

Purcotton: The Impact of Misogynistic Advertising on Brands

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter focuses on Purcotton's advertising issue. Purcotton, a Chinese brand, made an advertisement perceived as misogynistic which outraged some netizens. In today's China, women's position is increasing due to the spread of education and the development of Chinese society. The idea of gender is gaining more attention from the public and Chinese women speak up more often about misogyny online. This societal development is the main reason behind the online debates that followed the advertisement. This chapter focuses on the uproar this advertisement caused and analyses the effect of misogynistic advertising. It will describe the issue itself, the public reaction, and the brand's operation after the issue.

BRAND BACKGROUND

Shenzhen Purcotton's Technology Co., LTD was founded in 2009. Purcotton's parent company—Winner, produced medical gauze, which later discovered that thread ends on medical gauze could cause infection in patients' wounds and make wounds hard to recover. The company increased its investment in the research and development of cotton products, which was intended to alleviate the suffering of patients. Li Jianquan, president of Winner, has invested hundreds of millions of yuan in developing "cotton spun laced non-woven fabrics". This technology can directly process cotton into cotton cloth in two to three days and make it softer and skin friendly. Before, this process takes one to two months (Li, 2015).

However, Purcotton found that spun laced non-woven fabric did not become a famous medical surgical dressing when it was introduced to the market. Li Jianquan had invested a lot so he could not stop this project. He then found out that manufacturers of hygiene and home care products were interested in its technology and products. In those days, sanitary napkins, baby diapers, wet wipes, and other products were labelled as "soft cotton", but most of these products were made from chemical fibre non-woven fabric.

Chemical fibre raw material mainly comes from petroleum and petroleum derivatives. The chemical composition could be irritant to the human body. However, using the newly developed all-cotton spiny non-woven fabric technology, pure-cotton soft towels can offer an alternative to tissues and towels. Cotton has the best air permeability, warmth retention, and comfort. Jianquan Li was aware of the potential demand for high-quality cotton in daily commodities (Li, 2021a). Finally, in 2009, Purcotton came into life and its main product was soft cotton towels.

Purcotton's flagship products, which are cotton towels, were an alternative to tissues. They are made entirely of cotton and contain no wood pulp. Therefore, they are skin-friendly and flexible. Its non-woven technology has become an industry benchmark and got several national patent licenses. Using a towel for a long time can easily lead to excessive bacteria. A soft cotton towel can solve this problem, and customers can also use soft cotton cloth multiple times. In addition, tissues are easily broken after getting wet, and long-term use of tissues will harm the skin and cause skin problems. Therefore, the quality of cotton towels is higher than towels, and the price of cotton towels is higher. And more consumers are willing to use cotton towels instead of tissues or classic towels because using cotton products can get a better user experience (soft and reusable). The market potential was enormous and since the introduction of the cotton towel market, the sales have increased steadily every year.

Purcotton strives to cover all categories of cotton products to provide a one-stop shopping experience for consumers. Purcotton has a good reputation among customers through its strict product quality control. Since the company's establishment, online and offline sales have had explosive growth. In 2010, Purcotton launched its e-commerce division and established official flagship stores on Tmall and JD.com, which are the common e-commerce platforms in China. In 2013, the sales volume was 18.74 million yuan; in 2014, it was 66.66 million yuan; in 2015, it was 126 million yuan; in 2016, it was 260 million yuan; and in 2018, it reached 3 billion yuan. Its sales keep increasing. Purcotton's brand power and sales scale continue to grow. According to the sales data in recent years, as an alternative to tissues, cotton towels are gradually being accepted by consumers.

Purcotton is a leader in the cotton towel category and now accounts for nearly 40% of the overall market. The rapid growth of cotton towels has attracted many competing brands. Currently, there are more than 520 brands in this market, including Jierou, BabyCare, Jieliya, Cotton Secret, Good Baby, Zichu, FulCotton, etc. As the number of participants increases, competition in the industry is intensified. Purcotton dominates the online Marketplace with an estimated 44% share, occupying the absolute leading position. This market leadership came with an obligation to push marketing activities.

THE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE

On January 8, 2021, Purcotton posted a "reversal advertisement" on Weibo which is a popular social media platform in China. The advertisement is part of its mini-video series and is titled "Self-defense." In the beginning, there is a delicate-looking young girl who walks alone at night and is followed by a man. When this man gradually approached, the woman used her makeup wipes to rapidly discharge makeup. Then, the girl turned around and showed a ugly male face, which means she eventually became a man. The girl became safe because her good-looking face disappeared with the use of Purcotton wipes. Also, the background music changed from tense to funny, and the video ended with the sound of vomiting. Purcotton uses the video to promote its makeup remover wipes to show the efficiency of its product.

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