

Versace: The T-Shirt Controversy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a world-famous luxury brand, Versace has always been the most favored brand by high-net-worth people in China. In 2019, the text on a T-shirt designed by Versace was questioned by a netizen about “listing Hong Kong and Macao with other countries.” For most Chinese netizens, this incident was interpreted as a campaign promoting Hong Kong and Macao independence. In addition, Chinese influential KOLs and ambassadors of Versace subsequently stopped their cooperation with the brand. After that, Versace apologized in China and put its announcement on its official Weibo account. However, Chinese netizens found that Versace didn’t go far enough and did not apologize on foreign mainstream media either. Chinese consumers started boycott campaigns to incite other consumers not to buy it. Under this pressure, Versace issued a new apology in both Chinese and English on foreign social media and other official platforms, accompanied by an apology letter from the brand creative director, claiming that the T-shirt had been removed from the shelves and destroyed in the official sales channel.

BRAND BACKGROUND

Overview About Versace

Versace is a world-famous luxury brand. With the rapid development of young consumers’ purchasing power, in addition to celebrities, rich and noble, most consumers are white-collar workers with high incomes. They have great dress-up demand and avant-garde consumption concepts. (Zhao, 2013). Its brand logo is the mythical snake demon Medusa (Wang, 2021), which represents incomparable beauty and seduction, making people lose themselves unconsciously and be awed after being stunned.

Starting from costumes, Versace offers perfume, glasses, neckties, leather goods, bags, porcelain, glassware, scarves, down products, furniture, and so on. Among them, those women’s clothing styles full of humanistic characteristics have a unique charm. They are sexy and beautiful, which makes people get

rich in imagination (Wu & Li, 2016). In addition, Versace is good at using noble and luxurious fabrics. With the help of oblique cutting, Versace makes a clever transition between stiff geometric lines and soft body curves. Its suits, skirts, and coats are marked by lines to express the sexy female body.

Versace is often inspired by ancient Greek and Egyptian Civilizations (*Gianni Versace*, n.d.). Its design style is exaggerated, and sexy, revealing the freehand brushwork of dreams (HKT, 2022). As a brand family, Versace's fashion products dominate many areas of life. Its distinctive design style has a unique aesthetic feeling, diverse colours, unique decoration and matching, luxurious and high-profile, but unique. Its strong vanguard artistic representation makes it popular all over the world. Nowadays, to attract everyone "from Millennials to mothers", there are a large number of tropical street clothes on casual clothes, shorts and logo T-shirts, gem inlaid swimming pool slides, and so on (Turra, 2021).

Brand History

Versace was born in Milan, Italy in 1978 (Versace, n.d.). It was founded by Italian designer Gianni Versace, her brother Santo Versace and sister Donatella Versace. In 1989, Versace launched the "Atelier" series in Paris, which was the first step for Versace to not only be satisfied with dominating Italy but also enter the French high-end fashion industry. And this triggered the trend of Italian fashion entering Paris. On January 25th, Atelier Versace, a studio for advanced customization and professional training of advanced fashion models was announced to be found. Since the 1980s, Versace has been a popular brand in Hollywood, and it was responsible for some of the most popular red carpet shapes in people's memory (Vesilind, 2007). In March 1991, the Versus perfume was launched. In 1995, the first Versace fashion show was held in New York. At the end of 2018, Versace became a brand of the American luxury group Michael Kors, which was later renamed Capri Holdings. In December 2018, 2018 Top 500 World Brands compiled by the World Brand Laboratory announced that Versace ranked 223 (World Brand Laboratory, n.d.). In November 2019, Versace was rated in the Top 10 List of 2019 E-commerce Consumer Beauty and Personal Care Brands released by Iimedia ranking 4. On January 20th, 2022, Versace was selected for the 2022 Hurun Chinese Luxury Consumer Survey - Report on the Brand Tendency of China's Millionaires. And it ranked sixth among the clothing brands most favoured by China's high-net-worth people (Hurun Report, 2022).

Versace in China

For Versace, the Chinese market accounts for nearly half of its global market. Versace's official website shows that, among Versace's more than 300 stores around the world, 133 stores are located in China. Of them, 116 stores are on the mainland, 9 stores are in Hong Kong, and 8 stores are in Macao. While Versace has only 21 stores in the United States.

After being acquired by Michael Kors, the parent company determined that the decline of Versace's business was due to poor business development in China, so Versace accelerated its layout in China. In 2019, Versace's main goal is to explore the Chinese market and develop business in China. Therefore, Versace settled in Tmall, a high-end shopping application popular in China. In 2019, Versace also launched jewellery for China's Valentine's Day, Qixi, to catch more Chinese consumers' attention.

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