

## Regulatory focus and consumption of counterfeit luxury goods: Roles of functional theories of attitudes and perceived similarity

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Wang, Li, Manhui Jin, and Zhiyong Yang (2020), “Regulatory Focus and Consumption of Counterfeit Luxury Goods: Roles of Functional Theories of Attitudes and Perceived Similarity,” *Journal of Business Research*, 107, 50–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.10.026>



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### Abstract:

Four studies show that promotion (vs. prevention) focus leads to greater counterfeit consumption, and that social functions of attitudes and perceived similarity form a chain mediation underlying these effects. Study 1 links chronic regulatory focus to counterfeit consumption behavior in both China and South Korea. Study 2 replicates Study 1's findings using primed regulatory focus and a behavioral measure of counterfeit preference. Study 3 tests the effect of regulatory focus on counterfeit consumption in a different context and demonstrates the mediating roles of social functions of attitudes and perceived similarity. Study 4 examines the boundary condition of social functions of attitudes: When social-adjustive function is made salient (compared to a control condition), prevention-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is elevated, whereas promotion-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is unaffected. However, when value-expressive function is made salient (compared to a control condition), promotion-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is reduced, whereas prevention-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is unaffected.

**Keywords:** promotion focus | prevention focus | counterfeit consumption | social-adjustive function | value-expressive function | perceived similarity

### Article:

#### 1. Introduction

Consumption of counterfeit luxury goods has been a long-standing and intractable problem (Green & Smith, 2002). The general scale of counterfeit luxury goods reached 461 billion dollars from 2010 to 2013, almost 2.5% of global trade during the same time period (OECD/EUIPO, 2016). This figure surged to 3.3% in 2016 (OECD/EUIPO, 2019). Such unqualified goods may lead the luxury market into a mess and negatively affect the prestige of luxury brands (Green & Smith, 2002), violate intellectual property rights, and offend the development of innovation (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000). Industries have made various efforts to curb counterfeiting, yet many consumers still favor counterfeit products (International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition, 2019).

Compared to copycats or me-too products where the products look similar to other branded products but are not identical (Roux, Bobrie, & Thébault, 2016), counterfeiting is an exact copy of original items. Previous research in this domain has primarily focused on non-deceptive counterfeiting—the practice of consumers knowingly purchasing counterfeits for a price advantage, which creates a stable demand for such items (Bian et al., 2016, Wu et al., 2019). In this regard, researchers have examined various factors that may affect consumers' consumption of counterfeit items, including materialism (Davidson, Nepomuceno, & Laroche, 2019), novelty seeking (Wee, Tan, & Cheok, 1995), openness to experience (Randhawa, Calantone, & Voorhees, 2015), and risk aversion (Veloutsou & Bian, 2008). These studies have provided intriguing findings. However, little is known about how regulatory focus, which has fundamental influences on personal goal pursuit (Manczak, Zapata-Gietl, & Mcadams, 2014), may affect luxury counterfeit consumption. This oversight is somewhat surprising, as counterfeit consumption is by nature a goal-directed behavior (Wu et al., 2019).

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994) postulates that goals can be viewed as hopes, aspirations, and ideals (promotion-focused goals) or as responsibilities, duties, and obligations (prevention-focused goals). Individuals with a dominant promotion focus tend to seek for gains, whereas those with a dominant prevention focus emphasize on avoiding risks in their decision making (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Such qualitative differences in regulatory foci lead us to propose that consumers with a promotion (vs. prevention) focus have a greater tendency to adopt counterfeit luxury goods. This is because promotion (vs. prevention) focus induces higher social-adjustive function, whereas prevention (vs. promotion) focus induces higher value-expressive function of attitudes toward luxury items. Heightened social-adjustive function further enhances perceived similarity between a counterfeit product and its genuine counterpart, whereas heightened value-expressive function reduces it. Perceived similarity, in turn, increases consumers' consumption of that counterfeit. Due to the social functions of attitudes account, we further demonstrate that contextual factors that make social-adjustive function or value-expressive function more salient can moderate the influence of regulatory focus on consumption of counterfeit luxury goods.

The issues we address in this research offer valuable and timely contributions to the counterfeit consumption and regulatory focus literatures. First, by examining the role of regulatory focus, we bring a fresh perspective to the counterfeit literature. Previous research on counterfeit consumption has mainly focused on individual personalities that are either considered as promotive (e.g., Davidson et al., 2019) or prohibitive (e.g., Randhawa et al., 2015, Wu et al., 2019) factors. We are the pioneer to simultaneously investigate both promotive and prohibitive motivation in the same framework. Second, we also contribute to the regulatory focus literature by extending this domain of research from normative consumer behavior to counterfeit consumption, and examine when the two forms of regulatory focus lead to different/similar levels of counterfeit consumption, when they do not, and why. Finally, this research is also the first to identify social functions of attitudes and perceived similarity as the key process factors that underlie the impact of regulatory focus on counterfeit consumption. This discovery is important for two reasons: (1) it shows that social functions of attitudes represent a new dimension that differentiates promotion foci, and (2) it opens new avenues for future researchers to identify boundary conditions for the effect of regulatory focus on counterfeit consumption.

Managerially, our findings suggest that marketers and public policy makers can use various means (e.g., ad appeals) to situationally activate consumers' prevention focus to curtail counterfeit consumption, because prevention-focused consumers have lower degrees of counterfeit consumption. Further, due to the social functions of attitudes account, for promotion-focused consumers that are naturally high in social-adjustive function of attitudes, marketers should stop emphasizing brand equity or popularity of sales in their campaigns, because these appeals can lead consumers to focus on the social-adjustive function of luxury items. Instead, the emphasis should be on making social benefits associated with counterfeit luxury items less attractive; thereby devaluing the social-adjustive function. Moreover, this research suggests that marketers should not spend advertising budget on trying to convince consumers about the inferior quality of counterfeit products, because consumers are aware of that. Rather, advertising campaigns should focus on teaching consumers about how to identify subtle differences between the genuine and the counterfeit products. Also, it is desirable for marketers to change the appearance of their products on a regular basis, especially in regions that consumers tend to orient to promotion focus, such as metropolitan areas. Next, we discuss the relationship between regulatory focus and consumption of counterfeit luxury goods, followed by hypothesis development and empirical tests.

## **2. Conceptual background and hypothesis development**

### **2.1. Regulatory focus and consumption of counterfeit luxury goods**

According to the regulatory focus theory, consumers differ in the goals they are striving for: individuals with a promotion focus possess "ideal-selves," who tend to satisfy their desires and expectations, whereas those with a prevention focus pursue "ought-selves," who care more about responsibilities and duties (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). To achieve their goals, the two types of consumers tend to adopt different strategies in consumption-related decisions. Consumers with a promotion focus are less sensitive to potential social risks associated with product choices, whereas prevention-focused consumers are more prone to negative outcomes in their decision making (Herzenstein, Posavac, & Brakus, 2007). As a result, those with a prevention focus pay attention to risk avoidance, and tend to stick to conventional solutions such as selecting familiar products to avoid potential risks (Brockner, Higgins, & Low, 2004). In contrast, individuals with a promotion focus are sensitive to product benefits, and tend to be proactive in approaching novel opportunities to find potentially valuable interests (Tumasjan & Braun, 2012).

In the context of counterfeit consumption, we expect individuals with promotion (vs. prevention) focus to have a greater tendency to adopt counterfeit luxury goods, because promotion-focused (vs. prevention-focused) consumers perceive greater levels of social benefit, but lower levels of social risk associated with the consumption. In general, consumption of counterfeit luxury goods contains both benefits and risks (Randhawa et al., 2015). On one hand, it enables consumers to be distinctive at a lower cost, to obtain upper-class social connections, and to receive equivalent hierarchy identities (Perez, Castaño, & Quintanilla, 2010). On the other hand, such consumers have to take quality risks with items that are in poor condition or easily damaged, as well as inaccessible after-sale services (Veloutsou & Bian, 2008). More importantly, they also have to bear social risks (e.g., losing face) once their secret is revealed (Penz and Stöttinger, 2008, Wu et al., 2019). Despite their awareness of potential social risks, promotion-focused (vs. prevention-

focused) consumers are less sensitive to such risks. This is evident by previous research on product choices when social risks are salient, such as new product adoption (Herzenstein et al., 2007, Ma et al., 2014). Because of such differences, promotion-focused consumers are more likely to engage in rewarding yet unethical behavior (Gino & Margolis, 2011), but prevention-focused consumers are motivated by moral considerations when taking actions to address social issues (Zaal, Laar, Ståhl, Ellemers, & Derks, 2011). The forgoing discussion suggests that proneness to social risks leads prevention-focused consumers to overrate potential losses of purchasing counterfeit luxury goods and act vigilantly so as not to waste money on shoddy products or be derided by others who discover the truth.

## 2.2. Regulatory focus and social functions of attitudes

Consumers buy counterfeit luxury brands to satisfy social motives (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009). Functional theory of attitudes (Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956) shows that individuals' salient social goals are attached to their social functions of attitudes, including social-adjustive function and value-expressive function. *Social-adjustive function* refers to realizing the identification of one's wealth and social status in social interactions by using luxury brands, thus strengthening the purpose of self-presentation, whereas *value-expressive function* refers to conveying one's own value recognition to others through the profound culture and design concept of luxury brands, thus emphasizing the purpose of self-expression (Wilcox et al., 2009). These social functions of attitudes have been shown to affect consumer responses to product choice. For example, a consumer may use luxury brands (e.g., LV) to achieve social-adjustive function since LV is recognized by peers as a high-end brand belonging to upper social class (Slama & Celuch, 1995), to achieve value-expressive function because there is a match between LV's brand concept and his/her self-concept (Johar & Sirgy, 1991), or to satisfy both functions (Shavitt, 1989).

We expect that when promotion (vs. prevention) focus is made salient, consumers have a higher level of social-adjustive function; however, when prevention (vs. promotion) focus is made salient, consumers have a higher level of value-expressive function. This can be explained through the lens of motivational system and strategic means, which posits that promotion- and prevention-focused consumers tend to differ in social goals and cognitive processes. Specifically, consumers with a promotion focus are able to adjust plans and find alternative strategies according to contextual cues, shaping their social selves to present a more positive self-image to gain social benefits (Higgins & Spiegel, 2004). Researchers have also shown that promotion-focused consumers are posited to note higher-level abstractions (e.g., themes); accordingly, they evaluate products based more on image-enhancing properties (e.g., the product's parent brand awareness) (Yeo & Park, 2006). Given that social-adjustive function stresses the aim of self-display and emphasizes that the form- or image-related luxury brand logos reflect one's status of identity and facilitates integration into a higher class of society (Wilcox et al., 2009), it is anticipated to fulfill promotion-focused (vs. prevention-focused) consumers' goal of gaining social benefits in a better way.

In contrast, consumers with a dominant prevention focus are more orientated toward maintaining status quo, expressing important and enduring beliefs consistent with their self-concept and social role to shield themselves from social disapproval (Dholakia, Gopinath, Bagozzi, &

Natarajan, 2006). Besides, prevention-focused consumers favor more item-specific product features (e.g., performance), as compared to brand image (Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2007). Therefore, they rely on the performance and meanings inherent in products as a guide to make evaluations (Yeo & Park, 2006). Since value-expressive function stresses the congruency between intrinsic aspects of products (e.g., brand culture, design concept, and quality) and individuals' self-concept in order to obtain a sense of consistency between privately held value and public expressions (Harnish & Bridges, 2016), it is expected to fulfill prevention-focused consumers' goal of maintaining status quo to avoid social disapproval in a better way.

### 2.3. Social functions of attitudes and perceived similarity between counterfeit and genuine products

Perceived similarity is defined as the degree to which an individual believes two different objects look like each other (Rosch & Mervis, 1975). Past research has defined three different physical dimensions for product similarity, namely durability, quality, and physical appearance (Penz & Stöttinger, 2008). Among those attributes, physical appearance from a visual sense is more important than others (i.e., durability and product quality) for non-deceptive counterfeiting (Wee et al., 1995).

We expect that social-adjustive function of attitudes enhances, but value-expressive function of attitudes reduces, consumers' perceived similarity between counterfeit and genuine products. Individuals with social-adjustive function have a salient goal of self-presentation and those with value-expressive function have a salient goal of self-expression (Wilcox et al., 2009). Consumers with a significant goal of self-presentation consider the use of luxuries to show their status and economic strength in social occasions (Damhorst, Miller, & Michelman, 2001). Since visual sense is largely affected by one's goal and can have a significant influence on subsequent judgements and behaviors (Schwarz, Pfister, Kluge, Weller, & Kunde, 2017), self-presentation goal can enhance consumers' perceived similarity between counterfeit and genuine products. From the perspective of consumers who value social-adjustive function of luxury goods, counterfeit brands can generate public attention in social occasions in a similar way as the genuine ones. Consequently, the salient goal of self-presentation leads them to an increased perceived appearance similarity between counterfeits and genuine ones.

However, when consumers' attitudes toward luxury goods are biased toward value expressive, they care more about conveying self-concept to others through the brand culture and design philosophy (Wilcox et al., 2009). Counterfeit luxury goods do not carry the profound cultural and historical background of the brand to convey the intrinsic value of the one who uses it (Shukla & Purani, 2012), which means that counterfeit luxury goods are perceived to look quite different from the genuine ones because they cannot satisfy the salient goal of self-expression. Thus, for consumers who are concerned with value-expressive function of luxury goods, counterfeits cannot be used as a substitute for expressing their unique tastes and values and are perceived as more different from genuine luxuries.

### 2.4. Perceived similarity and consumption of counterfeit luxury goods

We further posit that perceived similarity between the counterfeit and the genuine product is positively related to consumers' counterfeit consumption. In the field of marketing, it is generally believed that two similar products will receive equal preference from consumers (Lefkoff-Hagius & Mason, 1993). In the case of counterfeit luxury goods, if consumers find only negligible distinctions in appearance between the counterfeit and the genuine product, counterfeit consumption is likely to increase, because consumers' social motivations can be equally satisfied by these two products. When the similarity between counterfeit luxury goods and their genuine counterparts is high, consumers who desire to use luxury brands to present themselves are more interested in the counterfeit ones and view these products containing "extra value." Because of that, counterfeit manufacturers often choose to imitate the appearance of genuine luxury brands as closely as possible (Wu et al., 2019), and create identical-looking luxury items of logos (Bian & Moutinho, 2009).

Taken together, the forgoing discussions suggest that promotion (vs. prevention) focus leads to a greater tendency to consume counterfeit luxury goods. This is because promotion (vs. prevention) focus induces higher levels of social-adjustive function, whereas prevention (vs. promotion) focus induces higher levels of value-expressive function. Social-adjustive function enhances, but value-expressive function reduces, perceived similarity between counterfeit and corresponding genuine products. Since perceived similarity increases consumption of counterfeit luxury goods, the different social functions of attitudes underlying regulatory foci lead promotion-focused consumers to prefer counterfeit luxury goods to a greater extent than prevention-focused consumers. Formally, we have:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Promotion (vs. prevention) focus leads to greater consumption of counterfeit luxury goods.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** The effect of promotion (vs. prevention) focus on counterfeit consumption is mediated by social functions of attitudes (both social-adjustive and value-expressive) and perceived similarity between counterfeit and genuine products.

## 2.5. Boundary conditions

To advance our understanding about the underlying role of social functions of attitudes, we also examine potential boundary conditions for the effect of regulatory focus on counterfeit consumption. We have argued that promotion (vs. prevention) focus has a salient social-adjustive function of attitudes toward luxuries, leading to greater perceived similarity between counterfeit and genuine products. Heightened similarity, in turn, enhances consumption of the counterfeit. Hence, when a luxury product's social-adjustive function is made salient, compared to a control condition wherein it is unchanged, prevention-focused consumers—who by nature have low levels of social-adjustive function of attitudes toward luxuries and have greater potential for increase—should have more self-presentation needs and thus perceive greater similarity between counterfeit and genuine products, leading to an increase in the tendency to consume counterfeit luxury goods. However, such a contextual cue is less likely to increase the consumption tendency of promotion-focused consumers, whose level of social-adjustive function is already high ("ceiling effect").

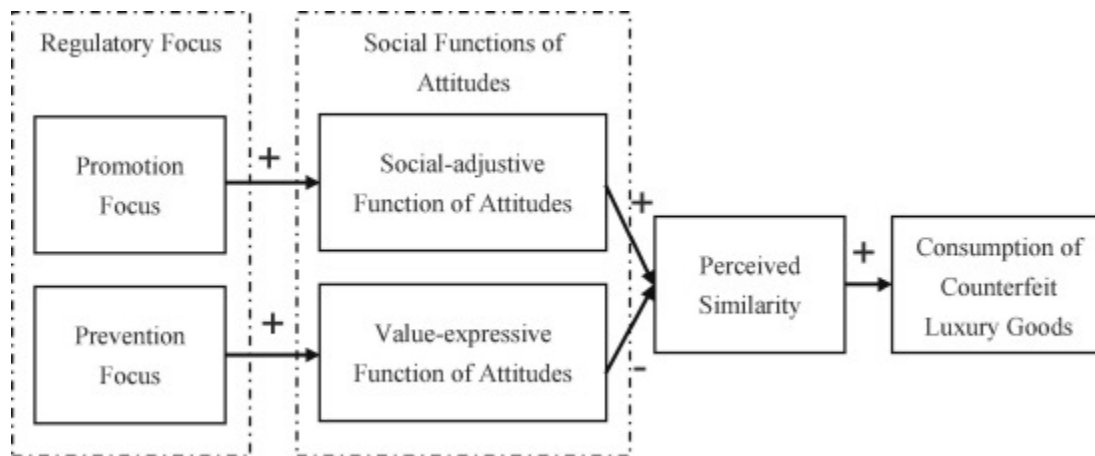
Similarly, when a luxury product’s value-expressive function is contextually made salient, promotion-focused consumers—whose baseline value-expressive function is low and has a greater potential for increase—should be alerted to center on value-expressive function of attitudes toward luxuries and therefore perceive less similarity between counterfeit and genuine products, resulting in a lower tendency to consume counterfeit luxury goods, compared to a control condition in which value-expressive function is unchanged. However, prevention-focused consumers’ baseline level of value-expressive function of attitudes toward luxuries is high and is difficult to increase further (“ceiling effect”). Hence, their perceived similarity between the counterfeit and the genuine products and tendency to engage in counterfeit consumption should be unchanged (i.e., remain at the low level) when value-expressive function is made salient, relative to a control condition. Therefore, we have:

**H<sub>3a</sub>:** When social-adjustive function is made salient (compared to a control condition in which it is unchanged), prevention-focused consumers’ counterfeit consumption is elevated, whereas promotion-focused consumers’ counterfeit consumption is unaffected.

**H<sub>3b</sub>:** When value-expressive function is made salient (compared to a control condition in which it is unchanged), promotion-focused consumers’ counterfeit consumption is reduced, whereas prevention-focused consumers’ counterfeit consumption is unaffected.

## 2.6. Overview of studies

The conceptual framework is presented in Fig. 1. We tested our hypotheses in four studies. Study 1 used chronic measures of regulatory focus to provide initial evidence on its impact on consumers’ counterfeit consumption behavior in both China and South Korea (**H<sub>1</sub>**). Study 2 replicated Study 1’s findings using primed regulatory focus and a behavioral measure of preference for luxury counterfeits (**H<sub>1</sub>**). Study 3 tested the effect of regulatory focus on luxury counterfeit consumption in a different context and demonstrated the chain of mediation as specified in **H<sub>2</sub>**. Study 4 examined the boundary condition of social functions of attitudes using advertisements (**H<sub>3a</sub>** and **H<sub>3b</sub>**).



**Fig. 1.** Conceptual Framework: Effect of Regulatory Focus on Consumption of Counterfeit Luxury Goods.

### 3. Study 1: measured regulatory focus and counterfeit consumption behavior

The purpose of Study 1 is to examine the relationship between regulatory focus and counterfeit consumption behavior in a naturalistic, realistic context. To ensure external validity of our findings, we gathered data from both China and South Korea.

#### 3.1. Participants and procedure

A total of 127 Chinese consumers (62.2% female;  $M_{age} = 27.1$ ,  $SD = 5.8$ ;  $M_{household\ income} = \$26,293$ ) and 117 Korean consumers (61.5% female;  $M_{age} = 29.2$ ,  $SD = 7.3$ ;  $M_{household\ income} = \$69,315$ ) participated in exchange for \$1.5 as a token of appreciation. In this and subsequent studies, sample sizes were pre-determined to exceed the minimum requirements for testing a medium effect size at 80% power for a significance level of  $p < .05$ . Three versions of the questionnaire (English, Chinese, and Korean) were developed. The back-translation approach was used to ensure their idiomatic equivalence. Because counterfeit consumption can be a sensitive topic, all information remained anonymous, and no information related to identity (e.g., name, address) was collected. These procedural remedies are also recommended for controlling for the common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

Participants were told that they would complete two unrelated tasks. In the first task, we measured their actual consumption of counterfeit luxury goods in the past 12 months, using Chan (2001) 3-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ), which focuses on three aspects: (1) shopping frequency (1 = *never*; 7 = *six times or more*), (2) total number of items bought (1 = *none*; 7 = *six or more*), and (3) amount spent (1 = *none*; 7 = *\$45 or more*). In the second ostensibly unrelated task, we measured regulatory foci using Higgins et al. (2001) 11-item scale, with six items assessing promotion focus (e.g., “*How often did you do well at different things that you try?*” 1 = *never*; 7 = *very often*;  $\alpha = 0.81$ ) and five items measuring prevention focus (e.g., “*How often did you obey rules and regulations that were established by your parents when you were growing up?*” 1 = *never*; 7 = *very often*;  $\alpha = 0.80$ ) (see Appendix A).

To control for potential social desirability bias, we used Strahan and Gerbasi’s (1972) 10-item short scale. Participants indicated whether each statement truly reflected their situation (0 = *true*; 1 = *false*). Items were summed, with higher scores indicating greater levels of social desirability. Since luxury products are mainly hedonic and promotion-focused individuals are more keen on hedonic consumption than prevention-focused people (Ashraf & Thongpapanl, 2015), we measured their frequency of purchasing genuine luxury products in the past 12 months and used it as another covariate in our analysis. Finally, participants reported their gender, age, education level, and annual household income.

#### 3.2. Results

**H<sub>1</sub>** specifies that promotion (vs. prevention) focus leads to greater counterfeit consumption. To test **H<sub>1</sub>**, we created composite scores of counterfeit consumption behavior, promotion focus, and prevention focus by averaging the ratings on the evaluative attributes of these constructs. A regression analysis on counterfeit consumption behavior, using promotion focus and prevention focus as the independent variables, and social desirability bias, gender, age, and household



income as covariates, revealed that counterfeit consumption behavior was positively associated with promotion focus ( $\beta = 0.83, t(241) = 5.57, p < .001$ ), but negatively associated with prevention focus ( $\beta = -0.52, t(241) = -4.58, p < .001$ ). Among the control variables, counterfeit consumption was significantly related to education ( $\beta = -0.49, t(235) = -4.21, p < .001$ ), and household income ( $\beta = -0.47, t(235) = -3.41, p = .001$ ), but not to social desirability bias ( $\beta = 0.05, t(235) = 0.82, p = .42$ ), gender ( $\beta = -0.25, t(235) = -1.20, p = .23$ ), age ( $\beta = -0.01, t(235) = -0.80, p = .43$ ), and frequency of purchasing genuine luxury items ( $\beta = -0.02, t(235) = -0.22, p = .83$ ). Multicollinearity was deemed not a severe threat to the validity of our findings, because all VIFs were lower than 1.7. Separate analyses on Chinese and Korean samples yielded similar results. Therefore, **H<sub>1</sub>** was supported in both countries.

### 3.3. Discussion

Study 1 confirmed that promotion (vs. prevention) focus leads to greater counterfeit consumption. Specifically, promotion focus positively, and prevention focus negatively relate to counterfeit consumption behavior. This pattern exists in both China and South Korea. However, Study 1 has a major limitation: the analysis is correlational by nature, with no evidence on the causal direction. To overcome this issue, we manipulated regulatory focus in the next study. Further, we used a behavioral measure of preference for counterfeit product to enhance the internal validity of our findings.

## 4. Study 2: Primed regulatory focus and preference for counterfeit product

### 4.1. Pretest

Fifty-two students (57.7% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.2$ ;  $SD = 1.2$ ) at a major university in China participated this pretest as part of a course requirement. The objective was to identify the brands considered as luxuries in different product categories. Participants were asked to list all the luxury brands in their minds among three product categories: pen, handbags, and watch. Results showed that in the pen category, Parker (75%), Montblanc (57.69%), and Pelikan (50%) were the top three most mentioned brands. Chanel (79%), LV (69%), and Gucci (63%) were the top three most mentioned in the handbag category. Therefore, we selected Parker and Chanel as our focal brand for Study 2 and Study 3, respectively. In Study 4, although Rolex (42%), OMEGA (36%) and Longines (33%) were rated as the top three most mentioned brands in the watch category, to facilitate the manipulation of social functions of attitudes, we selected Tissot as our focal brand, because it was a relatively less mentioned brand in the watch category (which was mentioned by 28.85% of the participants).

### 4.2. Participants and procedure

One hundred and thirty-five students (48.1% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.6$ ;  $SD = 1.2$ ) at a major university in China participated this study. Participants were told that they would complete two unrelated tasks: (1) a handwriting task, and (2) a short survey, before taking either a counterfeit product priced at RMB15 or RMB15 cash as a compensation for their participation. The back-translation approach was used to ensure all manipulation materials and the scales used in this study and the subsequent studies to ensure idiomatic equivalence between the Chinese and the English version.

The handwriting task was used to manipulate regulatory focus. Following Pham and Avnet (2004), in the promotion-focus condition, we asked participants to first think about their past hopes, aspirations, and dreams and write down two of them, and then think about their current hopes, aspirations, and dreams and write down two of them. In the prevention-focus condition, we asked participants to first think about their past duties, obligations, and responsibilities and write down two of them, and then think about their current duties, obligations, and responsibilities and write down two of them. Afterwards, participants completed a manipulation check for regulatory focus, using two questions: (1) *At present, the thoughts and feelings that come to my mind is reflective of hopes and aspirations*, and (2) *Currently, the thoughts and feelings that come to my mind is reflective of duties and responsibilities* (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*; Ashraf, Razzaque, & Thongpapanl, 2016).

Subsequently, participants were exposed to a genuine Parker pen priced at RMB480 (approximately \$68.6) and an identical-looking counterfeit Parker pen priced at RMB15 (approximately \$2.2), and were asked to rate similarity between these two products using a four-item measure (e.g., *From my point of view, the counterfeit Parker pen and the genuine one is nearly the same*; 1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = 0.83$ ; see Appendix A for all items). They were also asked to rate brand familiarity (*To what extent do you know the brand Parker?* 1 = *not at all*; 7 = *a lot*) and affection toward the Parker brand (*To what extent do you like the brand Parker?* 1 = *not at all*; 7 = *a lot*), as well as social desirability bias, frequency of purchasing genuine luxury items, and demographics (age and gender), using the same measures as in Study 1. Notably, there was no significant difference in brand familiarity between promotion foci ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 5.45$ ,  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 5.21$ ;  $F(1, 133) = 1.23$ ,  $p = .27$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$ ), brand affection ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 5.27$ ,  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 5.21$ ;  $F(1, 133) = 0.07$ ,  $p = .80$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$ ), social desirability bias ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 5.58$ ,  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 5.13$ ;  $F(1, 133) = 2.04$ ,  $p = .16$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$ ), frequency of purchasing genuine luxury items ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 1.96$ ,  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 1.68$ ;  $F(1, 133) = 2.36$ ,  $p = .13$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$ ), age ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 20.57$ ,  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 20.84$ ;  $F(1, 133) = 1.76$ ,  $p = .19$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$ ) and gender ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 0.45$ ,  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 0.59$ ;  $F(1, 133) = 2.68$ ,  $p = .104$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$ ). These control variables were measured in the subsequent studies, and similar effects were observed.

### 4.3. Results

*Manipulation Checks.* Results showed that participants thought and felt more about hopes and aspirations in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 4.31$ ) than those in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 3.72$ ;  $F(1, 133) = 5.80$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$ ). Also, participants in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 4.71$ ) thought and felt more about duties and responsibilities than those in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 3.96$ ;  $F(1, 133) = 7.33$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$ ). Therefore, regulatory focus was manipulated successfully.

*Choice of the Counterfeit Parker Pen.* A logistic regression on the choice of the counterfeit Parker pen, using regulatory focus (0 = *prevention focus*; 1 = *promotion focus*) as the independent variable, and the control variables as covariates, revealed a significant effect of regulatory focus ( $b = 1.34$ , Wald  $\chi^2 = 9.30$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Consistent with **H**<sub>1</sub>, more people in the promotion-focus condition (50.7%) chose the counterfeit pen, compared to 22.1% in the prevention-focus

condition. Brand familiarity, brand affection, social desirability, frequency of purchasing genuine luxury items, age, and gender had no effect on the choice ( $p$ 's > 0.10).

*Perceived Similarity between the Counterfeit and the Genuine Pen.* Univariate ANCOVAs were performed to test the effects of regulatory focus on perceived similarity while controlling for the effects of brand familiarity, brand affection, social desirability, frequency of purchasing genuine luxury items, age and gender. As expected, regulatory focus had significant main effects on perceived similarity ( $F(1, 127) = 8.85, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = 0.07$ ). Consistent with our theorizing, participants in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 4.53$ ) had a higher level of perceived similarity than those in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 3.69; F(1, 127) = 10.73, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.08$ ). None of the control variables had significant effects on perceived similarity ( $p$ 's > 0.10).

#### 4.4. Discussion

Replicating Study 1's findings using primed regulatory focus, Study 2 showed that promotion-focused consumers had a greater tendency to choose a counterfeit product (vs. cash in the same value) than prevention-focused consumers. Also, promotion (vs. prevention) focus led to greater perceived similarity between the counterfeit and the genuine product. We speculated in  $H_2$  that the effect of regulatory focus on counterfeit consumption is mediated by social functions of attitudes and perceived similarity. While we did not examine this proposed serial mediation effect in Study 2, we aimed to test it in the next study.

In addition, we intend to rule out four factors as alternative explanations for our findings in the next study, namely perceived similarity in other dimensions (i.e., durability and quality), attitudes toward the genuine brand, perceived social benefits, and perceived social risks. Past research shows that perceived similarity is multi-dimensional, including physical appearance, durability, and quality (Marticotte and Arcand, 2017, Penz and Stöttinger, 2008). Our theory suggests that the key dimension underlying our findings is physical appearance. That is, although promotion-focused consumers perceive greater physical appearance similarity across counterfeit and genuine products than prevention-focused consumers, both should perceive the genuine (vs. counterfeit) product to have better durability and quality. We test this prediction in Study 3. Also, it could be argued that promotion-focused (vs. prevention-focused) consumers may have more positive attitudes toward the genuine brand, which leads them to prefer the counterfeit product. We examine this possibility as well. Furthermore, as indicated earlier in the paper, we expect promotion-focused consumers to perceive greater levels of social benefit, but lower levels of social risk, than prevention-focused consumers. However, neither of these two constructs is anticipated to be an alternative explanation for our findings, because perceived social risks/benefits associated with the consumption of counterfeit luxury goods are only a part of the consequences of social function of attitudes. We test this argument in the next study. Finally, to enhance the generalizability of our findings, in Study 3 we use another approach to manipulate regulatory focus and examine counterfeit in a new product category (handbags).

### **5. Study 3: social functions of attitudes and perceived similarity as mediators**

### 5.1. Participants and procedure

Two hundred and one students (61.2% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 21.1$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ) from a major university in China participated this study in exchange for course credit. Participants were told that they would complete two unrelated tasks: (1) an essay-writing task, and (2) a product evaluation task. The essay-writing task was used to manipulate regulatory focus. Following Dholakia et al. (2006), participants assigned to the promotion-focus condition were instructed to write an essay on the concept of achievement and advancement in support of the statement: “*Success in life is determined by action, not inaction.*” Those in the prevention-focus condition were asked to write an essay on the concept of security and caution in support of the statement: “*Prevention is the best form of cure.*” Afterwards, participants completed the same manipulation check for regulatory focus as in Study 2.

Before moving to the second task, participants rated social functions toward luxury brands to evaluate the extent to which their attitudes served as social-adjustive and value-expressive functions. Following Grewal, Mehta, and Kardes (2004), we assessed attitude functions on seven-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*; Appendix A), including a four-item measure of social-adjustive function capturing their beliefs on the role of luxury brands in social interactions (e.g., “*Right now, I believe that luxury brands are a symbol of social status;*”  $\alpha = 0.85$ ) and another four-item measure of value-expressive function, reflecting their beliefs on the role of luxury brands in revealing personal tastes (e.g., “*Right now, I believe that luxury brands reflect the kind of person I see myself to be;*”  $\alpha = 0.91$ ).

Next, participants completed an ostensibly unrelated survey of product evaluation. In this part, all participants were asked to look at a version of genuine Chanel bag which were matched with participants’ gender, and asked to rate their familiarity with Chanel brand, using the same measures as in Study 2. Participants were then shown an identical counterfeit Chanel bag. After comparing the counterfeit Chanel bag with the genuine one, participants rated their purchase intention of the counterfeit bag, using a scale from Ma et al. (2014). A sample item is: “*What is the probability that you would consider purchasing the counterfeit?*” (1 = *very low*; 7 = *very high*;  $\alpha = 0.95$ ; see Appendix A for all questions). A composite score of purchase intention was derived by averaging these items. Afterwards, participants rated perceived similarity between the counterfeit and the genuine bag using the same measure as in Study 2 ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ). To rule out possible alternative explanations, we then measured perceived similarity in other dimensions (i.e., durability, quality), perceived social benefits, perceived social risks, and brand attitude toward Chanel in that order.

Following previous research (Marticotte and Arcand, 2017, Penz and Stöttinger, 2008), perceived similarity in other dimensions was assessed by seven-point scales (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *a lot*), including perceived durability similarity (“*To what extent do you think the counterfeit is similar to the genuine ones in terms of durability?*”), perceived quality similarity (“*To what extent do you think the counterfeit is similar to the genuine ones in terms of quality?*”) and perceived manufacturing skills similarity (“*To what extent do you think the counterfeit is similar to the genuine ones in terms of manufacturing skills?*”).

Perceived social benefits and perceived social risks were each assessed using two distinctive four-item measures (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *a lot*; see Appendix A). A sample item for perceived social benefits is: “*When I was making a decision whether to buy the counterfeit bag, my thoughts were focused on how the bag could make me feel good among my friends and family*” ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ). A sample item for perceived social risks is: “*When I was making a decision whether to buy the counterfeit bag, I was worried that my friends and family might not approve of this product*” ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ).

Brand attitude toward Chanel was assessed by a four-item semantic differential scale (1 = *dislike*, and 7 = *like*; 1 = *negative*, and 7 = *positive*; 1 = *bad*, and 7 = *good*; 1 = *unfavorable*, and 7 = *favorable*;  $\alpha = 0.92$ ) by Holbrook and Batra (1987). In addition, we measured all control variables (brand familiarity, social desirability, frequency of purchasing genuine luxury items, age, and gender) as in Study 2. The effects of these control variables were similar to those in Study 2, and will not be discussed further.

## 5.2. Results

*Manipulation Checks.* As expected, participants thought and felt more about hopes and aspirations in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 4.56$ ) than those in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 3.82$ ;  $F(1, 201) = 9.34, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$ ). Also, participants thought and felt more about duties and responsibilities in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 5.15$ ) than those in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 4.32$ ;  $F(1, 201) = 13.61, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.06$ ). These results indicated that our manipulation of regulatory focus was effective.

*Purchase Intention of the Counterfeit Chanel Bag.* Consistent with **H<sub>1</sub>**, a one-way ANOVA on purchase intention, using regulatory focus as an independent variable, showed that participants in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 4.06$ ) had a significantly higher purchase intention of the counterfeit Chanel bag than those in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 2.15$ ;  $F(1, 201) = 59.69, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.23$ ).

*Social Functions of Attitudes and Perceived Appearance Similarity.* A one-way MANOVA of regulatory focus revealed that participants in the promotion-focus condition had higher social-adjustive function ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 4.54$  vs.  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 3.98$ ;  $F(1, 201) = 9.25, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = 0.04$ ), lower value-expressive function ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 3.47$  vs.  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 4.07$ ;  $F(1, 201) = 7.59, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = 0.04$ ), and higher perceived appearance similarity ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 4.28$  vs.  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 3.20$ ;  $F(1, 201) = 23.54, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$ ) than those in the prevention-focus condition. These results were consistent with **H<sub>2</sub>**.

*Mediation Analysis.* To test whether the relationship between regulatory focus and purchase intention of the counterfeit bag was mediated by a serial of factors that contain social functions of attitudes and perceived similarity (**H<sub>2</sub>**), we conducted two separate mediation analyses using the PROCESS macro (Model 6,  $n = 10,000$ ; Hayes, 2013). We first tested whether social-adjustive function and perceived appearance similarity mediated the effect of regulatory focus on purchase intention, using regulatory focus as the predictor, purchase intention as the criterion, and social-adjustive function and perceived appearance similarity as the two mediators in that order. A bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 iterations using Model 6 of Hayes

(2013) PROCESS showed that, consistent with **H<sub>2</sub>**, the indirect effect of regulatory focus on purchase intention was positive (0.06) and significant (95% CI = [0.02, 0.17]), indicating that promotion (vs. prevention) focus led to a higher level of social-adjustive function, which enhanced perceived appearance similarity. Heightened perception of appearance similarity in turn increased purchase intention.

We then tested whether value-expressive function and perceived similarity mediated the effect of regulatory focus on purchase intention, using the same approach as indicated above.

Supporting **H<sub>2</sub>**, the indirect effect of regulatory focus on purchase intention was also positive (0.07) and significant (95% CI = [0.02, 0.18]), indicating that prevention (vs. promotion) focus led to a higher level of value-expressive function, which reduced perceived appearance similarity. Reduced perception of appearance similarity in turn lessened purchase intention.

*Ruling Out Perceived Similarity in Other Dimensions and Attitudes toward the Brand as Alternative Explanations.* We examined whether perceived similarity in other dimensions and attitude toward Chanel are mediators of the relationship between regulatory focus and purchase intention. A one-way MANOVA showed that participants in the promotion-focus condition did not differ from those in the prevention-focus condition in terms of perceived durability similarity ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 3.61$  vs.  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 3.50$ ;  $F(1, 201) = 0.29$ ,  $p = .59$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$ ), perceived quality similarity ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 3.62$ , vs.  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 3.54$ ,  $F(1, 201) = 0.11$ ,  $p = .74$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$ ), perceived manufacturing skills similarity ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 3.22$  vs.  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 3.00$ ;  $F(1, 201) = 0.94$ ,  $p = .34$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$ ), and attitudes toward Chanel ( $M_{\text{promotion-focus}} = 5.09$  vs.  $M_{\text{prevention-focus}} = 5.03$ ;  $F(1, 210) = 0.10$ ,  $p = .75$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$ ). A bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 iterations using Model 4 of Hayes (2013) PROCESS showed that the indirect effect of regulatory focus on purchase intention was not significant for perceived durability similarity ( $\beta = 0.02$ , 95% CI = [-0.06, 0.13]), perceived quality similarity ( $\beta = 0.01$ , 95% CI = [-0.06, 0.13]), perceived manufacturing skills similarity ( $\beta = 0.02$ , 95% CI = [-0.02, 0.16]), or attitudes toward Chanel ( $\beta = 0.01$ , 95% CI = [-0.03, 0.11]). Therefore, these factors are unlikely to be alternative explanations for our findings.

*Ruling Out Perceived Social Benefits and Perceived Social Risks as Alternative Explanations.* Results showed that, consistent with our expectations, participants in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 4.00$ ) were higher in perceived social benefits than those in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 3.19$ ;  $F(1, 201) = 14.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$ ). Yet, participants in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 3.57$ ) were lower in perceived social risks than those in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $F(1, 201) = 6.51$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$ ). Mediation tests further showed that perceived social risks/benefits are unlikely to be alternative explanations for our findings, because the indirect effect of regulatory focus on purchase intention was not significant through either perceived social benefits ( $\beta = 0.08$ , 95% CI = [-0.07, 0.28]) or perceived social risks ( $\beta = 0.04$ , 95% CI = [-0.03, 0.20]).

### 5.3. Discussion

Study 3 demonstrated that the relationship between regulatory focus and counterfeit consumption was driven by a chain of mediators that include social functions of attitudes and perceived similarity, in support of **H<sub>2</sub>**. Promotion-focused (vs. prevention-focused) consumers had higher

social-adjustive function, whereas prevention-focused (vs. promotion-focused) consumers had higher value-expressive function. Higher social-adjustive function enhanced, but higher value-expressive function reduced, perceived similarity between the counterfeit and the genuine product. Perceived similarity, in turn, increased consumption of counterfeit luxury products. We also ruled out other dimensions of perceived similarity, attitudes toward the brand, perceived social benefits, and perceived social risks as alternative explanations. The use of a different manipulation of regulatory focus and a different product category provided convergent validity to our findings. In the next study, we seek to provide further evidence on the mechanism by manipulating the mediator “social functions of attitudes” (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). To enhance managerial implications of this research, we use advertisements to manipulate social functions of attitudes.

## 6. Study 4: moderating role of social functions of attitudes

### 6.1. Participants and procedure

Three hundred and sixty-five students (59.5% female;  $M_{age} = 20.4$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ) from a major university in China attended this study in exchange for course credit. Study 4 featured a 2 (regulatory focus: promotion vs. prevention)  $\times$  3 (salience of social functions of attitudes: social-adjustive, value-expressive, and control) between-subjects design.

Following Pham and Chang (2010), regulatory focus was manipulated through a scenario (see Web Appendix 1). In the promotion [prevention] focus condition, participants were asked to imagine that they joined their company one year ago, and just received an invitation email from the company’s annual meeting, asking them to represent the newcomers to deliver a speech about their next year’s hopes and aspirations [responsibilities and obligations]. Furthermore, in the promotion [prevention] focus condition, the job description focused on accomplishments, growth, and opportunities (e.g., “*an ideal job*,” “*free membership at fitness club*”) [responsibilities, security, and protection (e.g., “*a job that cannot refuse*,” “*comprehensive medical insurance*”)].

They were then asked to imagine that they would like to buy a wristwatch for that event, and came across Tissot Watch. In the salient social-adjustive condition, participants were asked to imagine that Tissot watch doesn’t suit their own taste but would definitely be appreciated by their colleagues. They then saw two advertisements of Tissot Watch, one from the official website with a price tag of RMB5,450 (approximately \$813) and the other from a counterfeit website that claimed to sell high-quality replica at a lower price of RMB180 (approximately \$27). Following Wilcox et al. (2009), both advertisements contained a picture of Tissot watch which was matched with participants’ gender and a brief headline introducing the Tissot brand, and a slogan: “*It doesn’t matter how you see yourself: Wear a Tissot, be the perfect one in others’ eyes!*” (see Web Appendix 2 for the stimuli).

In the salient value-expressive condition, participants were asked to imagine that Tissot watch suited their own taste well but would not be appreciated by their colleagues. They then saw the same two advertisements as in the salient social-adjustive condition, with a different slogan: “*It doesn’t matter how others see you: Wear a Tissot, be the perfect one in your own eyes!*”

In the control condition, participants were not given the information about whether Tissot Watch fits with their own taste or the taste of their colleagues, and the two advertisements only contained the picture and the headline, without the slogan.

Afterwards, participants were asked to rate their purchase intention of the counterfeit Tissot Watch ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ), and the manipulation check questions for regulatory focus, using the same measures as in Study 3. To gauge the effectiveness of our manipulation in altering the attitudes associated with the relative salience of two social functions, we also assessed participants' attitude functions using two items ( $\alpha = 0.70$ ): (1) *After reading the material, to what extent do you think Tissot watch suits your own taste?* (1 = not at all; 7 = a lot); (2) *After reading the material, to what extent do you think Tissot watch would be appreciated by your colleagues?* (1 = not at all; 7 = a lot).

To rule out believability of the ads as an alternative explanation for our findings, we measured believability of the ads using two semantic differential scales (1 = *believable*, and 7 = *not at all believable*; 1 = *realistic*, and 7 = *not at all realistic*;  $\alpha = 0.83$ ) adapted from Wilcox et al. (2009). Results showed that participants' ratings of believability did not vary across the three social functions of attitudes conditions ( $F(2, 362) = 1.43, p = .24, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$ ). Therefore, our results reported below cannot be explained by believability of the ads. In addition, we measured all control variables (brand familiarity, social desirability, frequency of purchasing genuine luxury items, age, and gender) as in Study 2. The effects of these control variables were similar to those in Study 2, and will not be discussed further.

## 6.2. Results

*Manipulation Checks.* As expected, participants thought and felt more about hopes and aspirations in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 4.46$ ) than those in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 3.82$ ;  $F(1, 363) = 17.33, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$ ). Also, participants in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 4.56$ ) thought and felt more about duties and responsibilities than those in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 4.03$ ;  $F(1, 363) = 10.92, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.03$ ). Therefore, regulatory focus was manipulated successfully.

The manipulation of the salience of social functions was also effective, participants in the salient social-adjustive condition rated the Tissot watch as more likely to be “appreciated by colleagues” than those in the salient value-expressive or the control condition ( $M_{\text{social-adjustive}} = 4.59$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 3.93$  vs.  $M_{\text{value-expressive}} = 3.73$ ;  $F(2, 362) = 11.41, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.06$ ). Participants in the salient value-expressive condition rated the Tissot watch higher on “suits own taste” than those in the salient social-adjustive or the control condition ( $M_{\text{social-adjustive}} = 3.45$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 3.80$  vs.  $M_{\text{value-expressive}} = 4.24$ ;  $F(2, 362) = 8.21, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.04$ ).

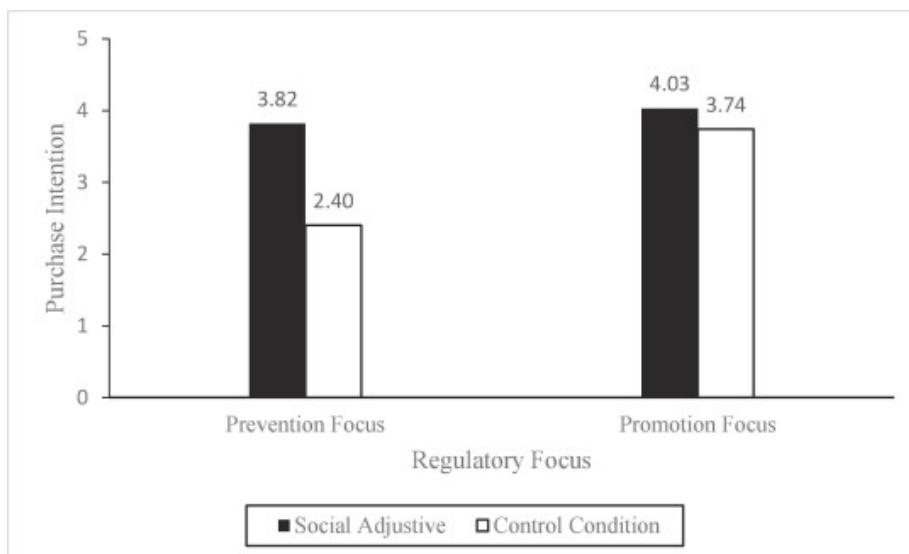
*Purchase Intention of the Counterfeit Tissot Watch.* We conducted a 2 (regulatory focus)  $\times$  3 (social functions of attitudes) ANOVA with purchase intention of the counterfeit Tissot watch as the dependent variable. Results revealed significant main effects of regulatory focus ( $F(1, 359) = 22.09; p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.06$ ) and social functions of attitudes ( $F(2, 359) = 21.64; p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$ ), and more important, a significant interaction between regulatory focus and social



attitudes of functions ( $F(2, 359) = 3.44, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$ ). To better understand the nature of the interaction effects, we separately analyzed the data for each of the three social functions of attitudes conditions.

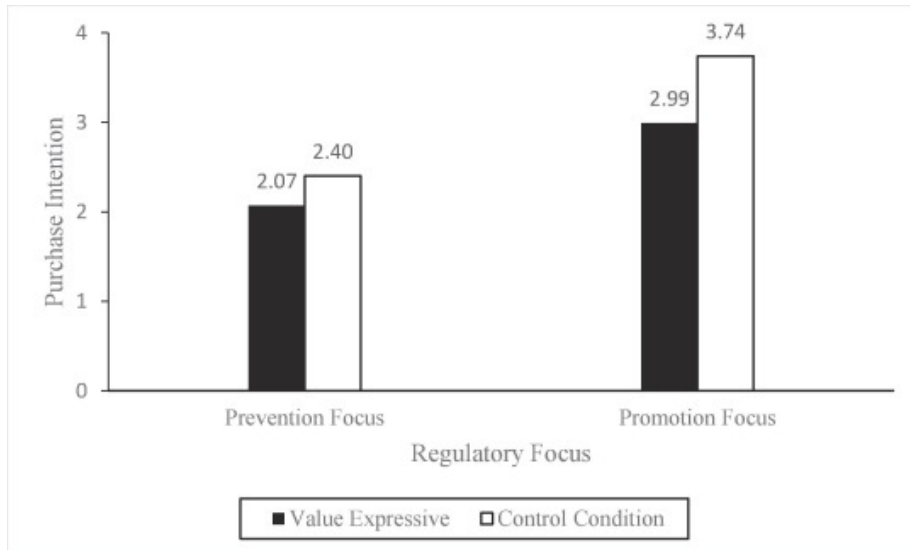
In the control condition, we expected to replicate previous findings. Consistent with our expectations, participants in the promotion-focus condition ( $M = 3.74$ ) had higher purchase intention than those in the prevention-focus condition ( $M = 2.40, F(1, 359) = 17.00, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.12$ ), supporting **H<sub>1</sub>**.

**H<sub>3a</sub>** depicts that when social-adjustive function is made salient (compared to the control), prevention-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is elevated, whereas promotion-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is unaffected. Consistent with **H<sub>3a</sub>**, prevention-focused participants in the salient social-adjustive condition ( $M = 3.82$ ) had higher purchase intention than those in the control condition ( $M = 2.40; F(1, 359) = 28.21; p = .00, \eta_p^2 = 0.19$ ), as shown in Fig. 2a. However, promotion-focused participants in the salient social-adjustive condition ( $M = 4.03$ ) had a similar level of purchase intention to those in the control condition ( $M = 3.74, F(1, 359) = 0.59; p = .45, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$ ). Taken together, these results supported **H<sub>3a</sub>**.



**Fig. 2a.** The Interactive Effect of Regulatory Focus and Social Adjustive Function on Purchase Intention.

**H<sub>3b</sub>** states that when value-expressive function is made salient (compared to the control condition), promotion-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is reduced, whereas prevention-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is unaffected. Supporting **H<sub>3b</sub>**, promotion-focused participants in the salient value-expressive condition ( $M = 2.99$ ) had lower purchase intention than those in the control condition ( $M = 3.74, F(1, 359) = 4.68; p = .03, \eta_p^2 = 0.04$ ). However, prevention-focused participants in the salient value-expressive condition ( $M = 2.07$ ) did not differ in purchase intention from those in the control condition ( $M = 2.40, F(1, 359) = 2.35; p = .13, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$ ), as presented in Fig. 2b.



**Fig. 2b.** The Interactive Effect of Regulatory Focus and Value Expressive Function on Purchase Intention.

## 7. General discussion

In four studies, we provide convergent evidence in support of three findings. First, promotion-focused consumers have higher levels of consumption on counterfeit luxury products than prevention-focused consumers. Second, social functions of attitudes and perceived appearance similarity form a chain of mediation underlying the effect of regulatory focus on counterfeit consumption, such that promotion (vs. prevention) focus induces higher social-adjustive function and lower value-expressive function of attitudes toward luxury items, which enhance perceived appearance similarity between counterfeits and their corresponding genuine counterparts. Perceived similarity between counterfeit and genuine products, in turn, increases consumers' consumption of counterfeit luxury products. Third, when social-adjustive function is made salient (compared to a control condition in which it is unchanged), prevention-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is elevated, whereas promotion-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is unaffected. However, when value-expressive function is made salient (compared to a control condition in which it is unchanged), promotion-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is reduced, whereas prevention-focused consumers' counterfeit consumption is unaffected.

Notably, these four studies varied in different aspects, including countries (China and South Korea in Study 1), respondent samples (actual consumers in Study 1, and students in Studies 2–4), manifestation of counterfeit consumption (actual behavior in Study 1, behavioral measure in Study 2, and purchase intentions in Studies 3–4), product stimuli (historical counterfeit consumption in Study 1, Parker pen in Study 2, Chanel bag in Study 3, and Tissot watch in Study 4), and regulatory focus (chronic measures in Study 1, thought-listing in Study 2, essay in Study 3, and scenario in Study 4). The consistent pattern of results from these studies provides direct evidence on the validity and generalizability of our findings.

### 7.1. Theoretical contributions

This research provides significant contributions to the existing literature in the following ways. First, we extend the extant literature on counterfeit consumption by opening new research avenues from the perspective of regulatory focus. Previous research on the antecedents of consumption of counterfeit luxury products has centered on individual personalities that are either promotive (e.g., Davidson et al., 2019) or prohibitive (e.g., Randhawa et al., 2015, Wu et al., 2019) factors. Little research has simultaneously examined both promotive and prohibitive motives in the same framework. Counterfeit consumption is a goal-directed behavior (Wu et al., 2019). Our research represents the first effort to demonstrate the significance of consumers' regulatory-focus motivation in understanding counterfeit consumption.

Second, we extend the literature on regulatory focus in two important aspects. One aspect is that we expand this domain of research from normative consumption behavior to counterfeit consumption. The regulatory focus theory has been widely used to understand normative consumption behavior, such as hedonic and utilitarian products consumption (Roy & Ng, 2012), green behaviors (Zou & Chan, 2019), impulsive buying behaviors (Das, 2016), and global versus local consumption (Westjohn, Arnold, Magnusson, & Reynolds, 2016). Building upon this stream of research, we examine when promotion-focused consumers have greater levels of counterfeit consumption than prevention-focused consumers, when these two types of consumers are similar, and why. Such an investigation not only advances our understanding about how regulatory focus affects counterfeit consumption, but also brings contributions to the literature on the relationship between regulatory focus and normative consumption behavior in general. The other aspect is that we provide theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence on the role of regulatory focus as a "filter" in building product preferences. According to Wang and Lee (2006), consumers automatically screen for information that matches their regulatory focus and spend more cognitive energy on. They further suggested that future research could use mixed appeals that contain both promotion- and prevention-focused information to gain an in-depth understanding of regulatory focus as a "filter" in building product preference. From a broader sense, our focus on counterfeit luxury goods in this research can be viewed as conveying naturally mixed appeals along this line, because the counterfeits are cost effective but associated with high social risk if discovered; thereby gaining an in depth understanding of how different regulatory foci play a "filtering" role that affects consumers' weighing of pros and cons of counterfeits.

Finally, this research extends both counterfeit consumption and regulatory focus literatures by identifying social functions of attitudes and perceived similarity as the key mediating mechanism that underlies the effect of regulatory focus on counterfeit consumption. This discovery has two significant implications. On one hand, it uncovers social functions of attitudes as new qualitative differences across promotion-focused and prevention-focused people; thereby opening new avenues for future researchers. On the other hand, discovering the chain of mediation also allows researchers to identify situational factors that can make social-adjustive function or value-expressive function salient, which in turn, affects consumers' perceived similarity between counterfeit and genuine products and their consumption of counterfeit luxury products.

## 7.2. Managerial and public policy implications

Apart from its theoretical contributions, this research also provides significant implications to managers and public policy makers, with respect to using novel strategies to curtail counterfeit consumption. Our research findings show that relative to promotion-focused consumers, prevention-focused consumers have a much lower level of counterfeit consumption. By manipulating text-framing, or emphasizing textual descriptions of loss and gains, prevention focus can be situationally primed (e.g., Pham & Chang, 2010). Thus, public policy makers can reduce consumers' tendency to adopt counterfeit products by inducing the salience of prevention focus.

In addition, our findings indicate that social-adjustive function increases, but value-expressive function decreases, perceived similarity between counterfeit and genuine products. Armed with this information, luxury marketers should use marketing tools (e.g., educational programs, advertisements) to decrease social-adjustive function, and/or to enhance value-expressive function of the luxury products. To decrease social-adjustive function, exemplar figures can be established through advertising in newspapers to show that a good citizen is the one who keeps away from counterfeit consumption. Another strategy is to use ads to emphasize that social-adjustive function is unlikely to be satisfied by counterfeits. Even worse, using counterfeit luxury items runs social risks of being "discovered." To enhance value-expressive function of luxury items, marketers should center on the cultural and historical value to promote their brand, and emphasize that counterfeits do not carry the profound cultural and historical background of that brand, rather than merely emphasizing brand influence and sales data, which misleads consumers to focus on the social-adjustive function of luxury goods.

Moreover, our findings help explain why the current approaches used by some marketers are not effective: their focus is primarily on emphasizing the inferior quality of counterfeits. Our findings suggest that consumers are already aware of the durability and quality differences across the genuine and the counterfeit products. Telling them more about such differences does not affect their consumption of counterfeits. Based upon our findings, marketers of luxury brands should shift their advertising campaign from emphasizing quality difference to emphasizing appearance difference. Workshops can be developed to educate consumers about how to discern the subtle differences between the genuine and the counterfeit product. Also, marketers of luxury brands should frequently change the appearance of these products so that counterfeit manufacturers need to occur a much higher cost to mimic these designs, especially in the regions that people tend to have a higher promotion-focus tendency, such as metropolitan areas.

Our findings indicate that consumers who purchase counterfeits are attracted by the potential social benefits associated with using them. To make it salient that perceived social benefits are over-calibrated in the minds of promotion-focused consumers, marketers can run various campaigns to make a clear comparison between their authentic products and the corresponding counterfeits about their subtle differences and how such differences can harm users' images. Apart from these appeals, marketers can also set up good examples for consumers to follow. Exemplar figures can be established through advertising in social media platforms (e.g., WeChat and QQ in China) and newspapers to show that a good citizen is the one who keeps away from counterfeit luxury goods.

Finally, our findings suggest that counterfeit consumption is driven mainly by the “top-down” approach (i.e., consumers’ salient goal). Therefore, effective educational programs could be developed to change consumers’ definitions of counterfeit consumption, shape their conceptions of morality and legitimacy regarding counterfeit consumption, and successively create a normative culture among groups where each person feels individually and socially bound to abide by those legal standards. Through such programs, we may remove excuses and induce guilt and shame for engaging in counterfeit consumption.

### 7.3. Limitations and future research

The results must be interpreted in the context of the study limitations. First, most of our data were from university students. Although this concern was alleviated by using actual consumers from both China and South Korea in Study 1 and a behavioral measure in Study 2, future research could employ a more representative sample from the general population so that older consumers’ counterfeit consumption could be represented better. Second, in an effort to minimize potential confounds, the present research did not fully explore the effect of brands on new counterfeit consumption. Although variations in product stimuli (historical counterfeit consumption in Study 1, Parker pen in Study 2, Chanel bag in Study 3, and Tissot watch in Study 4) showed converging results in support of our proposed effects, brand extension may be a fruitful avenue for future research. For example, promotion-focused and prevention-focused consumers may have differential adoption tendency toward counterfeit products when the products are associated with a main brand or a sub-brand. Third, we only manipulated the salience of the two social functions of attitudes using contextual cues. It may be fruitful for future researchers to expand our findings and the decision contexts that naturally make consumers’ social-adjustive or value expressive function of attitude salient. Finally, as pointed out in the previous research, national culture plays an important role in explaining a consumer’s regulatory foci (Petersen, Kushwaha, & Kumar, 2015). Specifically, prevention focus and promotion focus usually map with developing and developed countries, respectively (Thongpapanl, Ashraf, Lapa, & Venkatesh, 2018). Therefore, the findings of this study could be further tested under different cultural contexts as well as among participants not only from developing countries but also from developed countries to see whether the results observed would apply equally to both types of countries.

### Acknowledgement

This study was supported by research grants from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No. 71572130) and the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (Grant No. 22120180074).

### Appendix A.

#### Measurements of Key Variables:

Variables	Measurements
<b>Chronic Promotion Focus</b> (1 = never or seldom; 7 = very often)	<i>Compared to most people, are you typically unable to get what you want out of life. (R)</i> <i>How often have you accomplished things that got you “psyched” to work even harder? (1 = never or seldom; 7 = many times)</i> <i>Do you often do well at different things that you try</i>

Variables	Measurements
	<p><i>When it comes to achieving things that are important to me, I find that I don't perform as well as I ideally would like to do. (R) (1 = never true; 7 = very often true)</i></p> <p><i>I feel like I have made progress toward being successful in my life. (1 = certainly false; 7 = certainly true)</i></p> <p><i>I have found very few hobbies or activities in my life that capture my interest or motivate me to put effort into them. (R) (1 = certainly false; 7 = certainly true)</i></p>
<b>Chronic Prevention Focus</b> (1 = never or seldom; 7 = very often)	<p><i>Growing up, would you ever "cross the line" by doing things that your parents would not tolerate? (R)</i></p> <p><i>Did you get on your parents' nerves often when you were growing up. (R)</i></p> <p><i>How often did you obey rules and regulations that were established by your parents.</i></p> <p><i>Growing up, did you ever act in ways that your parents thought were objectionable. (R)</i></p> <p><i>Not being careful enough has gotten me into trouble at times. (R)</i></p>
<b>Social-adjustive unction</b> (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)	<p><i>Right now, I believe that luxury brands are a symbol of social status.</i></p> <p><i>At this moment, I think luxury brands help me fit into important social situations.</i></p> <p><i>Currently, I think I like to be seen wearing luxury brands.</i></p> <p><i>At present, I believe I enjoy it when people know I am wearing a luxury brand.</i></p>
<b>Value-expressive unction</b> (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)	<p><i>Right now, I believe that luxury brands reflect the kind of person I see myself to be.</i></p> <p><i>At this moment, I think luxury brands help me communicate my self-identity.</i></p> <p><i>Currently, I think luxury brands help me express myself.</i></p> <p><i>At present, I believe luxury brands help me define myself.</i></p>
<b>Perceived Similarity</b> (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)	<p><i>From my point of view, the counterfeit Parker pen and the genuine one is nearly the same.</i></p> <p><i>I think the difference between the counterfeit Parker pen and the genuine one is negligible.</i></p> <p><i>I believe others cannot tell the counterfeit Parker pen from the genuine one.</i></p> <p><i>By simply looking at the pictures, I cannot distinguish between the counterfeit Parker pen and the genuine one</i></p>
<b>Perceived Social Benefits</b> (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)	<p><i>When I was making a decision whether to buy the counterfeit bag, my thoughts were focused on how the bag could make me feel good among my friends and family.</i></p> <p><i>I thought a lot about how people around me might be impressed by this bag.</i></p> <p><i>I thought a lot how the bag may attract the attention from people around me.</i></p> <p><i>My thoughts were focused on the benefits the bag could bring me.</i></p>
<b>Perceived Social Risks</b> (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)	<p><i>When I was making a decision whether to buy the counterfeit bag, I was worried that my friends and family might not approve of this product.</i></p> <p><i>I was afraid that I might look foolish among my friends and family by purchasing this bag.</i></p> <p><i>My thoughts were focused on the risks the bag could bring me.</i></p>
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	<p><i>What is the probability that you would consider purchasing the counterfeit? (1 = very low; 7 = very high)</i></p> <p><i>How interested will you be in purchasing the counterfeit? (1 = not at all interested; 7 = extremely interested)</i></p> <p><i>How much are you willing to purchase the counterfeit? (1 = not at all; 7 = a lot)</i></p>

## Appendix B. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.10.026>.

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