

More Than a Bargain: How Hedonic Motivation and Need for Approval Drive Purchase Intention of Dupe

PhD research proposal for
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Marketing

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the phenomenon of "dupes" - alternative products that share similar characteristics with popular premium items - has gained significant traction in the consumer marketplace. Although the dupe culture has gradually become prevalent compared to before, academic research about dupes remains limited (e.g., Pravin, More, & Kaur, 2023; Roberts, 2025).

Solomon et al. (2012) distinguish consumer motivations into utilitarian and hedonic motivation. Utilitarian motivation is defined as a shopping motivation that is task-oriented, rational, efficient, and goal-specific. In contrast, hedonic shopping motivation refers to shopping behavior driven by the pursuit of happiness, fantasy, excitement, sensory pleasure, enjoyment, and social interaction (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Nkwe & Cohen, 2017). Traditionally, people suggested that consumers with utilitarian motivations would be more likely to purchase dupes. However, utilitarian consumers, who prioritize product value and functionality, might actually prefer purchasing from affordable original brands (e.g., Nike) that offer similar functionality at lower price points rather than selecting dupes of luxury items. Thus, this study therefore aims to examine the underlying motivations driving consumers' decisions to purchase dupes.

Moreover, this research proposes that the need for approval serves as a crucial theoretical framework for understanding dupe purchasing behavior, particularly among consumers with hedonic motivations. According to Wang and Lin (2017), social influence is described as the need for approval from another individuals. This

theoretical perspective is particularly relevant when examining hedonic consumers, as research by Arnold and Reynolds (2003) demonstrates that hedonic motivation includes a fundamental desire for social interaction, making these consumers more susceptible to influences from their social networks. Their heightened need for approval potentially magnifies their responsiveness to dupe-related social media content, ultimately increasing their purchase intention of dupes as a means of gaining social acceptance and validation within their communities.

In addition, this research also focuses on the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). FoMO has been defined as a "*pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent*" (Przybylski et al., 2013). Based on this theoretical foundation, this paper hypothesizes that FoMO will demonstrate a stronger moderating effect on the purchase intention of dupes among consumers with hedonic motivations. This relationship suggests that FoMO may play a crucial role in understanding the variance in dupe purchase behavior across different consumer motivation types.

This research also plans to investigate the moderating role of the product itself. Building on the distinction between hedonic and utilitarian goods (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000), this research proposes that a "fit" between the consumer's motivation and the product's nature will enhance purchase intention. Therefore, this research predicts that the effect of hedonic motivation on purchase intention will be stronger for hedonic products than for utilitarian products, and conversely, the effect of utilitarian motivation will be stronger for utilitarian products.

In sum, the core of this research is to answer the following questions: First, what is the primary motivational driver (hedonic vs. utilitarian)? Second, what is the key psychological mechanism that explains this phenomenon? Finally, under what conditions does this purchase motivation become stronger or weaker? Therefore, this research designs four studies to address these questions. Study 1 uses text mining to analyze dupe-related content across major social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, REDnote, Dcard, and YouTube) to identify the predominant motivation patterns (hedonic vs. utilitarian) in dupe discussions. Studies 2–4 adopt experimental designs to examine (a) the main effect of motivation type on dupe purchase intention, (b) the mediating role of need for approval in the link between motivation type and dupe purchase intention, and (c) the moderating effects of FoMO and product type on this relationship.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Hedonic motivation, utilitarian motivation, and purchase intention of dupes

In 1982, Hirschman and Holbrook suggested that consumer consumption motivations can be categorized into two types: utilitarian and hedonic motivation. Utilitarian motivation is characterized by rational, goal-oriented decision-making driven by factors such as product information, convenience, and monetary savings (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; To et al., 2007). Moreover, there is another indicator of hedonic motivation relevant to its social characteristic, which is social shopping. It refers to the enjoyment of shopping with friends and family, socializing and building relationships

with others while shopping (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003).

If people think intuitively, they might suggest that utilitarian-motivated consumers would be the group which tend to purchase dupes. However, this assumption may be flawed. Given their rational, goal-oriented nature, utilitarian consumers are more likely to seek original brands offering similar functionality at lower prices rather than buying dupes of well-known brands. Conversely, consumers with hedonic motivation, driven by their desire for social interaction (Nkwe & Cohen, 2017, Arnold & Reynolds, 2003), may be easier to be influenced by dupe-related content greatly appear across social media platforms, regardless of whether this content comes from famous influencer or their peers and family.

Thus, the following hypothesis was inferred:

H1 Compared to consumers with utilitarian motivation, consumers with hedonic motivation tend to have greater purchase intention of dupe.

2.2 The impact of need of approval on the relationship between motivation type and purchase intention of dupes

The concept of Need for Approval (NFA) provides a critical theoretical framework for understanding consumer behavior in the context of dupe purchases. The need for approval (NFA) construct was formulated by Crowne and Marlowe (1960), they first consider the need for approval as a tendency for people to try to display socially desirable traits in order to gain approval from others.

Prior research has also shown that hedonic motivation includes not only individual pleasure-seeking behaviors, but also the basic need for social interaction. Dawon et al. (1990) found that one of the main motivations for consumers to use social media is the pleasure derived from social interaction. With the rise of social media platforms, this link between hedonic motivation and social interaction has become more distinct, as users are able to have a pleasurable social experience in online communities (Venkatesh et al., 2012). This link between hedonic motivation and social interaction provides a theoretical basis for understanding how consumers with hedonic motivation may be easier to influenced by dupe-related content on social media.

Thus, the following hypothesis was inferred:

H2 Need for approval mediates the relationship between motivation type and the purchase intention of dupes. In other words, when motivation involves the need for approval, consumers tend to have higher purchase intention of dupes.

2.3 The moderating effect of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell (2013) describe fear of missing out (FoMO) as a generalized concern that others may be enjoying rewarding experiences in their absence.

The type of motivation may become an important trigger for online FoMO as consumers with hedonic motivation also seek social interaction (Nkwe & Cohen, 2017;

Arnold & Reynolds, 2003), which makes them easier to be driven by FoMO and change their purchase intention of dupe. Therefore, this study attempts to examine the moderating effect of FoMO in this relationship and inferred the following hypotheses:

H3 FoMO moderates the relationship between motivation type and the purchase intention of dupes. Consumers with hedonic motivation and a higher FoMO tend to have higher purchase intention of dupe, while consumers with hedonic motivation and a lower FoMO tend to have lower purchase intention of dupe. Purchase intention of consumers with utilitarian motivation relatively unchanged by FoMO.

2.4 The moderating effect of Product Type

Prior research has established a fundamental distinction between hedonic and utilitarian products. Hedonic products are associated with emotional pleasure, sensory experiences, and fun, while utilitarian products are defined by their functional and practical benefits (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000).

This research proposes that the congruence between a consumer's motivation and the product type of the dupe will moderate their purchase intention. This alignment creates a psychological fit that facilitates the decision-making process and reinforces the consumer's behavior (Sirgy, 1982, Higgins, 2005).

Moreover, it is also important to consider the primary effect of motivation (H1), which suggests that hedonic motivation is a stronger driver of dupe purchase intention

than utilitarian motivation. Therefore, this research expects that while the congruence between motivation and product type will lead to a boost in purchase intention, consumers with hedonic motivation will consistently show a higher overall purchase intention for dupes compared to those with utilitarian motivation, regardless of the product type.

Therefore, this study attempts to examine the moderating effect of product type in this relationship and inferred the following hypotheses:

H4 Product type moderates the relationship between motivation type and the purchase intention of dupes. That is, the purchase intention of consumers with hedonic motivation is higher for hedonic dupes than for utilitarian dupes, while the purchase intention of consumers with utilitarian motivation is higher for utilitarian dupes than for hedonic dupes.

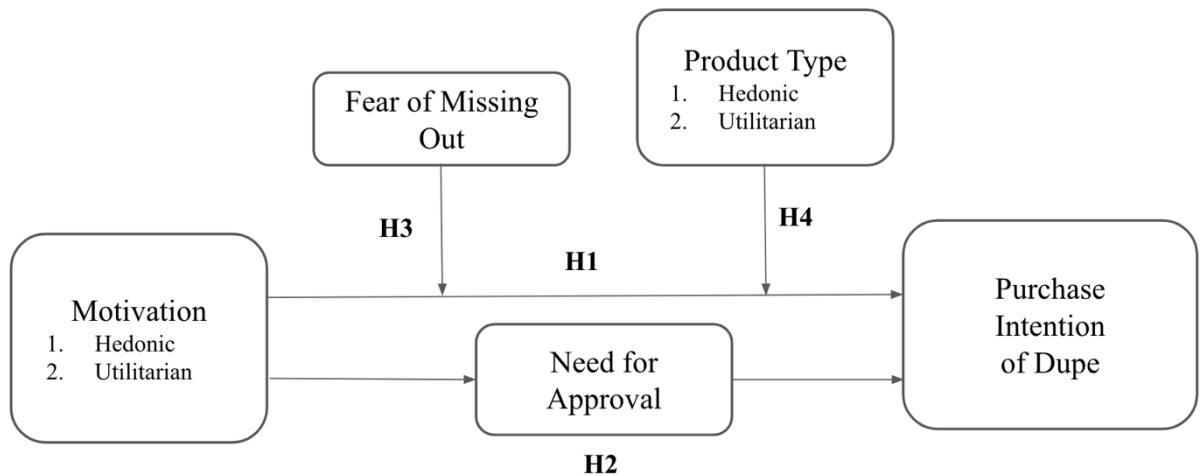


Fig. 1. Research model.

3. Method

3.1 Study 1

Study 1 will provide an exploratory test of H1 by analyzing real-world consumer conversations. This research plan to collect a large-scale dataset of public posts from 2023-2025 on major social media platforms in Taiwan (e.g., Dcard, PTT) and China (e.g., Xiaohongshu, Weibo), using search terms such as "dupe" and "平替," while excluding promotional content.

The analysis will be centered on the Structural Topic Model (STM), a state-of-the-art method to identify latent themes in text. To facilitate this, a custom Chinese-language lexicon for hedonic and utilitarian motivations will be systematically developed based on

prior marketing literature and validated by experts, drawing from sources like the Ministry of Education's dictionary. By examining the prevalence of hedonic versus utilitarian topics within posts that also express purchase intent, this research will determine the primary motivation driving the online dupe phenomenon. The results will be presented using visualizations such as word clouds and topic relationship networks.

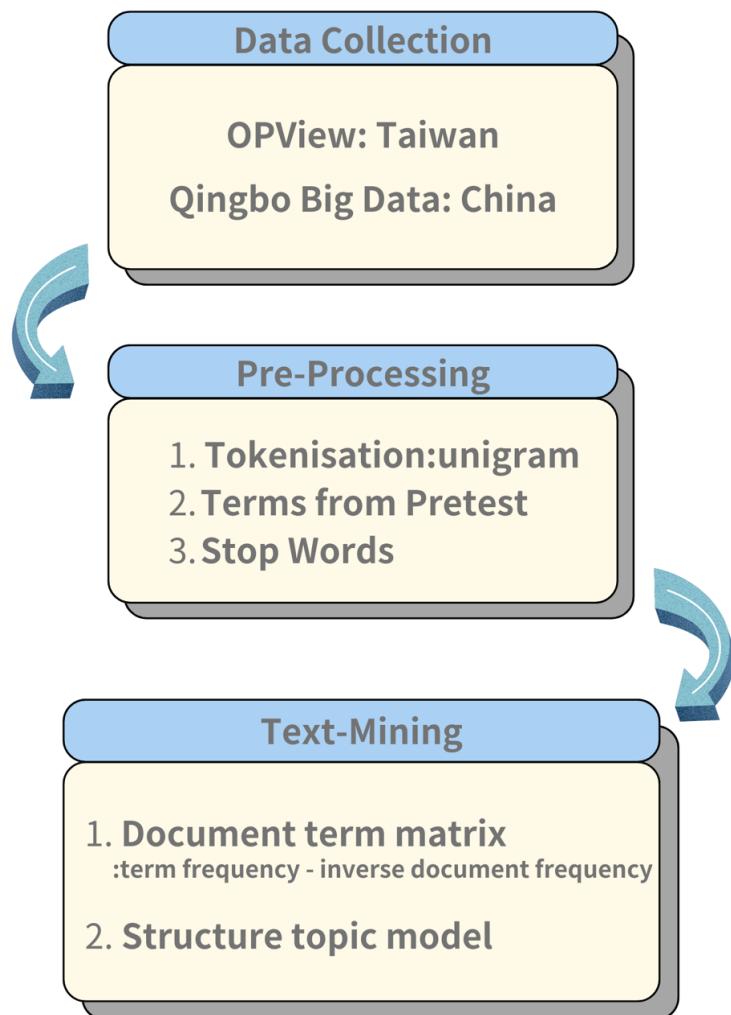


Fig. 2. Research Procedure of Study 1.

3.2 Study 2

3.2.1 Participants and Design

To test the main effect (H1) and the mediating role of need for approval (H2), Study 2 will employ a two-group (Motivation: hedonic vs. utilitarian) between-subjects design. Study 2 will recruit approximately 120 participants from Taiwan (via social media) and China (via the Credamo platform), who will be randomly assigned to one of the two conditions.

3.2.2 Materials and Procedure

Participants will first be presented with a definition of "dupe products." They will then read a scenario designed to prime either a hedonic or a utilitarian shopping motivation. The effectiveness of these scenarios, featuring common dupe product categories like cosmetics or handbags, will be validated in a pilot study. After the scenario, participants will complete all key measures in order: a manipulation check for motivation (adapted from Turan, 2021), the Need for Approval scale which serves as the mediator (Wei et al., 2024), and the dependent variable, purchase intention (Hung et al., 2011).

3.3 Study 3

3.3.1 Participants and Design

Study 3 tests the moderating role of the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) (H3), while also replicating the main and mediation effects (H1, H2). The study employs a 2 (Motivation: hedonic vs. utilitarian) \times 2 (FoMO: high vs. low) between-subjects design. Study 3 will recruit approximately 120 participants from Taiwan and China, who will be randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions.

3.3.2 Materials and Procedure

The procedure follows as Study 2, but with the addition of the FoMO manipulation. In the high-FoMO condition, the scenario will describe the dupe product as a viral, high-selling item, featuring influencer endorsements and emphasizing that it is a limited edition that will not be restocked once sold out (adapted from Xi et al., 2022). In the low-FoMO condition, this information will be absent. Following the scenario, participants will complete manipulation checks for both motivation and FoMO. They will then complete the same scales for need for approval (mediator) and purchase intention (dependent variable) as used in Study 2.

3.4 Study 4

3.4.1 Participants and Design

The final study is designed to test the moderating role of product type (H4). It will employ a 2 (Motivation: hedonic vs. utilitarian) \times 2 (Product Type: hedonic vs. utilitarian) between-subjects design. As in the previous studies, study 4 will recruit approximately 120 participants from Taiwan and China, who will be randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

3.4.3 Materials and Procedure

Participants will be exposed to one of four scenarios, which will manipulate their shopping motivation (hedonic vs. utilitarian) for a dupe product that is either predominantly hedonic or utilitarian in nature. The specific products used as stimuli will be selected and validated through a pilot study to ensure they are clearly perceived as either hedonic or utilitarian. Following the scenario, participants will complete a manipulation check for motivation, as well as the same scales for need for approval and purchase intention used in the previous studies.

4. Expected Contributions

This research undertakes a systematic, multi-method investigation into the drivers of "dupe" product consumption. Challenging the intuitive assumption that such purchases are purely utilitarian, this research expects to reveal a fundamental shift in understanding, positing that hedonic, socially driven motivations are the primary drivers. The four-study package is designed to build a comprehensive theoretical model, progressing from an initial exploration of consumer motivations (Study 1: Text Mining), to establishing the core psychological mechanism (Study 2: Mediation Test of Need for Approval), and finally to testing key boundary conditions (Study 3: Moderation of FoMO; Study 4: Moderation of Product Type).

Theoretically, this research will offer one of the first comprehensive and empirically tested models of dupe product consumption. Its primary contribution lies in delineating the full process: identifying the motivational drivers (Study 1), explaining the underlying social-psychological mechanism (the need for approval in Study 2), and defining the psychological and contextual conditions under which these effects are amplified (FoMO in Study 3 and product category in Study 4).

Practically, the insights will provide actionable guidance for marketers and brands operating in the dupe product space. By understanding that hedonic motivation is key, brands can focus their messaging on experiential and emotional benefits. The findings on FoMO suggest that leveraging scarcity tactics and influencer marketing can be particularly effective. Furthermore, the results from product category moderation will enable managers to tailor their communication strategies, emphasizing hedonic framing

for certain products while potentially using a different approach for others. Ultimately, this research empowers brands to more effectively engage consumers by aligning marketing strategies with the specific psychological and contextual factors that drive the purchase of dupe products.

5. Timetable

Year One: Foundation and Initial Exploration	
Months 1-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coursework• Intensive literature review• Refine research proposal
Months 7-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-tests & pilot studies development• Familiarize with text mining tools• Develop and finalize the keyword lexicon• Submit application for Ethical Approval

Year Two: Core Experiments & Analysis	
Months 13-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Run keyword pre-test (for Study 1)• Data collection (Study 1)• Data analysis (Study 1)• Write-up (Study 1)

Months 19-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run scenario pilot study (for Study 2) • Data collection (Study 2) • Data analysis (Study 2) • Write-up (Study 2)
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Year Three: Core Experiments & Analysis	
Months 25-30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop FoMO Manipulation (for Study 3) • Data collection (Study 3) • Data analysis (Study 3) • Write-up (Study 3)
Months 31-36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run product pilot study (for Study 4) • Data collection (Study 4) • Data analysis (Study 4) • Write-up (Study 4)

Year Four: Dissertation Writing	
Months 37-42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate studies • Write general introduction & general discussion chapters • Submit first full dissertation draft

Months 43-48	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise dissertation • Submit final dissertation • Oral defense (Viva) • Final revisions & graduation
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