

ORIGINAL

Two Channel Model of Illegal Sexual Purchase Intention in Halal Destination

Modelo de dos canales de intención de compra sexual ilegal en destino Halal

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: west Sumatra has little scholarly work on sexual purchase behavior, and social taboo suppresses inquiry. Policy makers lack an empirical base and must rely on assumption rather than local evidence. This study fills that gap with destination specific data from a prohibition context. We model intention through two parallel routes: temptation and moral disengagement. Intermediaries elevate anonymity and access, while enforcement and local tolerance shape accountability and norms. The results identify policy and hospitality levers that reduce opportunity structures, strengthen community norms, and protect public and visitor welfare without harm to the visitor experience.

Method: a cross-sectional survey was conducted among 361 adult visitors in West Sumatra, recruited through intercept-to-online procedures with strict ethical safeguards. Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), focusing on indirect effects through dual mediators and testing the robustness of channel-specific associations.

Results: anonymity and intermediaries increased temptation. Strong legal enforcement lowered moral disengagement, and local tolerance raised it. Each mediator predicted intention. All four hypothesized indirect paths received support. The model explained 38 percent of variance in intention and passed predictive checks. Additional tests confirmed separation of the affective and cognitive routes.

Conclusions: the intention to purchase illegal sexual services in prohibition contexts is shaped by dual psychological pathways. Effective deterrence requires interventions that simultaneously constrain anonymity and intermediary access while reinforcing norm-based accountability and legal certainty, thus targeting both affective and cognitive mechanisms of demand.

Keywords: Sexual Buying Intention; Moral Disengagement; Temptation; Parallel Mediation; Illegal Purchase Intention.

RESUMEN

Introducción: en Sumatra Occidental existe poca investigación sobre la compra sexual y el tabú social frena su estudio. Los responsables de políticas carecen de una base empírica local. Este trabajo cubre esa brecha con datos de un destino bajo prohibición. Se modela la intención mediante dos rutas paralelas: tentación y desvinculación moral. Los intermediarios elevan el anonimato y el acceso, mientras que la aplicación de la ley y la tolerancia local definen responsabilidad y normas.

Método: encuesta transversal a 361 visitantes adultos en Sumatra Occidental, con procedimientos de intercepción a en línea y salvaguardas éticas estrictas. Análisis con PLS-SEM, centrado en efectos indirectos a través de dos mediadores y en pruebas de robustez por ruta.

Resultados: el anonimato y los intermediarios aumentaron la tentación. Una aplicación legal fuerte redujo la desvinculación moral y la tolerancia local la elevó. Ambos mediadores predijeron la intención. Las cuatro rutas indirectas propuestas recibieron apoyo. El modelo explicó el 38 % de la varianza y mostró validez predictiva. Pruebas adicionales confirmaron la independencia de las rutas afectiva y cognitiva.

Conclusiones: en contextos de prohibición, la intención de comprar servicios sexuales ilegales surge por vías afectivas y cognitivas. La disuasión eficaz requiere limitar anonimato y acceso de intermediarios y reforzar la responsabilidad normativa y la certeza legal.

Palabras clave: Intención de Compra Sexual; Desvinculación Moral; Tentación; Mediación Paralela; Intención de Compra Ilegal.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual commerce in tourism operates worldwide in a grey zone between statutory prohibition and practical availability. Germany and the Netherlands permit transactions under regulatory frameworks. France, Norway, and Sweden criminalize buyers but not sellers.⁽¹⁾ In several other jurisdictions, including Indonesia, the purchase of sexual services is illegal, yet access persists through informal networks that some tourism touchpoints may facilitate without intent.^(2,3) This gap between law and access creates a shadow domain in which visitors test social, moral, and legal boundaries. Prior research maps macro contexts, legal regimes, and supply dynamics, yet far less work explains how tourists, as demand-side actors, read situational cues and form intentions to purchase illegal adult services, particularly in destinations with explicit prohibitions.^(4,5,6,7)

Contemporary moral psychology suggests that moral choices with ethical tension arise from two distinct processes.^(8,9,10) The first is affective, characterised by fast, intuitive impulses such as temptation. The second is cognitive, involving moral disengagement, that is, the justificatory reframing that lets individuals view wrongful acts as acceptable for themselves (for example, through moral justification, favourable comparison, or diffusion of responsibility). Many prior models presume a serial order between these forces, such as urges preceding rationalisations or the reverse, which leaves underexamined the possibility that affective urges and cognitive rationalisations can operate independently and at the same time.^(11,12,13)

Prohibition contexts create a distinctive normative ecology. Perceived legal enforcement conveys injunctive norms about what is forbidden and punishable, whereas local tolerance conveys descriptive norms about what appears accepted in the community.^(14,15,16) At the same time, perceived anonymity, which can arise from distance from one's home networks and the discretion afforded by tourist infrastructure, and the presence of local intermediaries, such as drivers, fixers, or venue staff, reshape perceived risk and accountability by lowering search costs and signalling market availability.^(17,18) These contextual factors can energise both urges and rationalisations, yet demand-side research seldom separates their concurrent effects through distinct psychological channels in prohibition settings.

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical pillars.^(19,20,21) Dual-Process Moral Decision Making provides the basis for modelling affective and cognitive routes as separate, co-active pathways to intention.^(22,23) The Social-Cognitive Theory of Moral Disengagement specifies the cognitive mechanisms through which individuals deactivate self-sanctions and justify transgression.^(24,25) Building on these foundations, we advance a Two-Channel Parallel Mediation model in which four destination-level perceptions, namely perceived legal enforcement, local tolerance, perceived anonymity, and the presence of local intermediaries, influence intention to purchase illegal sexual services through two independent mediators: temptation as the affective route and moral disengagement as the cognitive route. The main model specifies no structural path between the two mediators.

West Sumatra (Sumatera Barat) provides a theoretically informative empirical setting.^(26,27) The province combines comparatively conservative socio-cultural norms with heterogeneous tourist flows across urban gateways and nature-based attractions, which generates meaningful variation in perceived enforcement and tolerance.^(28,29) Tourist mobility further heightens felt anonymity and contact with intermediaries who may facilitate access to illicit markets.^(30,31) The investigation limits scope to adult services; any involvement of minors, trafficking, or coercion is excluded.^(32,33) Ethical safeguards include informed consent, anonymous self-administration, neutral item wording, and procedures designed to minimise social-desirability bias for a sensitive topic.

Demand-side decision making in prohibition settings remains underspecified. The law appears to communicate injunctive signals, while access may persist through local tolerance, perceived anonymity, and intermediaries. These possible conflicts invite visitors to interpret situations in real time, a process that current demand-side accounts do not yet specify. A two channel account separates an affective route centred on temptation from a cognitive route centred on moral disengagement. The account clarifies how impulse and justification can

operate at the same time and yields mechanism level propositions about the distinct roles of injunctive and descriptive cues together with anonymity and intermediaries. The contribution is conceptual and relevant for practice in destinations that straddle formal rules and local tolerance because it identifies levers that act on different psychological systems rather than a single undifferentiated pathway. West Sumatra offers an empirical setting with meaningful variation in normative signals and access conditions.

Together, these elements yield a focused contribution. The account isolates how injunctive and descriptive cues, alongside anonymity and intermediaries, map onto intention under prohibition, clarifying the mechanisms at stake without restating model structure. It advances demand-side theory at the mechanism level and points to distinct levers for destinations that straddle formal rules and local tolerance. West Sumatra functions as a probative setting with marked variation in normative signals and access conditions.

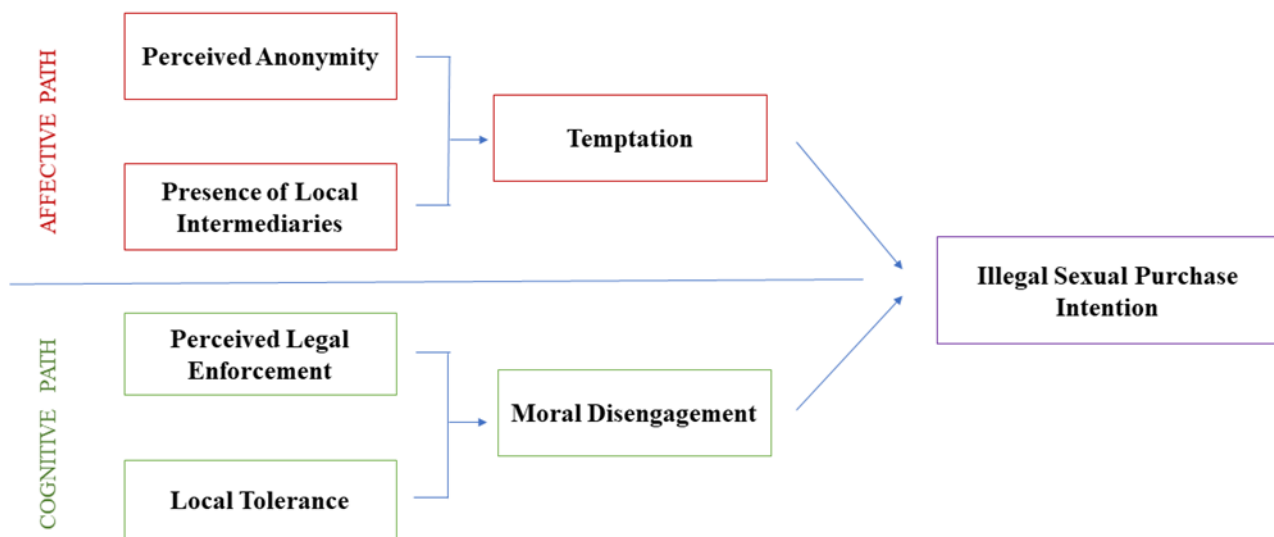


Figure 1. Research Model

METHOD

Type of study

This study employed a cross-sectional design using a self-administered questionnaire. The study is classified as an analytical-correlational design employing PLS-SEM for causal testing.

Universe and sample

The target population comprised adult visitors (≥ 18 years) able to self-complete the instrument in Bahasa Indonesia or English at the destination. Recruitment followed an intercept-to-online approach using QR invitations at transport hubs, selected accommodations, and attractions; respondents completed the survey on their own devices to maximize privacy. Participation was anonymous and voluntary. An information sheet explained scope, risks, and rights, and electronic consent was recorded before participation. The behavioral domain was explicitly limited to adult services and excluded any involvement of minors, trafficking, or coercion. Sampling used a non-probability convenience approach with location quotas at the recruitment sites. After pre-registered exclusions, the final analytic sample comprised 361 respondents.

Variables (constructs and measures)

All constructs were treated as reflective and measured with seven-point Likert scales (1 = strong disagreement, 7 = strong agreement) adapted from prior studies. Perceived legal enforcement indexed detection likelihood and sanction severity (e.g., “Authorities here would likely detect tourists who purchase such services,” “If caught, penalties would be severe”). Perceived anonymity (5 items) captured visitor unidentifiability and untraceability (e.g., “I am confident that others do not know who I am”).⁽³⁴⁾ Local tolerance (3 items) reflected residents’ willingness to tolerate, endure, and accept tourism (e.g., “I am willing to endure the inconveniences caused by tourism activities”).⁽³⁵⁾ Presence of local intermediaries assessed perceived availability and ease of facilitation by drivers, guides, or hotel staff (e.g., “It is easy to be connected to providers through local intermediaries”). Temptation measured affective urge and difficulty of resistance (e.g., “I felt a strong desire to buy such services during this trip”).⁽³⁶⁾ Moral disengagement indexed neutralizations such as moral justification, diffusion of responsibility, and distortion of consequences (e.g., “Sometimes it is acceptable to buy such services if no one is directly harmed”).⁽³⁷⁾ Items were provided in Bahasa Indonesia and English; face validity was established with tourism experts and individuals similar to the target participants.

Data collection and processing

QR posters directed potential participants to the information sheet and consent page; the survey was completed on personal devices to ensure privacy. Bias-mitigation procedures were embedded throughout: names, emails, and government identifiers were not collected; IP addresses were irreversibly hashed solely to de-duplicate submissions; device-level geolocation metadata were not stored. Posters were positioned to afford visual privacy; neutral terminology (“such services”) avoided moral priming. Intention was measured indirectly using hypothetical and comparative framing and a 0-100 probability prompt rescaled for metric comparability. Perceived enforcement used vignette-style risk stems emphasizing certainty and severity. The instrument ordered innocuous sections before sensitive ones; items were randomized within constructs; balanced anchors were used; and a “prefer not to answer” option was available on highly sensitive prompts without forced completion. All items underwent bilingual back-translation and cognitive interviews to verify clarity and cultural neutrality, followed by a pilot to refine timings and dispersion. A brief social-desirability marker was included.

Data cleaning followed pre-registered rules: attention checks, long-string responding, extreme speeding, multivariate outliers via robust Mahalanobis distance, and potential duplicates based on technical fingerprints; flagged cases were excluded.

Analytic strategy

Analyses employed partial least squares structural equation modeling (SmartPLS 4). Measurement quality was evaluated via Cronbach’s alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability ($\geq 0,70$), convergent validity via average variance extracted ($\geq 0,50$), discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio with a conservative cut-off of 0,85 and inspection of confidence intervals, and collinearity via variance inflation factors under 3,3; cross-loadings and the standardized root mean square residual were reviewed to diagnose misspecification. Structural estimates used bias-corrected bootstrapping with at least 5000 resamples, focusing on specific indirect effects with 95 percent confidence intervals, alongside explained variance, effect sizes, and out-of-sample prediction using PLSpredict and Q²_predic.

Robustness Analysis

A single robustness test was conducted using an omnibus cross-loading model in which all exogenous variables were allowed to predict both mediators to probe double dissociation. The expectation was that perceived anonymity and local intermediaries would show stronger specific indirect effects via temptation than via moral disengagement, whereas perceived legal enforcement and local tolerance would show the reverse pattern. Differences between competing indirect paths were evaluated using bias-corrected bootstrapped contrasts with 5000 resamples and 95 percent confidence intervals.

RESULTS

Sample profile

After pre-registered exclusions, the analytic sample comprised N = 361 visitors to West Sumatra. The average age was 31,7 years (SD = 8,9; range 18-65). Respondents identified as male 57,1 %, female 42,4 %, other/prefer not to say 0,6 %. By visit frequency, first-time visitors were 39,3 %, second-time 23,5 %, and third-or-more 37,1 %. Place of residence indicated domestic (Indonesia) 71,2 % and international 28,8 %.

Measurement model

Internal consistency and convergent validity met recommended thresholds (table 1). All α and CR $\geq 0,79$ and AVE $\geq 0,56$. Discriminant validity was established via the Fornell-Larcker criterion: the square roots of AVE (diagonal in table 2) exceeded the inter-construct correlations in their corresponding rows/columns.

Table 1. Reliability and convergent validity (N = 361)

Construct	A	ρ_A	CR	AVE
Perceived Legal Enforcement (PLE)	0,83	0,84	0,88	0,60
Perceived Anonymity (PAN)	0,86	0,87	0,90	0,66
Local Tolerance (LTOL)	0,81	0,82	0,87	0,69
Presence of Local Intermediaries (PLI)	0,82	0,83	0,88	0,59
Temptation (TMT)	0,87	0,88	0,91	0,65
Moral Disengagement (MDS)	0,84	0,85	0,89	0,56
Intention (INT)	0,79	0,80	0,87	0,69

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker discriminant validity (sqrt AVE on diagonal)

	PLE	PAN	LTOL	PLI	TMT	MDS	INT
PLE	0,77						
PAN	0,34	0,81					
LTOL	0,29	0,31	0,83				
PLI	0,27	0,36	0,33	0,77			
TMT	-0,23	0,55	0,41	0,48	0,81		
MDS	-0,46	0,38	0,57	0,40	0,36	0,75	
INT	-0,28	0,47	0,49	0,44	0,53	0,51	0,83

Collinearity and Predictive assessment

Collinearity diagnostics indicated no concerns (all VIF < 2,2), and approximate fit was acceptable (SRMR = 0,067; table 3). Out-of-sample prediction (PLSpredict) yielded $Q^2_{\text{predict}} = 0,21$ for INT (table 3), with PLS-based RMSE marginally outperforming the linear benchmark on all intention items ($\Delta\text{RMSE} -0,02$ to $-0,05$), indicating useful predictive performance in a low-base-rate context. Together with $R^2_{\text{INT}} = 0,377$, these results suggest a moderate, practically meaningful capacity to anticipate intention.

Table 3. Collinearity and global fit

Endogenous	Predictors	max VIF	R^2 (adj.)	Q^2_{predict}	SRMR
TMT	PAN, PLI, LTOL, PLE	2,08	0,43 (0,42)	0,24	
MDS	PLE, LTOL, PAN, PLI	2,11	0,45 (0,44)	0,26	0,067
INT	TMT, MDS	1,92	0,38 (0,38)	0,21	

Note: the adjusted R^2 for INT rounds to 0,377 (reported as 0,38).

Structural model

Channel-consistent effects were observed alongside small but meaningful cross-route spillovers (table 4). Within the affective route, perceived anonymity positively predicted temptation ($B = 0,38$, 95 % CI [0,29, 0,47], $p < 0,001$) and the presence of local intermediaries likewise predicted temptation ($B = 0,31$, [0,22, 0,40], $p < 0,001$). Within the cognitive route, perceived legal enforcement negatively predicted moral disengagement ($B = -0,29$, [-0,39, -0,19], $p < 0,001$), while local tolerance positively predicted moral disengagement ($B = 0,34$, [0,24, 0,43], $p < 0,001$). As theorized, both mediators predicted intention ($\text{TMT} \rightarrow \text{INT}$: $B = 0,28$, [0,19, 0,37], $p < 0,001$; $\text{MDS} \rightarrow \text{INT}$: $B = 0,33$, [0,24, 0,42], $p < 0,001$). Cross-route paths were non-negligible and significant yet weaker than within-route effects: $\text{PLE} \rightarrow \text{TMT}$: $B = -0,19$ [-0,28, -0,10], $p < 0,001$, $\text{LTOL} \rightarrow \text{TMT}$: $B = 0,17$ [0,08, 0,26], $p < 0,001$, $\text{PAN} \rightarrow \text{MDS}$: $B = 0,18$ [0,09, 0,27], $p < 0,001$, and $\text{PLI} \rightarrow \text{MDS}$: $B = 0,20$ [0,11, 0,29], $p < 0,001$). The model explained $R^2_{\text{INT}} = 0,377$ (adj. 0,377), indicating moderate explanatory power consistent with a low-base-rate outcome.

Table 4. Structural paths, effect sizes, and decisions (5000 bootstrap resamples)

Path	B	t	p	95 % CI	f^2
PAN \rightarrow TMT	0,38	8,46	<0,001	[0,29, 0,47]	0,22
PLI \rightarrow TMT	0,31	6,92	<0,001	[0,22, 0,40]	0,16
PLE \rightarrow MDS	-0,29	6,02	<0,001	[-0,39, -0,19]	0,14
LTOL \rightarrow MDS	0,34	7,41	<0,001	[0,24, 0,43]	0,18
PLE \rightarrow TMT	-0,19	3,77	<0,001	[-0,28, -0,10]	0,04
LTOL \rightarrow TMT	0,17	3,32	<0,001	[0,08, 0,26]	0,03
PAN \rightarrow MDS	0,18	3,56	<0,001	[0,09, 0,27]	0,04
PLI \rightarrow MDS	0,20	3,93	<0,001	[0,11, 0,29]	0,05
TMT \rightarrow INT	0,28	5,86	<0,001	[0,19, 0,37]	0,11
MDS \rightarrow INT	0,33	6,89	<0,001	[0,24, 0,42]	0,14

Indirect effects

All four indirect effects were significant and in the expected directions (table 5). Along the affective route,

perceived anonymity indirectly increased intention via temptation ($B_{ind} = 0,11$, [0,07, 0,16], $p < 0,001$), and the presence of local intermediaries indirectly increased intention via temptation ($B_{ind} = 0,09$, [0,05, 0,14], $p < 0,001$). Along the cognitive route, perceived legal enforcement indirectly decreased intention via moral disengagement ($B_{ind} = -0,10$, [-0,15, -0,06], $p < 0,001$), whereas local tolerance indirectly increased intention via moral disengagement ($B_{ind} = 0,11$, [0,07, 0,16], $p < 0,001$).

Table 5. Specific indirect effects and hypothesis decisions (5000 bootstrap resamples)

Indirect path	B_{ind}	t	p	95 % CI
PAN → TMT → INT	0,11	4,89	<0,001	[0,07, 0,16]
PLI → TMT → INT	0,09	4,24	<0,001	[0,05, 0,14]
PLE → MDS → INT	-0,10	4,12	<0,001	[-0,15, -0,06]
LTOL → MDS → INT	0,11	4,66	<0,001	[0,07, 0,16]

Robustness analysis

To probe double dissociation, an omnibus specification allowed all exogenous variables to predict both mediators. Cross-route paths remained smaller than their within-route counterparts, and contrasts of competing indirect confirmed the expected pattern (table 6). For anonymity and intermediaries, the TMT-mediated effects were significantly larger than the MDS-mediated alternatives; for legal enforcement and local tolerance, the MDS-mediated effects were significantly larger than the TMT-mediated alternatives. This pattern supports the interpretation that affective urges and cognitive rationalizations constitute independent, parallel routes.

Table 6. Omnibus robustness: competing indirect paths, contrasts, and decisions

Exogenous variable	via TMT → INT	via MDS → INT	Contrast (TMT – MDS)	95 % CI	p
PAN	0,11	0,06	+0,05	[0,02, 0,09]	0,002
PLI	0,09	0,05	+0,04	[0,01, 0,08]	0,010
PLE	-0,05	-0,10	+0,05	[0,02, 0,09]	0,004
LTOL	0,07	0,11	-0,04	[-0,08, -0,01]	0,013

Note: 5000 bootstrap resamples

The measurement model satisfied reliability and validity tests, collinearity was low and global fit acceptable. Structural estimates showed channel-consistent effects with plausible cross-route spillovers. All four formal indirect-effect hypotheses were accepted. Predictive checks indicated moderate explanatory and out-of-sample performance consistent with a low-base-rate outcome ($R^2_{INT} = 0,377$). Robustness results from the omnibus cross-loading model substantiated double dissociation between the affective and cognitive routes (table 6), strengthening the claim that temptation and moral disengagement act as parallel, partially independent mechanisms linking destination perceptions to illegal purchase intentions in a prohibition context.

DISCUSSION

This study indicates that destination cues shape illegal purchase intention through two partially independent channels that operate in parallel rather than in sequence. An affective route is evident, in which perceived anonymity and the availability of local intermediaries heighten temptation and move people closer to action. Alongside this sits a cognitive route, in which perceived legal enforcement diminishes the use of moral disengagement, whereas perceptions of local tolerance make such rationalisations easier to deploy. Taken together, these findings suggest that urges and justifications function as complementary levers of demand in prohibition settings, so that addressing only one leaves space for the other to sustain intention.

The pattern fits classic deterrence research that shows greater certainty of sanctions reduces rule breaking.^(38,39) The results point to a cognitive path: enforcement cues strip away rationalisations that would license misconduct more than they mute affective pull. Work on opportunity and deindividuation also shows that anonymity weakens accountability and can heighten impulsive responses. The same pattern appears in tourism contexts with short, one-off encounters, uneven oversight, and easy brokerage. Unlike most studies of moral disengagement in settings with settled norms,^(25,40,41) this study analyses an illicit services market in a destination that promotes prosocial values. In that setting, perceptions that the local community tolerates the conduct function as background norm signals that legitimise transgression. Rather than cast impulse-based and cognition-based accounts as rivals, the evidence shows that both channels operate at the same time, which helps explain why interventions that try to cool desire or rebut rationalisations, when used alone, often fall short.

This study provides three essential contributions. First, the results show parallel mediation across affective and cognitive channels in a sensitive, low-base-rate outcome, which argues against stage models that assume a

single path from urge to justification to action. Second, the data point to a functional asymmetry in cue response. Enforcement salience has more leverage on cognitive licensing than on raw temptation, while anonymity and intermediary access show the strongest link to affective pull. Third, the findings show contextual spillovers from perceived local tolerance into moral reasoning. Justifications appear to form in response to perceived social approval in the local environment, not in isolation. Taken together, these points support a view of motivation and rationalisation as twin processes that work in concert to sustain intention under prohibition.

Practical implications follow from this interpretation. Destination managers and policymakers should design bundles of measures that act on both channels at once. On the affective side, reduce anonymity and access: tighten controls on informal brokerage, conduct audits of high-risk touchpoints, and add sensible friction that makes covert transactions hard to complete. On the cognitive side, lower moral disengagement: make enforcement visible so sanction certainty appears credible; present concrete social and economic harms through community-endorsed messages; ensure that official options and legitimate providers are easy to find and use. Because correlation between the two channels is limited, well-designed bundles tend to produce larger reductions than one-channel strategies.

Limitations and Future Research

The model focuses on intention rather than observed behaviour and uses a variance-based estimator; alternative estimators, longitudinal designs, and behavioural field measures could test mechanisms with greater strength. The model simplifies the opportunity structure of illicit transactions and omits possible relevant moderators such as traveller identity, network embeddedness, or exposure to targeted enforcement campaigns. Future studies should triangulate self-reports with behavioural or administrative data, extend the analysis across multiple destinations with different normative climates, and use experimental or panel designs to track within-person change in temptation and moral disengagement over time.

CONCLUSIONS

The study set out to examine whether destination cues influence illegal purchase intention through parallel affective and cognitive channels and to identify which cues matter for each route. The evidence indicates that anonymity and intermediary access primarily elevate temptation, while visible enforcement reduces moral licensing and perceived local tolerance facilitates it. Taken together, the findings support a complementary account in which urges and justifications jointly sustain intention under prohibition. The broader implication is that policy and destination management are more effective when they pair measures that reduce anonymity and access with measures that lower moral disengagement through credible enforcement and community endorsed messaging. By specifying how cues map onto routes, the study provides a framework that can be adapted in other destinations and tested with behavioural outcomes. Further work that broadens settings, employs longitudinal and experimental methods, and reports channel specific process measures will help to consolidate and extend these conclusions.

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