkowsky,1999), or similar package with different brand name (Till & Priluck, 2000; Warlop & Alba, 2004). They proposed theories such as stimulus generalization, or brand confusion to explain the phenomena of brand imitation and consumers' response of imitating brand. In this study, brand imitation refers to package similarity done by the imitating brand.

2.3. Price

Price is crucial to consumers and viewed as an extrinsic cue that signals product quality and affects consumers' perceived quality, product evaluation, attitude, and purchase probabilities (Boyle & Lathrop, 2009; Hansen, 2005; Mitra, 1995; Völckner & Hofmann, 2007; Veale & Quester, 2009). Specifically, Boyle and Lathrop (2009) indicated that consumers have positive price-perceived quality relationship on both durable goods and non-durable goods. By a 7-point Likert scale (anchored from -3 to +3), the mean of item measuring price-perceived quality relationship on durable goods is 1.48 and on non-durable goods is .51. When adding 4 points to the same measure, means of P/Q relationships on durable and non-durable goods are 5.48 and 4.51, respectively. The result shows a consistency with Lichtenstein and Burton's (1989) study, in which means of P/Q relationships on durable and non-durable goods are 5.44 and 4.17, respectively (7-point Likert scale anchored from 1 to 7). Moreover, in a meta-analysis study of the price-perceived quality relationship, Völckner and Hofmann (2007) reviewed published studies from 1989 to 2006, demonstrating that the correlation coefficientγ between price and perceived quality is .273, moderately strong and highly significant. The findings indicate that price is still an important

indicator of quality in consumers' mind. In the case of brand imitation, Warlop and Alba (2004) set two prices-intermediate price (slightly lower than the leading brand's price) and low price (significantly lower than leading brand's price) on the imitating brand, and demonstrated that consumers favored the imitating brand with intermediate price more than that with low price. It showed that consumers may use price to assess quality of the imitating brand.

2.4. Brand Evaluation

Due to the effect of stimulus generalization and brand confusion (both of which will be addressed later), consumers perceive the package similarity between the imitating brand and the leading brand, and may make an inaccurate evaluation on the imitating brand. Therefore, brand evaluation, stimulus generalization, and consumer brand confusion are introduced in sequence to develop hypotheses.

2.4.1. Brand Evaluation

Brand evaluation is constructed by brand attitude and brand trust (Dawar & Lei, 2009; Klein, & Dawar, 2004). Attitude is a psychological tendency expressed by evaluating a particular entity; therefore, brand attitude is defined as "the general evaluation (favorable or unfavorable) of a particular brand" (Crosno, Freling, & Skinner, 2009, p. 95). In addition, brand trust refers to consumers' overall feeling towards the brand (Lau & Lee, 1999) and is defined as consumers' willingness to rely on the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

The tri-component attitude model (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960) suggests that attitude is constructed by affective, cognitive, and behavioral component. Therefore, brand trust, as an affective factor, could be included in the attitude construct. Most of previous research defined brand evaluation as brand attitude (Chang, 2005; Crosno, Freling, & Skinner, 2009; Keller, 1987; Labroo & Lee, 2006; Swaminathan, Page, & GÜRhan-Canli, 2007). However, brand attitude and brand trust are also deemed as two different constructs. In the study of Okazaki, Katsukura, and Nishiyama (2007), brand attitude and brand trust are different constructs. The researchers demonstrated that brand trust positively affects brand attitude. Therefore, this study defined brand evaluation as the composition of brand attitude and brand trust based on Dawar and Lei (2009), and Klein and Dawar (2004).

2.4.2. Stimulus Generalization

Theoretically, stimulus generalization is utilized to explain the phenomena of brand imitation. In classical conditioning theory, stimulus generalization refers to "the degree to which a response conditioned to a particular stimulus is also evoked by similar stimuli" (Till & Priluck, 2000, p. 56). Pavlov (1928) discovered that dogs conditioned to a CS would have the same CR toward similar stimuli (Till & Priluck, 2000). This response-transfer effect applied to a brand is the practice of brand extension and brand imitation. In brand imitation, according to research (Burshteyn & Buff, 2008; Till & Priluck, 2000; Zaichkowsky & Simpson, 1996), consumers' attitude toward one brand can be transferred to another brand through stimulus generalization. Therefore, the first hypothesis is generated as below:

H1. To consumers, the more similar in packages between the imitating brand and the leading brand, the higher evaluation of the imitating brand.

2.4.3. Brand Confusion

When talking about confusion, the related terms regarding "confusion" evoked by brand imitation are: consumer confusion, consumer brand confusion or brand confusion, and brand source confusion. If consumers buy the wrong product because of the similar package, it is called consumer confusion (Balabanis & Craven, 1997; Foxman, Muehling, & Berger, 1990; Kearney & Mitchell, 2001). Sometimes, consumers would think similar packages are from the same origin, and this is called brand source confusion (Howard, Kerin, & Gengler, 2000; Loken, Ross, & Hinkle,

1986). Brand confusion refers to consumers would make inferences and believe that the attributes of the imitating brand are similar to that of the imitated brand because of the package similarity (Foxman, Berger, & Cote, 1992; Kapferer, 1995; Mitchell & Kearney, 2002). Since there are few studies investigating consumer brand confusion, this study is interested in examining this effect on brand imitation.

Consumer brand confusion means that something goes wrong in consumers' inferential process, in which stimuli similarities and other factors make consumers evaluate the attributes or performance of the imitating brand based on the leading brand (Foxman, Berger, & Cote, 1992). The inferential processing refers to "the task of making evaluations and judgments about a target based on limited information in memory and in the environment" (Auh & Shih, 2009, p. 440). To evaluate a product or alternative brands, consumers would fill in missing information related to the product or brands through the inference-making process (Graeff & Olson, 1994; Gardial & Biehal, 1987). In the case of brand imitation, researchers (Balabanis & Craven, 1997; Foxman, Berger, & Cote, 1992; Kapferer, 1995; Mitchell & Kearney, 2002) proposed that package similarity is the source of consumer brand confusion—the more similar of the two stimuli, the higher of the confusion, therefore, the second hypothesis stated as below:

H2. To consumers, the more similar in packages between the imitating brand and the leading brand, the higher confusion of the imitating brand.

2.5. The relationships among Brand Imitation, Price, Brand Evaluation, and Brand Confusion

Package and price serve as extrinsic cues (Underwood & Klein, 2002; Veale & Quester, 2009) that consumers rely on to predict value and product quality when intrinsic cues (such as product attributes) are unavailable (Gopinath & Glassman, 2008; Veale & Quester, 2009). In the case of brand imitation, Warlop and Alba (2004) proposed that the proportion of favoring the imitating brand with intermediate price was higher than the proportion of favoring the imitating brand with low price. Since similar packages have positive effects on evaluation of the imitating brand (Till & Priluck, 2000), and consumer always use price to infer product attributes or quality (Boyle & Lathrop, 2009; Lichtenstein & Burton, 1989; Völckner & Hofmann, 2007), the similar package with intermediate price would have synergy effects on evaluation of the imitating brand, comparing to the similar package with low price. Therefore, the interaction between package similarity and price can be depicted as following:

H3. To consumers, the imitating brand with intermediate price would generate higher brand evaluation than that with low price; that is, the synergy effect of package similarity and price happened.

As mentioned earlier, the imitation strategy is that the imitators copy what leaders do, and price, as included in the marketing mix, is also involved in the imitation strategy (Foxman, Muehling, & Berger, 1990). Pricing strategy affects consumer brand confusion due to the similar market positioning (Foxman, Berger, & Cote, 1992; Monroe & Petroshius, 1981). Two perception theories are used to explain consumers' perception of price. First, the differential threshold theory stated that people can detect the differences between two stimui (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007, p. 149). Weber's law, which stated that $\Delta I/I=k$, where ΔI =j.n.d., I=first stimulus, and k=constant (Lambert, 1978), indicated that j.n.d. is not an absolute amount, but relates to the intensity of the first stimulus (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). Based on Weber's law, Chang and Chiou (2007) measured the differential thresholds among different magnitudes of prices and proved that the initial price was positively correlated with the differential thresholds, consistent with Weber's Law. In the case of the brand imitation, if the price of the imitating brand is based on the leading brand, when the imitating brand wants consumers to perceive it to be similar to the leading brand, the price should be set below the j.n.d., which means smaller price differences between the imitating brand and the leading brand. Otherwise, when the price is above the j.n.d, which means larger price differences

between the imitating brand and the leading brand, it would be perceived as different from the leading brand.

On the other hand, according to assimilation-contrast theory (Sherif, 1963), consumers have a latitude of acceptance for price, if the price falls inside latitude of acceptance, consumers would think it is reasonable and accept it (assimilation). On the contrary, if the price is too low or too high which is outside the latitude of acceptance, consumers would reject it (contrast). Therefore, the price information revealed by the imitating brand may elicit the assimilation-contrast effect when consumers evaluate the similar package provided by the imitating brand. Since consumers use price to infer quality (Boyle & Lathrop, 2009; Lichtenstein & Burton, 1989; Völckner & Hofmann, 2007), and the leading brand often has higher quality and higher price, if the prices between the leading brand and the imitating brand are perceived to be different (contrast), then consumers would infer that the two brands are different in product attributes or quality. Therefore, they will not be confused by the imitating brand. Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis is described as following:

H4. To consumers, the imitating brand with low price would decrease consumer brand confusion.

2.6. The Relationships among Brand Confusion, Brand Evaluation, and Purchase Intention

Brand confusion refers to errors in consumers' inferential making process, and thus results in inaccurate evaluation of the imitating brand (Foxman, Berger, & Cote, 1992). Since the leading brand tends to be viewed as of higher quality than others, if consumers infer the imitating brand based on the leading brand and thus make a higher evaluation of the imitating brand, it could be stated that consumer brand confusion leads to higher evaluation of the imitating brand. Accordingly, the fifth hypothesis is drawn below:

H5. To consumers, higher brand confusion would lead to higher brand evaluation.

Purchase intention of a brand is defined as personal action tendencies relating to the brand (Spears & Singh, 2004). The relationship between brand evaluation and purchase intention of a brand is not simply a positive or a negative correlation. According to the Brisoux–Laroche brand categorization model (Brisoux & Laroche, 1980), brands were categorized into three sets—the consideration set, the hold set, and the reject set. As to the consideration set, consumers have positive attitudes and purchase intentions toward these brands. As to the hold set, consumers do not consider these brands but still have a negative, neutral, or positive attitude and purchase intention towards these brands (Teng, 2009). As to the reject set, consumers do not consider these brands and generally have negative attitude toward these brands.

Roberts and Lattin (1991) suggested that the leading brand is in the consideration set, which means that consumers has positive brand evaluation and purchase intention toward it. In the case of brand imitation, due to the stimulus generalization or brand confusion, consumers' evaluation of the imitating brand was affected by the leading brand and higher than the differentiated trailers (Burshteyn & Buff, 2008; Foxman, Berger, & Cote, 1992; Kapferer, 1995; Mitchell & Kearney, 2002; Till & Priluck, 2000; Zaichkowsky & Simpson, 1996). Also, the purchase intention of the imitating brand was higher than that of the differentiated trailers (Warlop & Alba, 2004). Accordingly, it can be inferred that the evaluation of the imitating brand is positive to the purchase intention of the imitating brand. Therefore, the sixth hypothesis can be depicted as below:

H6. To consumers, higher evaluation of the imitating brand would lead to higher purchase intention of the imitating brand.

Warlop and Alba (2004) demonstrated that when consumers face the imitating brand and the differentiated trailer, they show higher purchase intention toward the imitating brand. Due to the brand imitation, consumers may evaluate the imitating brand incorrectly (brand confusion), thus may purchase the imitating brand (Balabanis & Craven, 1997; Foxman, Berger, & Cote, 1992;

Foxman, Muehling, & Berger, 1990; Kapferer, 1995; Kearney & Mitchell, 2001; Mitchell & Kearney, 2002). Hence, the seventh hypothesis is developed:

H7. To consumers, higher brand confusion would lead to higher purchase intention of the imitating brand.

2.7. Conceptual Model

Based on previous literature, the conceptual model of this study was illustrated at below.

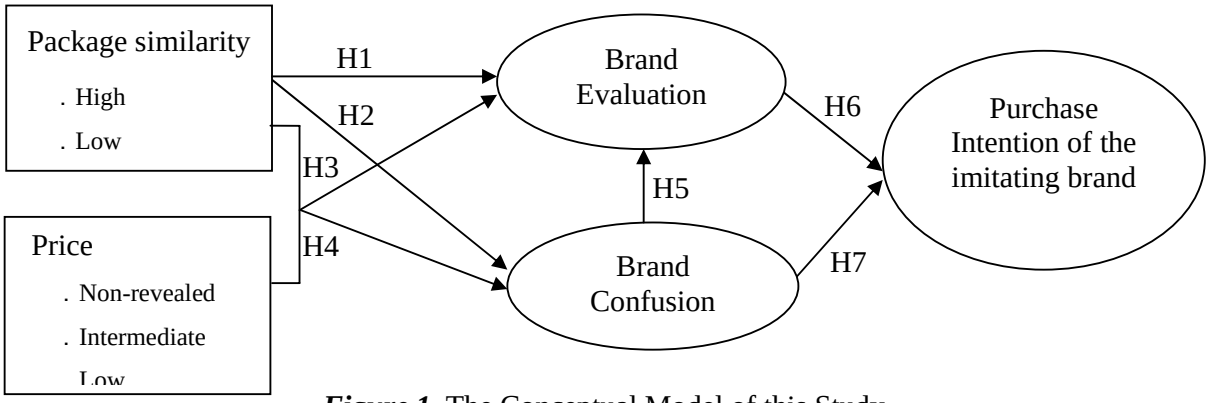


Figure 1. The Conceptual Model of this Study

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

A 2 (package similarity: high and low) x 3 (price: non-revealed, intermediate, and low) factorial design was adopted to test the hypotheses. The independent variables were package similarity and pricing of the imitating brand. The dependent variables were brand evaluation, brand confusion, and purchase intention of the imitating brand.

3.1.1. Stimuli

Potato chip was chosen and three brands were selected: Lay's, Tom's, and CAPE COD. The leading brand was Lay's, which was reported as the most eaten brand in three months by consumers (E-ICP, 2008). In addition, Lay's is the first brand that comes in consumers' mind (43.98%) when they go to convenience store for potato chips (Pollster, 2009). The imitating brand was Tom's and the interference brand was CAPE COD, both of which are real brands and rarely seen by consumers in Taiwan.

3.1.2. Manipulations and procedures

3.1.2.1. Manipulations

To test consumers' responses to the imitating brand, there were two packages with the same brand name– Tom's in this study. The high package similarity was the original package of Tom's, and the low package similarity was a fictitious package of Tom's, we made it as the non-imitating brand in this study. In addition, interference brand was used to disguise the actual purpose of the experiment and prevent respondents from realizing the research purpose.

To test price (intermediate and low) effect on consumers' brand evaluation and brand confusion, the price of the imitating brand was manipulated. The intermediate price was that the price of the imitating brand was set lower but around that of the leading brand and was perceived indifference between the imitating brand and the leading brand. On the contrary, the low price was that the price of the imitating brand was set significantly lower than that of the leading brand and

was perceived differently between the leading brand and the imitating brand.

According to the differential threshold theory, Chang and Chiou (2007) measured the differential thresholds among different magnitudes of initial prices for food products, the j.n.d. for initial prices of NT$12, NT$36, and NT$450 were NT$3, NT$6, and NT$60, respectively. When converted the j.n.d. to discount ratio, the discounts for initial prices of NT$12, NT$36, and NT$450 were 25% off, 16% off, and 13% off, respectively. Meanwhile, since consumers can perceive price changes, if retailers want to reduce price, they often mark product price down amounting to at least 20% of the original price (Britt, 1975; Hoch & Banerji, 1993). Therefore, in this study, the intermediate price was set 10% off (NT$23) based on the price of the leading brand (NT$25), and the low price was set 30% off (NT$ NT$17) based on the price of the leading brand. In addition, because people's attention on different packages varies, the order of three packages in each triad was counterbalanced. Therefore, a total of 36 research product pictures (6 triads x 6 orders) were manipulated. Respondents only saw one randomly assigned research product picture.

3.1.2.2. Procedures

Each respondent was given a written questionnaire in the form of booklet. After answering the first manipulation check item, respondents would read a scenario, which states that they saw some potato products while shopping in supermarket and suddenly feel like to buy some. Respondents then could turn to the next page to see the randomly assigned product picture. Next, they answered the manipulation check item and questions relating to the dependent variables. Finally, respondents filled out questions on their personal information including gender, age, occupation, income, and frequency of buying the research product.

3.1.3. Measures

3.1.3.1. Independent Variable

3.1.3.1.1. Brand Imitation

To test consumers' perceived similarity of the product packages, one 10-point semantic differential scale item, "similar /dissimilar in overall appearance", developed by Loken, Ross, and Hinkle (1986) was modified as 7-point scale and reworded as "package similarity of (leading brand) and (imitating brand)" to test respondents' perceived package similarity between the leading brand and the imitating brand. In addition, in order to test respondents' familiarity of brands of research product and their attention on the product picture, two items— "As for "potato chips", which brand that you think is the best selling in Taiwan market" and "What is the product that you just saw in the picture" were developed by this study.

3.1.3.2. Dependent Variable

3.1.3.2.1. Brand Evaluation

Brand evaluation was measured by brand attitude and brand trust based on Dawar and Lei's (2009) study. Each item was measured by 7-point semantic differential scales. Three items (unfavorable/favorable, bad/good, negative/positive) were used to assess brand attitude and three items (not at all trustworthy/very trustworthy, not at all dependable/very dependable, not at all reliable/very reliable) were used to measure brand trust.

3.1.3.2.2. Brand Confusion.

To measure consumer brand confusion, three 7-point scale items, "The taste of the leading brand and the imitating brand is similar.", "The texture of the leading brand and the imitating brand is similar.", and "The crisp of the leading brand and the imitating brand is similar." were developed based on McDaniel and Baker (1977), Veale and Quester (2009), and Knight and Kim (2007), respectively.

3.1.3.2.3. Purchase Intention.

Purchase intention of the imitating brand was measured by five 7-point semantic scale items. The items were "Intend to buy/do not intend to buy" was modified from Knight and Kim (2007), "Consider buying/do not consider buying", "Try to buy/do not try to buy", "Will buy/will not buy"

(Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009), and “Definitely buy/definitely not buy” (Spears & Singh, 2004).

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Pretest I

3.2.1.1 Validity, reliability, and item analysis

Data was gathered by convenience sampling method. The written questionnaires were delivered to undergraduates and junior MBA students. All items of each research variables were loaded to the intended factors. The *Cronbach's* α coefficient showed that all items measuring each variable were reliable (greater than .7). As for brand confusion, brand evaluation, and purchase intention, the α coefficients were .863, .963, and .940, respectively. Moreover, values of Item to Total of each variable were greater than .5. The results showed all variables were reliable. The mean of high similarity and mean of low similarity were 6.130 (n=46, SD=.778) and 3.184 (n=38, SD=1.557), respectively. The manipulation of package similarity was successful (t=10.621, p= .000). Movever, Levene test for homogeneity of variance was significant (F=27.583, p= .000), showing the perceived package have differences not only in the value of mean, but also in the value of variance for the two samples. That is, respondents of low package similarity revealed a discrepancy in perception of the low similarity package.

In addition, item analyses showed that the effect of package similarity on brand evaluation and purchase intention was not significant (p> .05), even more, some t-values were shown negative, which means the value of mean in high similarity was lower than that in low similarity. It revealed consumers seems to favor the low similarity package. Besides, respondents evaluated low similarity package higher than high similarity package. It displayed obviously that respondents favored the overall appearance of the low similarity package, and some of them mentioned the package design of low similarity based on black color seems to be of high quality. However, since the package colors and design were not the issue investigated in this study, on the contrary, high similarity package is the focus of this study; the low similarity package was redesigned to fit the research purpose.

3.2.2. Pretest II

3.2.2.1 Validity, reliability, and item analysis

Data was gathered by convenience sampling method. The online questionnaire was released to friends who did not fill out the pretest of this study before. There were a total of 48 research product pictures (8 triads x 6 orders) were shown. Respondents would see all these pictures and rated all of them. A total of 36 questionnaires were collected. For package similarity, the mean of high similarity and mean of low similarity were 5.056 (n=36, SD=1.393) and 2.583 (n=36, SD=1.574), respectively. The result of the manipulation of package similarity was successful (t=7.057, p= .000). Besides, in order to prevent certain color or package design favored by respondents, the value of variance in each package was observed. The Levene test for homogeneity of variance was not significant (F=.935, p= .337), showing the two samples of package perception have the same value of variance. That is, respondents of high and low similarity packages revealed a congruency in perception of each package. Further, the Duncan test of each random triad showed that the Pillai's Trace = .502 (F=1.021) and Wilks'λ=.353 (F = 1.279), which means the order effect was not happened.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Data Handing

Among 500 on-line questionnaires collected, 206 were valid. In the 294 invalid data, 30 were

deleted due to the same IP address, ID account, or e-mail address, 150 were deleted due to the first manipulation check (What is the product that you want to buy in this scenario?), and 114 were deleted for the second manipulation check (Package similarity of (leading brand) and (imitating brand). The valid rate is 41.2%.

4.2. Validity and reliability

The results of factor analyses showed that all of the items loaded on their intended factors as cited literature. Besides, all items measuring each variable were reliable (greater than .7). In addition, the construct validity was performed with CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) to examine the items to each construct. For brand evaluation, the model fit of the single factor model ($\chi^2_{(9)}$=63.816, *p*=.000, *df*=9, RMR=.083, GFI=.929) is inferior to that of the two factor model ($\chi^2_{(7)}$=18.660, *p*=.009, *df*=7, RMR=.027, GFI=.979). Since the two factor model presented better fitness than the single factor model for all the indexes, the construct of brand evaluation was illustrated as two factor model. As to purchase intention, the indicators ($\chi^2_{(5)}$=35.764, *p*=.000, *df*=5, RMR=.057, GFI=.952) did not meet the criteria. To improve the validity of purchase intention construct, items that contain the same meaning in sentence were considered deleting. Therefore, item 2 (try to buy) was deleted due to its meaning is similar to item 4 (intend to buy) and its factor loading was lower than item 4. The deletion of item 2 would not affect the construct. Purchase intention can be presented as uni-dimensional structure by both exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis (Chatura, Harvir, & Gordon, 2008; Dee K. Knight & Eun Young Kim, 2007; Spears & Singh , 2004; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009). By deleting item 2, the model fit ($\chi^2_{(2)}$=8.534, *p*=.014, *df*=5, RMR=.024, GFI=.986) was improved.

Table 1

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	χ^2	*df*	*p*-value	RMR	GFI	AGFI	NFI
Brand Evaluation							
Single Factor Model	63.816	9	.000	.083	.929	.833	.689
Two Factor Model	18.660	7	.009	.027	.979	.937	.909
Purchase Intention							
Single Factor Model (5 items)	35.764	5	.000	.057	.952	.856	.784
Single Factor Model (4 items)	8.534	2	.014	.024	.986	.928	.937

4.3. Effectiveness of Manipulation

T-test was conducted to check the effectiveness of package similarity (high vs. low) of the imitating brand. The mean of high similarity and mean of low similarity are 5.1058 (*n*=104, *SD*=.9129) and 2.4803 (*n*=102, *SD*=.9306), respectively. The results showed the manipulation of package similarity is effective (*t*=20.441, *p*= .000).

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

H1 and H2 were tested by one-way ANOVA. Table 2 and Figure 2 show that the effects of package similarity on brand evaluation (*F* (1, 63) = 38.152, *p*= .000) and brand confusion (*F* (1, 63) = 22.673, *p*= .000) are significant. Thus, H1and H2 are supported. These findings are consistent with Till and Priluck (2000) and Foxman, Berger, and Cote (1992).

Table 2

Result of ANOVA (Brand Evaluation and Brand Confusion) =f (package similarity)

		SS	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P*
Brand Evaluation	Corrected Model	27.167[a]	1	27.167	38.152	.000
	Intercept	945.992	1	945.992	1328.503	.000
	Package Similarity	27.167	1	27.167	38.152	.000
	Error	43.436	61	.712		
	Total	1011.750	63			
Brand Confusion	Corrected Model	30.901[b]	1	30.901	22.673	.000
	Intercept	1073.024	1	1073.024	787.332	.000
	Package Similarity	30.901	1	30.901	22.673	.000
	Error	83.135	61	1.363		
	Total	1181.556	63			

a. R^2 = .385 (Adjusted R^2 = .375)

b. R^2 = .271 (Adjusted R^2 = .259)

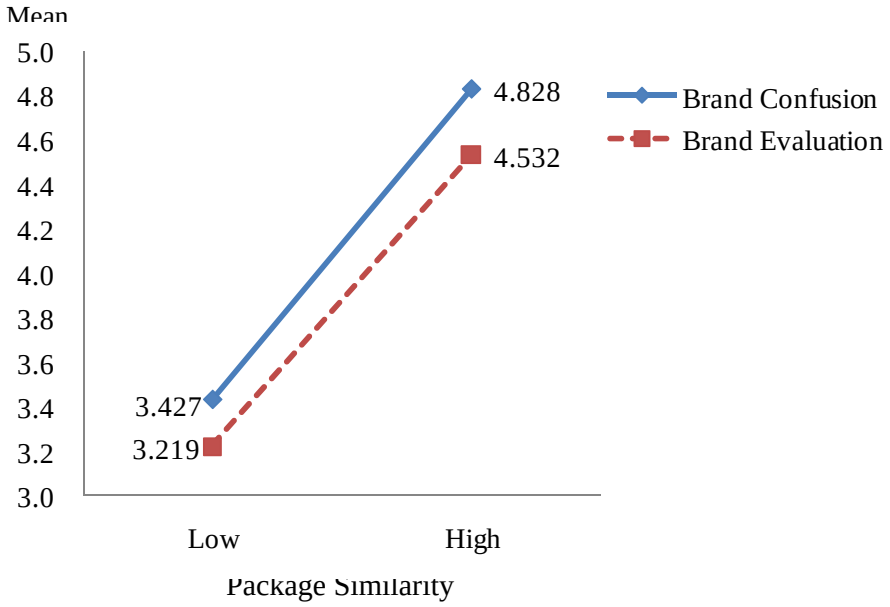


Figure 2. The Effect of Package Similarity on Brand Evaluation and Brand Confusion

H3 and H4 were tested by contrast analysis. First, a 2-way ANOVA was performed to examine the interaction effect of package similarity and price. Next, contrast analysis was used to further investigate the evaluation of the imitating brand on intermediate price and low price. The interaction effects of package similarity and price on brand evaluation (F (1, 143) = 5.424, p= .021) and brand confusion (F (1, 143) = 21.439, p= .000) are significant.

Moreover, the results of contrast analyses show (Table 4) reveal that the differences of prices (intermediate vs. low) in the high similarity package on brand evaluation and brand confusion are significant. As to brand evaluation, the imitating brand with intermediate price has higher brand evaluation (contrast estimate=.685, F (1, 143) =11.053, p= .001). Therefore, H3 is supported. The results correspond to Warlop and Alba (2004). As to brand confusion, the imitating brand with intermediate price has higher brand confusion (contrast estimate=1.268, F (1, 143) =35.786,

p= .000). Therefore, H4 is supported. The findings are consistent with Monroe and Petroshius (1981), and Schiffman and Kanuk (2007).

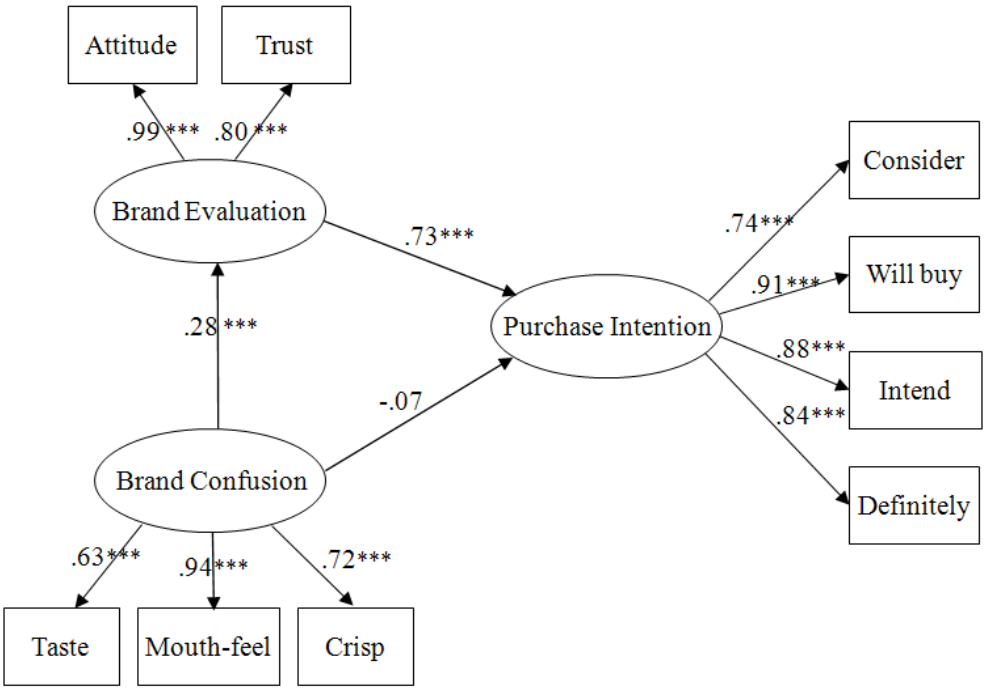
Table 4

Results of Contrast Analysis on Brand Evaluation and Brand Confusion

	Experimental Condition[a]								
Contrast	1	2	3	4	*df*	*SE*	*F*	Contrast Estimate	*p*
Brand Evaluation									
1 vs. 2	1	-1	0	0	1	.206	11.053	.685	.001
Brand Confusion									
1 vs. 2	1	-1	0	0	1	.212	35.786	1.268	.000

a. Experimental Condition: 1—PS-high / intermediate price, 2—PS-high / low price, 3—PS-low / intermediate price, 4—PS-low / low price, where PS= package similarity.

H5, H6 and H7 were tested by Structural Equation Model (SEM). The results of full model shows good model fit (X^2= 33.984, *df*=24, *p*=.085, *RMR*=.043, *RMSEA*=.037, *GFI*=.975, *AGFI*=.953, *NFI*=.979).



***: p< .001, **: p< .005

*Figure 3.*The Parameter Estimates

Table 5
Full Model of Dependent Variables

Relations		Standardized Coefficients	C.R. (*t*-value)
Variables			
Brand Confusion	Taste	.633***	9.995
	Texture	.932	--
	Crisp	.718***	10.954
Brand Evaluation	Brand Attitude	.996	--
	Brand Trust	.793***	15.585
Purchase Intention	Consider	.736***	15.812
	Will buy	.909	--
	Intend	.884***	22.283
	Definitely	.836***	19.948
Paths			
H5. Brand Confusion → Brand Evaluation		.284***	4.604
H7. Brand Confusion → Purchase Intention		-.067	-1.340
H6. Brand Evaluation → Purchase Intention		.703***	12.267
Chi-Square		33.984	
Degree of freedom (*d.f.*)		24	
Chi-Square/*d.f.*		1.416	
p-value		.085	
GFI		.975	
AGFI		.953	
RMR		.043	
RMSEA		.037	

Note. ***: $p < .001$, **: $p < .005$

According to path analyses show (Figure 3 and Table 5), the results reveal that H5 (β=.284, *p*=.000) and H6 (β=.703, *p*=.000) are significant and consistent with Foxman, Berger, and Cote (1992). However, H7 (β=-.067, *p*=.180) is not supported. Warlop and Alba (2004) suggested that the purchase intention of the imitating brand is higher than the differentiated trailer. Retrospect to the definition of brand confusion, which refers to errors exist in consumers' inferential making process, and thus result in inaccurate evaluation of the imitating brand (Foxman, Berger, & Cote, 1992). Accordingly, brand confusion has indirect effect on purchase intention through brand evaluation. The indirect effect between brand confusion and purchase intention is proven through H5 and H6.

4.5. Other Findings

Contrast analyses were performed to compare the imitating brand and the differentiated trailer in intermediate and low price. For brand evaluation, the imitating brand with intermediate price has higher brand evaluation than the differentiated trailer that either with intermediate price (contrast estimate=.877, F (1, 143) =23.808, *p*=.000) or with low price (contrast estimate=.907, F (1, 143) =20.004, *p*=.000). Respondents' brand evaluation was generalized (assimilation) to the leading brand, thus resulting in significantly higher brand evaluation. On the contrary, the imitating brand with low price was perceived as different (contrast) from the leading brand and generalized to the

differentiated trailer, thus the brand evaluation is indifferent to the differentiated trailer either with intermediate price (contrast estimate=.192, F (1, 143) =1.020, p=.353) or low price (contrast estimate=.222, F (1, 143) =1.047, p=.269).

Table 6

Results of Contrast Analysis on Brand Evaluation

	Experimental Condition[a]							Contrast	
Contrast	1	2	3	4	*df*	*SE*	*F*	Estimate	*p*
Brand Evaluation									
1 vs. 3	1	0	-1	0	1	.180	23.808	.877	.000
1 vs. 4	1	0	0	-1	1	.203	20.004	.907	.000
2 vs. 3	0	1	-1	0	1	.190	1.020	.192	.353
2 vs. 4	0	1	0	-1	1	.217	1.047	.222	.269

a. Experimental Condition: 1—PS-high / intermediate price, 2—PS-high / low price, 3—PS-low / intermediate price, 4—PS-low / low price, where PS= package similarity.

As to brand confusion, the imitating brand with intermediate price has higher brand confusion than the differentiated trailer that either with intermediate price (contrast estimate=1.652, F (1, 143) =65.563, p=.000) or with low price (contrast estimate=1.459, F (1, 143) =50.391, p=.000). However, Table 7 reveals the insignificant results of brand confusion between the imitating brand with low price and the differentiated trailer either with intermediate price (contrast estimate=.384, F (1, 143) =2.509, p=.100) or low price (contrast estimate=.191, F (1, 143) =.622, p=.398).

Table 7

Results of Contrast Analysis on Brand Confusion

	Experimental Condition[a]							Contrast	
Contrast	1	2	3	4	*df*	*SE*	*F*	Estimate	*p*
Brand Confusion									
1 vs. 3	1	-1	0	0	1	.204	65.563	1.652	.000
1 vs. 4	1	0	0	-1	1	.206	50.391	1.459	.000
2 vs. 3	0	1	-1	0	1	.242	2.509	.384	.100
2 vs. 4	0	1	0	-1	1	.242	.622	.191	.398

a. Experimental Condition: 1—PS-high / intermediate price, 2—PS-high / low price, 3—PS-low / intermediate price, 4—PS-low / low price, where PS= package similarity.

Moreover, demographics were used to examine whether they have effects on the dependent variable by MANOVA. The findings reveal that gender affects purchase intention of the imitating brand (F (1, 206) = 5.987, p= .015). Females had higher tendency of trying to buy the imitating brand than men. The mean of purchase intention of the imitating brand in female was 4.181 (n=124, SD=.976) and in male was 3.829 (n=82, SD=1.057), respectively.

Meyers-Levy (1991) argued that men and women have different judgment-making style. Women have lower elaboration threshold and thus use more message cues in judging products. Likewise, Nowaczyk (1982) proposed that compared with men, women had higher responses to nonverbal and elaborate descriptions. Nonverbal cues—package was manipulated and it shows obviously that women's purchase intention is affected by the effect of package similarity.

5. Conclusions and suggestions

5.1. Conclusions

In the international market, because global brands attract consumers worldwide (Gillespie,

Krishna, & Jarvis, 2002; Popescu, 2009), brand imitators use imitation as marketing strategy to increase their sales. Therefore, this study is interested in investigating the effect of brand imitation and its relationship to price on consumers' brand confusion and brand evaluation. Seven hypotheses based on previous research are developed. In addition, we choose potato chips as the research product. Two pretests were conducted to test consumers' responses toward the experimental material, and the validity and reliability of questionnaire items. Data were collected by online questionnaire. The results of this study are summarized and discussed below.

5.3. Research Contributions

5.3.1. Academic Contributions

5.3.1.1. The Effect of Brand Imitation and the Interaction Effect

This study investigated the notion of brand imitation from the strategy perspective, in that brand imitation can be traced back to imitation strategy, which relates to the market positioning strategy. Although the market follower cannot enjoy first-mover advantage, it still can gain its market share by adopting the imitation strategy. In addition, there are few studies investigated the relationship between the package similarity and price. Since price is demonstrated crucial to consumers (Hansen, 2005; Mitra, 1995), this study makes efforts to bridge this gap.

5.3.1.2. The Relationship between Brand Confusion and Brand Evaluation

This study investigates confusion aroused by package similarity and makes an accurate definition for brand confusion. Moreover, the relationship between brand confusion and brand evaluation was examined based on the definition of Foxman, Berger, and Cote (1992) and the result supports their positive relationship.

5.3.1.3. The Relationship between Brand Evaluation and Purchase Intention

On the topic of brand imitation, researchers investigated either consumers' attitude (Till & Priluck, 2000; Wilke & Zaichkowsky, 1999) or purchase intention (Warlop & Alba, 2004). However, the relationship between the two has not yet been established. Their positive relationship was supported by path analysis in this study.

5.3.1.4. The Gender Differences on Purchase Intention of the Imitating Brand

This research finds that gender affect the purchase intention toward the imitating brand. Specifically, women have higher tendency of buying the imitating brand. There are researchers (DePaulo & Rosenthal, 1979; Meyers-Levy, 1991; Nowaczyk, 1982) discussing the gender differences on message cues. Since brand imitation utilizes the package similarity—an extrinsic nonverbal cue, the finding could also give support for message cues research.

5.3.2. Managerial Implications

5.3.2.1. Firms Can Use Brand Imitation as Market Entry Strategy

Tens of thousands of packaged products available in the market, a package plays a role not only in protecting the product, but also affects their purchasing choice (Ghoshal, Boatwright, & Cagan, 2009; Rundh, 2005). Based on the results of this study, for a new brand, the firms can use brand imitation as market entry strategy to get higher brand evaluation and arouse consumers' purchase intention. The brand imitation strategy should be integrated in other marketing mix elements, such as product. Zaichkowsky and Simpson (1996) found that when consumers dissatisfied the imitating brand, their purchase intention toward the imitating brand would lower. On the contrary, their purchase intention toward the leading brand would be higher. Therefore, if the imitating brand provides consumers a poor product, consumers' may not come back after experiencing the imitating product.

5.3.2.2. Firms of the Imitating Brand Should Be Cautious of Setting Price

Firms should also be cautious of setting price which would affect consumers' quality assessments (Boyle & Lathrop, 2009; Lichtenstein & Burton, 1989; Völckner & Hofmann, 2007). For the imitating brand, when the price is set intermediately, it would be generalized to the leading brand and arouse higher brand evaluation than the differentiated trailers. On the contrary, if the

price is set lowly, then consumers would contrast it against to the leading brand and perceive it as no difference to the differentiated trailers.

5.4. Limitations and Suggestions

First, the generalization of results may be an issue. This study uses convenience sampling and respondents are familiar with potato chips (65.0% of the respondents know the leading brand). Alain and Ezzedine (2001) proposed that product familiarity and brand sensitivity would affect consumers' brand evaluation, therefore, whether consumers' product familiarity and brand sensitivity would affect consumers' brand evaluation and brand confusion could be examined in future research.

Second, the findings of this study may not be generalized to all types of consumer products. The research product (potato chips) belongs to convenience product. For convenience products, consumers make little effort and comparison in their purchase decision (Armstrong & Kotler, 2009) and rely heavily on limited information such as extrinsic cues (package, price, etc.) (Mitra, 1995). Thus, future research could examine the brand imitation issues in other types of consumer products.

Third, since the extrinsic cues (package and price) had interaction effects on consumers' brand evaluation and brand confusion of the imitating brand, other extrinsic cues can be included to investigate whether it would interact with package similarity and price.

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