

# **Exploring aspiration and counterfeit luxuries purchase intention through moral rationalization and moral decoupling mechanisms?**

**Abstract** This research investigates how intrinsic and extrinsic aspiration drive consumers' counterfeit purchase intention through moral reasoning strategies-moral rationalization and moral decoupling. Drawing on moral disengagement theory, we argue that consumers driven by aspirations are likely to justify their behavior to avoid self-condemnation. They may adopt different moral strategies to activate corresponding process by which such reprehensible or culpable consumption actions can be disengaged from self-sanctions, such that the guilty of immoral consumption felt by consumers is alleviated without violating moral standards. Thus, providing evidence from consumers in China where counterfeiting is pervasive., this study confirms the mediating role of moral reasoning strategies in increasing counterfeit purchase intention driven by aspirations in emerging markets.

**Keywords** counterfeit purchase intention; moral rationalization; moral decoupling; aspiration

## **Introduction**

In recent years, research interest in aspiration in driving consumers to purchase counterfeits has escalated (Cordell, Wongtada, & Kieschnick Jr, 1996; Sharma & Chan, 2011; Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009). Scholars have argued that they are motivated to conduct such behavior for image, popularity, social status, belonging to desired group, symbolic self-extension et. al. (Furnham & Valgeirsson, 2007; Hanzaee & Jalalian, 2012; Liao & Hsieh, 2012; Phau, Sequeira, & Dix, 2009; Wilcox et al., 2009). However, extant researches on how aspiration impact counterfeit purchase intention is relatively limited. To address the research gap, this study examines the mechanisms through which aspirations are associated with counterfeit purchase intention based on the perspective of moral disengagement.

Based on moral disengagement theory, previous research about counterfeit has found that consumers' personal gratification of self-accomplishment, social recognition and desire for finer things in life can motivate consumers to go through a process of moral reasoning. After going through this process, individuals will use different moral reasoning strategies to reinterpret their immoral behaviors as less immoral and make a decision to buy counterfeit (Hanzaee & Jalalian, 2012; Phau, Teah, & Lee, 2009). This suggests that consumers' aspirations for image, money, or affiliation, community etc. have an impact on their counterfeit purchasing intention, and that their moral reasoning strategy also will have an impact on their counterfeit purchasing intention. However, these impacts have been neglected in previous studies.

In related literatures, scholars have identified two aspirations based on self determined

theory: (1) extrinsic aspiration, or life goals that are considered as means of obtaining rewards or social praises from other people, such as money, image and popularity; (2) intrinsic aspiration, or life goals that are congruent with persistent, proactive and positive tendencies of human, such as affiliation, community and self acceptance (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Previous researches mainly discuss the impact of extrinsic aspiration in driving counterfeit purchase intention (Furnham & Valgeirsson, 2007; Hanzaee & Jalalian, 2012; Liao & Hsieh, 2012; Phau, Sequeira, et al., 2009; Wilcox et al., 2009). However, the impact of intrinsic aspiration has been largely overlooked in the literature.

Furthermore, moral reasoning strategies include (1) moral rationalization, to make the immoral inconsequential, (2) moral decoupling, to selectively separate the immoral counterfeit purchasing behavior from acquired benefits (Bhattacharjee, Berman, & Reed, 2013; Eisend & Schuchert-Güler, 2006). However, conceptually and empirically, most of the researches focus on arguing about moral rationalization (Aquino, Reed, Thau, & Freeman, 2007; Baumeister & Newman, 1994; McAlister, Bandura, & Owen, 2006; Shu, Gino, & Bazerman, 2011). They may rule out the possibility that these two reasoning strategies operate simultaneously on immoral behavior, such as counterfeit purchasing. Hence special attention needs to be given to these two moral reasoning strategies simultaneously.

This study seeks to make three contributions. (1) We contribute theoretically to the extant literature on counterfeiting by introducing a moral disengagement mechanism that explains the role of aspiration in driving counterfeit purchase intention. (2) This

study enriches SDT theory and empirically tests whether (and how) the different effects of extrinsic and intrinsic aspiration on counterfeit purchase intention by linking aspirations to different moral reasoning strategy. (3) This study demonstrates whether (and how) moral rationalization and moral decoupling strategy are associated with counterfeit purchasing intention. Our key finding is that consumers are motivated by extrinsic aspiration to use moral rationalization, leading to a improvement of counterfeit purchase intention. Otherwise, intrinsic aspiration is also found to be positively associated with counterfeit purchase intention though utilizing moral decoupling by consumers, but negatively related with moral rationalizaion.

This article is organized as follows: First, we detailed our conceptual framework and research hypotheses. Second, we described our research methods used to design the empirical study. Thirdly, our model is tested using Chinese sample of consumers and the results are presented. Finally, we discuss the main findings and managerial implication of the study, and provide limitation and future research directions.

## **Theory background**

### ***Aspiration***

Aspiration, or life goals, has experienced a proliferated interest among psychology researchers. Alongside the work on aspiration, the content of it has shown to be an important predictor of outcome interest. One of the most widely recognized content distinction concerns the differentiation between contents of intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations, which is consistent with SDT(Self determined theory) literatures(Ryan, 1996). SDT literatures have focused on the distinction between contents of goals

based on the concept of basic psychological needs or whether these goals contribute to basic psychological needs or not (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic goals are defined as ones that are congruent with persistent, proactive and positive tendencies of human, thus providing satisfaction with inherently basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, affiliation aspiration concerns family life and friends, community aspiration concerns making the world better through action of oneself, and self-acceptance concerns self-esteem, which are associated with three basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence and relatedness (Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Ryan, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Whereas extrinsic goals are typically means of obtaining rewards or social praises from other people, which do not contribute to or detract from basic needs (Ryan, 1996). Past works have identified aspirations or life goals, such as self-acceptance, affiliation and community et. al. to reflect intrinsic aspiration and money, image and popularity et. al. to reflect extrinsic aspiration (Brdar, Rijavec, & Miljković, 2009; Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008; Grouzet et al., 2005; Lee, McInerney, Liem, & Ortega, 2010; Ryan, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2000). As verified by recent empirical studies, different aspiration or life goals have different effects on human behavior and effective consequence. For example, various researches have provided empirical support for the negative link between extrinsic aspiration and job satisfaction, psychological health, and well-being, whereas, the intrinsic aspiration shows a positive effect in contrast (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Sebire, Standage, & Vansteenkiste, 2009).

In context of counterfeit luxury consumption, consumers purchase counterfeit luxury brands for image benefits associated with social praises such as bringing people prestige and status, attracting other people's attention so as to fulfill extrinsic goals (Bian & Moutinho, 2009; Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2010). Additionally, since counterfeit luxury are designed to look like authentic brands, consumers are likely motivated to consume it as a form of self expression when they are not able to afford genuine product (Michaelidou & Christodoulides, 2011). For example, people will buy a counterfeit GUCCI bag because the brand reflects their values and beliefs or associate consumers with desired group so as to fulfill intrinsic goals, such as affiliation, community and self-acceptance (Wilcox et al., 2009).

### ***Moral reasoning***

According to work of Galotti (1989) and (Bargh, 1994), moral reasoning is defined as a conscious process of reaching moral judgment after though a series of steps, such as searching for evidence, weighting evidence, coordinating evidence with theories and reaching a decision. However, recent moral psychology theory holds that moral reasoning is usually a post-hoc construction, generated after an intuitive moral judgment has been reached. In other words, when individuals are involved in a moral dilemma, they will alter reasoning process in a way that selectively search for information to reach a moral judgment in line with the desired outcome (Ditto, Pizarro, & Tannenbaum, 2009).

There are two moral reasoning strategies, moral rationalization and moral decoupling,

which are likely employed by consumers to alter direction of moral reasoning. Moral rationalization is defined as a cognitive process that find excuses to persuade themselves and surroundings for fear of being exposure to embarrassed condition. Different from moral rationalization, consumers may pursue a distinct reasoning strategy to not be involved in improper behavior, defined as moral decoupling by Bhattacharjee et al.(2013). Compared to moral rationalization, moral decoupling is more like an convenient device to persuade themselves that their behavior don't violate moral standards by separating the performance of the immoral conduct from morality.

Ethically, everyone knows manufacturing, using, and dispersing counterfeit is illegal (Amy Frerichs 2009) . If consumers decide to purchase counterfeit, violating the moral principle will lead them to feel self-sanction or guilty(Cordell et al., 1996; Furnham & Valgeirsson, 2007). However, if they decide not to buy, withdrawing the economic or hedonic benefits of purchasing will cause discomfort(Eisend & Schuchert-Güler, 2006). To resolve the tension, some, who strongly motivated by benefits, may pursue moral reasoning strategies to altering reasoning process in a way that adjust moral judgment in line with the desired outcome(Tsang, 2002) (Ditto et al., 2009).

### ***Aspiration and moral reasoning***

Consistent with the above logic, consumers are likely motivated to purchase counterfeit luxury brands either by extrinsic or intrinsic aspirations. Nevertheless,

there is a paucity of research concerning the morality in counterfeit luxury purchasing, which is likely contradictory with attainment of goals. For example, counterfeit luxury brands are always involved in moral issues such as child labor, intellectual right protection, defrauding consumers and tarnishing original brands et al.. (Furnham & Valgeirsson, 2007; Phau, Sequeira, et al., 2009). These negative consequences may break one's internal moral belief or principles that are always related to people's intrinsic goals, such as affiliation, community and self-acceptance. In addition, consumers may face social risks in case of being found out. In this case, consumers run risks of losing image characterized by financial status, taste and competence, popularity as being ostracized by peers, leading to a fall in attainment of extrinsic goals (Bian & Moutinho, 2009; de Matos, Ituassu, & Rossi, 2007; Wee, Ta, & Cheok, 1995). Thus, counterfeit luxury brands consumption has a double-edged sword effect on people's aspiration (Jiang & Cova, 2012). Although previous study has examined the effect of aspiration in driving luxury consumption (Truong et al., 2010), how consumers reconcile such double-edged sword effect in counterfeit luxury consumption is still unsolved.

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Insert figure 1 about here

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## **Hypothesis development**

### *Extrinsic goal and moral reasoning*



Consumers who are striving for extrinsic aspirations are likely to morally disengage and engage in antisocial or immoral behavior. When individuals pursue extrinsic goals, such as money, image and popularity etc., they are motivated in a non self-determined or controlled fashion (Solberg & Halvari, 2009). For instance, when people purchase counterfeit, a look-alike luxury brands, they are seeking higher social status in order to acquire outward rewards satisfaction and physical pleasure (Kasser & Ryan, 1993) (Grouzet et al., 2005), or attracting other people's attention in order to preserving image (Solberg & Halvari, 2009). Consistent with self determined theory, previous researches have found that individuals with dominant controlled motivation are more likely to emphasize compliance with value; to achieve personal extrinsic aspiration, they may do any thing that even violate their moral principles, and to morally disengage (Ken Hodge 2011). As such, consumers driven by extrinsic aspiration tend to use moral reasoning strategies, moral rationalization and moral decoupling. thus, we posit that:

**H1: Extrinsic goal is positively related to moral rationalization**

**H2: Extrinsic goal is positively related to moral decoupling**

### *Intrinsic aspiration and moral reasoning*

There is controversial debate about the effect of intrinsic aspiration on counterfeit purchase intention. One argue that consumers motivated by intrinsic aspiration are not likely to moral disengage and purchase counterfeits. The explanation is about the way or manner in which the aspiration is pursued or attained. Unlike with extrinsic goals,

people pursue intrinsic goals in an autonomous manner rather than feeling pressured or controlled, especially for fun, enjoyment or personal being obtained from the attainment of goals (Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004). In accordance with self-determination theory (SDT), autonomy-motivated consumers should behave primarily in line with their true self and seek to satisfy basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence and relatedness. For autonomously motivated consumers, counterfeit luxury brands purchasing would run counter to satisfaction of these three basic needs. For instance, such behavior would lead consumers to achieve artificial competence; violate their sense of autonomy by engaging in behaviors that act against their moral values and moral standards; and disconnect with their targeted belonging group by purchasing illegal and low-price replicas of products that typically possess high brand value (Hodge, Ken 2012).

In contrast, taking perspectives of social identity theory (SIT), consumers motivated by intrinsic aspirations are likely to morally disengage and purchase counterfeits. When identifying as a member of a social group that holds a belief that counterfeit luxury brands purchasing is not an immoral issue, autonomously motivated consumers may act in a sense of self. Given that consumers, especially in China etc., are more influenced by their social circle which favored counterfeits and consider counterfeit purchasing as not immoral, they are more likely to endorse the social norms. Thus, when they are striving for intrinsic aspirations, consumers are likely to use moral reasoning strategies to disengage.

Through moral decoupling, perceived benefit will be separated from judgment of morality. So, consumers can choose to purchase counterfeit luxury brands solely concerning benefit and such immoral behavior is no way distracted from their basic psychological needs satisfaction. Whereas, compared with moral decoupling, moral rationalization is involved in condoning immoral behavior so that personal moral standards will be violated, leading to a distraction of basic psychological needs satisfaction. As such, Consumers tend not to employ moral moral rationalization. In a line with the above logic, we predict that:

**H3: Intrinsic aspiration is positively associated to moral decoupling**

**H4: Intrinsic aspiration is negatively associated to moral rationalization**

#### *Moral reasoning and purchase intention*

Moral rationalization allows individuals to convince themselves that counterfeit purchasing behavior is consistent with their moral standards. When facing the ambiguous moral standards of counterfeiting, the preference towards counterfeits will distort their moral interpretation. Individuals won't go looking for evidence of culpability or adverse effects of counterfeit purchasing but strive to rationalize the ambiguity behavior as less immoral (Ditto et al., 2009). Therefore, we predict:

**H5: Moral rationalization will have positive effect on purchase intention**

Moral decoupling, as a psychological separation process, selectively alter the manner in which an individual view the relationship between morality and benefits of counterfeit purchasing behavior. When individuals adopting such strategy, they focus

on the social benefits (i.e. image, status consumption, etc.) and economic benefits(i.e., perceived fashion content, physical appearance, performance, scarcity etc.) (Liao & Hsieh, 2012). As such, consumers will be motivated to only address the functional or hedonic performance of counterfeits which could both satisfy their conspicuous or practical needs, so as to increase purchase intention. Thus, we predict:

**H6: Moral decoupling will have positive effect on purchase intention**

## **Method**

### Sample and data collection

Given that china has been perceived to be one of the main country where counterfeit luxury products are pervasive due to weak enforcement of intellectual right protection and moral ambiguity to the public, our study conducted in china (Wanjau and Muli Muthiani, 2012).

The personal interview combined with literature review are used to generate a questionnaire. To begin with, we developed an English-version, and then two English proficient translators are asked to translate English to Chinese, following a Chinese to English translation process to make sure conceptual equivalence. Two pretests are conducted using this questionnaires, one with three marketing professors and three consumers through random sampling and the other with 30 consumers, to ensure face and content validity. We revised some items in terms of completeness and relevance of the questionnaire to make more clarity based on their responses.

In our study, we contact respondents through a conventional email means. First of all, to get a mail list, we registered some famous social-networking website and attended some relevant social media group, such as QQ and wechat. And then, we sent an invitation to these potential respondents to ask them to complete an survey in Qualtrics.com website, with a commitment that we will ensure all of their personal information won't be divulged. To increase participation, we also promise anyone will be paid a fee when completed this survey.

In the end, an usable sample of 327 consumers are obtained on which we empirically test our model, leading to a 35% response rate. Of the final sample 30.6% are male and 69.4% are female. The demographics indicate that about 0.62% are less than 20 years old, 74.77% are between 20 and 29 years old, 17.85% are between 30 and 39 years old, 4% are between 40 and 49 years old, 1.54% are between 50 and 59 years old, and 0.9% are over 60 years old. Additionally, Compared distribution of education with income distribution, we will find that Chinese young people with a high level of education earn not much, as seen in table 1.

There no no-response bias existed in terms of no-significant T test on age, monthly disposable income, education and key constructs between early and late respondents.

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#### Construct measures

The constructs included in this study were, extrinsic goals, intrinsic goals, moral rationalization, moral decoupling and purchase intention. All latent constructs are

measured by 7-point multi-items scales (1= “strongly disagree”, 7= “strongly agree” ) drawn or adapted from established literatures.

*Extrinsic goals*, following Kasser and his colleagues’ conceptualization, was seen as being reflected in money, image and popularity(Grouzet et al., 2005; Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Consequently, extrinsic goals are manifest in three first-order factors. Among them, money was measured using 4 items, image was measured using 5 items and popularity was measured using 3 items drawn from (Grouzet et al., 2005).

*Intrinsic goals* are also manifest in three first- order factors, affiliation, community and self-acceptance, help us meet fundamental psychological needs (such as the needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence). Affiliation consist of 5 items, and 3 items scale and 7 items scale are used to measure community and self-acceptance each drawn from Grouzet et al. (2005).

*Moral rationalization* was measured using 8-items scale adapted from previous studies (Bandura et al., 1996; Bhattacharjee et al., 2013).

*Moral decoupling*, We adapted the measure of moral decoupling from the work of Bhattacharjee et al. (2013), using three items to assess the extant to which such reasoning strategy was employed by respondents in considering purchasing of counterfeit luxury brands, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

*Counterfeit purchase intention*, we adapted measures of counterfeit purchase intention from from Teng and Laroche 2007 using 4 items to assess the extant to which consumers are willing to purchase counterfeit luxury brands, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

## **Analysis and results**

### Measurement validity and reliability

First of all, exploratory factor analyses were conducted on items of the each nine constructs (money, image, popularity, affiliation, community, self-acceptance, moral rationalization, moral decoupling and purchase intention) in software STATA, the results indicated that each item only loaded on one single factor, suggesting the unidimensionality of measures. This was followed by a confirmatory factor analysis, and item 5 and item 6 of moral rationalization whose factor loadings were less than 0.5 were dropped.

After unqualified items were deleted, we specified a series of models and tested them using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the structure of the intrinsic and extrinsic goal scales in this sample. Comparative analysis results between one-factor model in which all items of intrinsic or extrinsic goal loaded on a single latent construct and three-factor model in which all items of intrinsic or extrinsic goal loaded on three latent constructs, indicated that the three factor model fit the data well better ( for intrinsic goal scale,  $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 311.38$ ;  $p = 0.00$  for extrinsic goal scale,  $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 154.52$ ;  $p = 0.00$  ). Additionally, the strong interrelationships among the dimensions of intrinsic or extrinsic goals ( for intrinsic goal, average correlation=0.53; for extrinsic goal, average correlation=0.57) suggested that there existed a higher order factor. Accordingly, we loaded these first order factor dimensions of intrinsic or extrinsic goal onto a second order dimensions of goal. The fit statistics of measurement model presented a good fit to the data(for intrinsic goal,

$\chi^2/df \approx 2.14$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.063$ ,  $NFI = 0.97$ ,  $CFI = 0.98$  ;for extrinsic goal,  
 $\chi^2/df \approx 3$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.08$ ,  $NFI = 0.94$ ,  $CFI = 0.96$  ) and every loading coefficient is strongly significant, thus specifying intrinsic or extrinsic goal as a second order factor was supported.

Based on purified measures for each construct, we estimated a confirmatory factor model including all constructs and calculated composite reliability, average variance extracted and composite reliability coefficients. As seen in the appendix, the value of reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) exceed or equaled the threshold level of 0.6 and 0.5 respectively. Furthermore, all factor loadings were highly significant at 1% significance level. Together, these above-mentioned test results demonstrated adequate reliability and convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was established by two ways. First, chi-square difference test for two-factor confirmatory measurement models with each possible pair of all the constructs (15 tests) was conducted to determine whether restricted model (correlation between the two constructs was fixed to 1) was significantly worse than the unrestricted model (correlation between the two constructs was estimated freely) . All the  $\chi^2$  differences between each of the restricted with the unrestricted models were highly significant (e.g., intrinsic goal and extrinsic goal  $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 169.21$ ;  $p = 0.00$  : moral decoupling and moral rationalization:  $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 430.19$ ;  $p = 0.00$  ), and the unrestricted models showed a worse data fit in every instance, thus providing evidence of discriminant validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Second, the shared variance between other constructs was lower than the AVE of each construct (see table



1), in support of discriminant validity ( Fornell Larcker 1981).

#### Common method bias

To avoid ex ante common method bias, we addressed remedies in the design stage by informing participants that there are no right or wrong answers but they should answer honestly, promising anonymity and confidentiality, clarifying ambiguous and unfamiliar items, and randomizing the order of questionnaire through the Qualtrics.com website(Chang et al., 2010). In addition, we employed Harman one-factor test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986) and results indicate that there is no one general factor accounting for the majority of variance, suggesting the CMV is not significant.

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Insert table 2 about here

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#### Hypothesis testing

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The proposed model was tested using structure equation model(SEM). The results of the SEM analysis revealed a satisfactory fit to data. As suggested by table 2, all fit indices are within an acceptable range, the chi-square statistic is 1222.12 with 653 degrees of freedom and are significant at the 1% level ( $p=0.00$ ). The NFI-value (0.90) and CFI-value(0.95) are both above the 0.9 requirements. The RMSEA-value is 0.052, indicating an acceptable fit of the data.

As table 2 shows, extrinsic goal is significantly related to moral rationalization, thus H1 is accepted. The effect of extrinsic goal on the purchase intention is not significant, indicating that extrinsic goal doesn't directly affect moral decoupling, so H2 is not supported. As predicted by H3, intrinsic goal has a significant positive impact on moral decoupling ( $r=0.33$ ;  $p=0.00$ ). Intrinsic goal is hypothesized to affect moral rationalization negatively (H4), and the result supports H4 ( $r=-0.08$ ;  $p=0.00$ ). Consistent with H5, the relationship between moral rationalization and purchase intention is positively and significant ( $r=0.33$ ;  $p=0.00$ ). Moral decoupling is positively related to counterfeit purchase intention as predicted by H6( $r=0.12$ ;  $p=0.00$ ).

## **Conclusion and discussion**

This research investigates how intrinsic and extrinsic aspiration drive consumers' counterfeit purchase intention through moral reasoning strategies-moral rationalization and moral decoupling. Through an analysis of 327 consumers in China,

we find that a higher level of extrinsic aspiration is positively associated with higher levels of moral rationalization while a higher level of intrinsic aspiration is positively associated with moral decoupling and negatively related to moral rationalization. In turn, both higher levels of moral rationalization and moral decoupling contribute to the counterfeit purchase intention. In doing so, we address two research questions that helped us explicate (1) how aspiration drive people to conduct a immoral behavior, such as counterfeit purchasing, and (2) whether intrinsic and extrinsic aspiration influence counterfeit purchase intention through different moral reasoning strategies.

#### *Research implication*

First, this study contributes to consumer immoral consumption research by introducing moral disengagement mechanisms in counterfeit context. Previous conceptual and empirical studies have focused on the link between extrinsic aspiration () and counterfeit purchase intention. Drawing on moral disengagement theory, we argue that consumers driven by aspirations are likely to justify their behavior to avoid self-condemnation. They may adopt different moral strategies to activate corresponding process by which such reprehensible or culpable consumption actions can be disengaged from self-sanctions, such that the guilty of immoral consumption felt by consumers is alleviated without violating moral standards. Thus, providing evidence from consumers in China where counterfeiting is pervasive., this study confirms the mediating role of moral reasoning strategies in increasing counterfeit purchase intention driven by aspirations in emerging markets.

Second, this study prove a counterintuitive existence that except for extrinsic-oriented consumers, intrinsic-oriented consumers are also likely to moral disengage by adopting different moral reasoning strategies. Previous researches based on SDT(self determined theory), extrinsic-oriented consumers who perceive being controlled may moral disengage by rationalizing antisocial behaviors. And intrinsic-oriented or autonomy motivated consumers should behave primarily in line with moral standards, so as not to moral disengage(Solberg & Halvari, 2009). Inconsistent with the above argument, we enriches SDT theory by differentiating the role of extrinsic and intrinsic aspiration in driving consumer counterfeit purchase intention, linking aspirations to different moral reasoning strategy. Drawing on the results that extrinsic aspiration is positively associated with moral rationalization, while intrinsic aspiration is positively related to moral decoupling and negatively to moral rationalization, we support the argument that through moral decoupling other than moral rationalization, intrinsic-oriented consumers can purchase counterfeit luxury brands by separating perceived benefit from judgment of morality, which is no way distracted from their basic psychological needs satisfaction. Furthermore, moral decoupling is not involved in condoning immoral behavior compared with moral rationalization.

Third, we contribute to moral disengagement theory literatures by simultaneously examining two types of moral reasoning strategies, moral rationalization and moral decoupling, which provide consumers with convenience device to moral disengage with recognition of moral issues in counterfeits consumption. Researchers have traditionally focused on moral rationalization, paying little attention to moral

decoupling. This study, therefore, fills a void by proposing a aspiration-purchase intention model in the counterfeit consumption setting and testifying the mediating role of moral rationalization and moral decoupling in increasing counterfeit purchase intention. We argue that moral rationalization reduce the tension between desired benefits and their moral standards by reconstructing counterfeit purchasing so that reach a desired self-serving moral judgment, thus increase counterfeits purchasing intention which is an individual internal forming process involved in assessment of morality. And moral decoupling makes consumers avoid self-sanction without activation of morality assessment thus increase purchase intention.

#### *Managerial implication*

Except for the above theoretical contributions, our results also provide the bellowing managerial implications. First, the findings of this study suggest that both extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations can be motivators to consumer preference for counterfeit luxuries. Consumers whoever are extrinsically or intrinsically oriented tend to buy counterfeit luxuries. Luxury brand firms should be knowledgeable that advertisement which based on extrinsic values, such as “The Gentleman is Back(Givenchy)”, or intrinsic values “Does the person create the journey, or does the journey create the person? (Louis Vitton)” not only appeal to real consumers, but also inspire aspiration of counterfeit consumers.

Second, this research finds that moral reasoning strategies, moral rationalization and moral decoupling, are effective ways for consumers to support their counterfeit

purchasing and avoid self-guilty. This finding suggests that, to prevent from purchasing counterfeit luxuries driven by aspiration, luxury brands firms and policy makers should place emphasis on decreasing the possibility of adopting moral rationalization and moral decoupling. As such, different messages should delivered to extrinsically oriented and intrinsically oriented audience. For instance, extrinsically oriented consumers should be informed that buying counterfeits of luxury brands is absolutely wrong in any case, which prevents consumers from justifying for their immoral behavior or adopting moral rationalization. As for intrinsic oriented consumers, to effectively reduce the probability of adopting moral decoupling, marketers and policy makers should not only pay more effort in informing consumers that the economic and social benefits from counterfeit purchasing are accompanied by potential risk posed on self and others, but emphasize that counterfeit purchasing is absolutely not a means of self-expression.

### **Limitation and future research**

There are several limitations of this study should be explored in the future. First, the study is cross-sectional design in nature and the results are based on self-report, which means no conclusion about cause and effect can be made. So, experiment research should be designed to explore the moral disengagement mechanism between aspiration and purchase intention through controlling for mediating effect. In addition, it would be instructive to obtain objective scores of consumers' psychosocial functioning in order to obtain more evidence for the validity of these relationships.

Second, we collect data only from one country, namely China, which limit the generalizability of the findings. Although counterfeit luxuries tend to have a similar image, the relative importance of different aspirations granted by consumers may vary from developed countries to emerging markets, where consumers share different values, norms and customs. Therefore, the findings may be inappropriate to apply them to consumers with very different cultural values and future studies about specific aspiration content in different culture should deserve exploring. Third, moral rationalization and moral decoupling is likely to vary across domains. For example, moral decoupling may be more cognitively demanding than moral rationalization in domains such as athletics, in which performance is objectively and less enmeshed with moral concern. Future study should consider whether these results from this research are applied for different domains.

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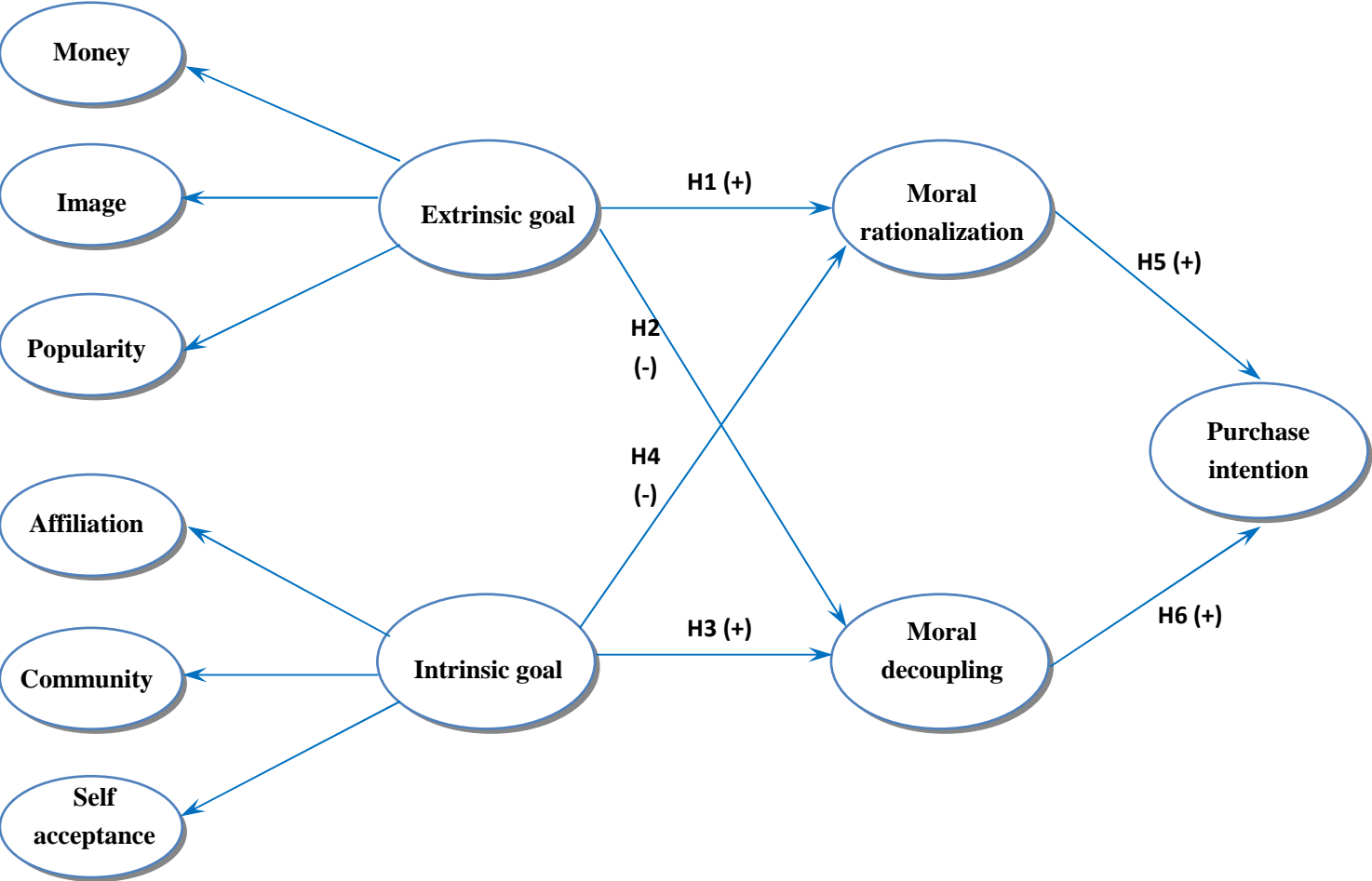
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Figure 1



**Table 1.** Demographics

Gender		Age		Income		Education	
Male	30.6%	<20	2	<1000	35.2%	High school or below	2.1%
Female	69.4%	21 -29	243	1001-3000	33.6%	Junior college	6.4%
		30 -39	58	3001-5000	13.1%	Undergraduate	63.3%
		40-49	13	5001-10000	11.6%	Post-graduate	19.6%
		50-59	5	10001-20000	4.6%	Doctor	8.6%
		>60	4	>20000	1.8%		

**Table 2** Statistics and correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Money	<b>0.76</b>								
2. Image	0.52	<b>0.81</b>							
3. Popularity	0.44	0.61	<b>0.70</b>						
4. Affiliation	0.40	0.33	0.35	<b>0.83</b>					
5. Community	0.23	0.22	0.32	0.55	<b>0.76</b>				
6. Self-acceptance	0.44	0.32	0.32	0.63	0.53	<b>0.87</b>			
7. Moral rationalization	0.12	0.09	0.12	0.03	0.01	0.04	<b>0.82</b>		
8. Moral decoupling	0.04	0.00	-0.07	0.17	0.08	0.18	0.04	<b>0.85</b>	
9. Purchase intention	0.08	0.07	0.04	0.06	0.03	0.11	0.33	0.13	<b>0.92</b>
AVE	0.83	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.52	0.45	0.51	0.66	0.76
Mean	5.12	4.47	4.70	5.67	5.14	5.65	4.23	4.73	3.16
Standard deviation	1.05	1.11	1.12	1.02	1.07	0.88	1.03	1.32	1.40

Notes. \*p<0.1. \*\*p<0.05. \*\*\*p<0.01., the value of dialogue are estimates of reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha)

**Table 3**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Std. loading</b>
<b>Intrinsic goal</b>	
<i>Money</i> (CR=0.95)	
I will have many expensive possessions	0.95
I will be financially successful	0.91
I will have enough money to buy everything I want	0.97
I will have a job that pays well	0.82
<i>Image</i> (CR=0.81)	
My image will be one others find appealing	0.65
I will achieve the "look" I've been after	0.76
People will often comment about how attractive I look	0.67
I will successfully hide the signs of aging	0.66
I will keep up with fashions in clothing and hair	0.66
<i>Popularity</i> (CR=0.68)	
I will be admired by many people	0.73
My name will be known by many different people	0.70
Most everyone who knows me will like me	0.70
<b>Extrinsic goal</b>	
<i>Affiliation</i> (CR=0.82)	
People will show affection to me, and I will to them	0.55
I will feel that there are people who really love me	0.79
I will express my love for special people	0.72
I will have a committed, intimate relationship	0.73
Someone in my life will accept me as I am, no matter what	0.71
<i>Community</i> (CR=0.76)	
I will assist people who need it, asking nothing in return	0.63
The things I do will make other people's lives better	0.82
I will help the world become a better place	0.69
<i>Self-acceptance</i> (CR=0.86)	
I will be efficient	0.70
I will choose what I do, instead of being pushed along by life	0.71
I will feel free	0.66
I will deal effectively with problems in my life	0.73
I will feel good about my abilities	0.65
I will overcome the challenges that life presents me	0.75
I will have insight into why I do the things I do	0.61

<b>Moral rationalization</b> (CR=0.86)	
It is alright to purchase counterfeit luxury brands (moral justification)	0.71
It's not a bad thing to buy one or two counterfeit luxury brands (euphemistic language)	0.79
Purchasing of counterfeit luxury brands is not as bad as some of the other horrible things people do (advantageous comparison)	0.63
People should not be at fault for purchasing counterfeit luxury brands because of the convenience of such behavior in recent society (displacement of responsibility)	0.72
People should not be at fault for purchasing counterfeit luxury brands when so many other people do it (diffusion of responsibility)	0.01
It's unfair to blame such purchasing behavior, because it's probably the fault of business environment around us (displacement of responsibility)	0.48
It's okay to to buy one or two counterfeit luxury brands, because it doesn't really do much harm (distortion of consequences)	0.73
It's not our fault to buy counterfeit luxury brands, because the price of truly brand goods are too high (attribution of blame)	0.68
<b>Moral decoupling</b> (CR=0.85)	
The immoral actions of purchasing counterfeit luxury brands do not change my assessment of benefits provided by counterfeits	0.78
Perceived benefit should remain separate from judgment of morality towards purchasing counterfeit luxury brands	0.84
Reports of wrongdoing should not affect our view of buying counterfeits	0.82
<b>Purchase intention</b> (CR=0.93)	
I would definitely intend to buy counterfeit luxury brands	0.75
I would absolutely consider buying counterfeit luxury brands	0.94
I would definitely expect to buy counterfeit luxury brand	0.92
I would absolutely plan to buy counterfeit luxury brands	0.86

Table 4

Hypothesis	Path	Expect sign	Standardized estimates	Supported vs not supported
H1:	Extrinsic goal → Moral rationalization	+	0.21***	Supported
H2:	Extrinsic goal → Moral decoupling	-	-0.19	Not Supported

H3:	Intrinsic goal → Moral decoupling	+	0.33***	Supported
H4:	Intrinsic goal → Moral rationalization	-	-0.08***	Supported
H5:	Moral rationalization → Purchase intention	+	0.33***	Supported
H6:	Moral decoupling → purchase intention	+	0.12***	Supported
<b>Goodness of Fit Statistics</b>		$\chi^2 = 1222.12$ ; $P = 0.00$ ; $\chi^2 / d.f. = 1.86$ ; $RMSEA = 0.052$ ; $NFI = 0.90$ ; $CFI = 0.95$		