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What should Hermès do to recover from PETA's allegations?

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Hermès Metamorphosis campaign

By SARAH JONES

French leather goods house Hermès is facing continued pressure from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals following the activist organization's allegations last month of mistreatment of alligators and crocodiles that eventually become its handbags and watches.

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Luxury Daily

After PETA released video footage of farms that it linked to the brand, Hermès issued a statement to press, but remained quiet on social media even in the face of hundreds of negative comments. The brand broke its approximate month of silence on social media July 27 with a social video for its scarves, but is this return to normal enough to change the conversation around the label?

"The recent situation involving Hermès and its crocodile suppliers could very well be a situation of 'When bad things happen to good companies,'" said Christine Ferrell, marketing director for the [Global Luxury Management program](#) at NC State University's Jenkins Graduate School of Management, Raleigh, NC. "That said, it definitely fits the bill of a public relations crisis for the high profile luxury goods company.

"Typically, brands in crisis will fight to ensure they are at least one step ahead of any forthcoming information, proactively offering statements of explanation, contrition or commitment," she said. "While Hermès was initially silent, its late June declaration of its commitment to working with quality suppliers puts a stake in the ground. And, by remaining silent on the issue across social media channels, Hermes is signaling its stake hasn't moved."

Ms. Ferrell is not affiliated with Hermès, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Hermès was unable to comment directly, but has issued a statement, included below.

Silent treatment

PETA's video was released only days before the brand's runway show on June 27. The film follows two anonymous guides through farms in Zimbabwe and Texas that supposedly supply Hermès with skins, with these workers providing a rundown of the conditions the animals are raised in, which they say includes life in crowded concrete pits or dirty pools.

This film also shows footage of the process used to kill the animals, which allegedly includes repetitive shots from a bolt gun or being cut while they are still able to feel pain.

According to PETA, the video has been watched more than 19 million times across its channels, including Facebook and YouTube. The organization has also worked to get viewers to act, with a petition garnering 67,000 signatures as of press time and pushes to share their disagreement on social media.

Many did just that, filling Hermès' Facebook page with negative comments, reposting the PETA video or asking for the brand to stop producing any products with animal skins. Some talked directly to the Hermès audience, attempting to spur a boycott of the brand.

Linda Newbery Adorable, cute and pretty? Hermes is not so keen for you to know the conditions in which alligators and crocodiles are farmed and killed to make luxury products. If you care about animal welfare, please boycott Hermes.
Like · Reply · 107 · June 24 at 2:17pm

Jean Harrington-Culbertson Handmade with skins of tortured crocodiles and alligators! Not at all adorable, cute and pretty if you saw what they do to make these!!! STOP the abuse!!! I have a hermes handbag but after seeing how they torture and abuse the animals who's hides are used to make them, I won't be buying any more and I will be a voice against it to friends and family!!
Like · Reply · 91 · June 24 at 1:41pm

Gary Williams Please stop selling the skins taken from alligators. Whilst producing Adorable, cute, pretty products here. You are encouraging and condoning barbaric, blood thirsty torture elsewhere
[http://investigations.peta.org/crocodile-alligator.../...](http://investigations.peta.org/crocodile-alligator.../)



Exposed: Crocodiles and Alligators
Factory-Farmed for Hermès 'Luxury'...
INVESTIGATIONS.PETA.ORG

Like · Reply · 184 · June 24 at 1:42pm
↳ 6 Replies

Shannon Browne Bertuch Sorry. I just watched the video of the Hermes owned alligator and crocodile concrete factories where these magnificent ancient reptiles live on top of each other and then are cruelly slaughtered and it isnt adorable or cute or pretty. All for the bir... See More
Like · Reply · 194 · June 24 at 11:48am
↳ 3 Replies

Alicia Madden Please stop selling products made crocodile and alligator skins. It breaks my heart to hear that Hermes, a brand that i hold at high standards and wear, is engaged in this terrible practice and cruelty to animals.
Like · Reply · 67 · June 24 at 1:42pm
↳ 1 Reply

Comments received by Hermès

While the brand did not respond to negative comments, on Instagram, some of Hermès' followers defended the brand, saying that it is no different than other luxury houses that use similar materials.

Hermès did issue a statement to press, including [The New York Times](#), which quoted the brand as saying, "Hermès has established a strong network of farm partners to secure its supply in the highest skin quality. All our skins used by Hermès are sourced from farms where Hermès demands the best farming conditions, which conform to the international regulations.

"These farms respect the rules established by the Washington Convention (1972), which defines the parameters of the protection of specific species. These rules, established under the aegis of the U.N.O., were beneficial for the protection of crocodiles: These farms reintroduce into the wild a part of their farm breeding program, which therefore assists in regulating the local ecosystems.

"Hermès is continuously verifying all procedures. Any nonconforming parties will be dealt with accordingly and will be sanctioned."

The label used the media to handle publication of the statement, rather than sharing it to its social channels.

“We immediately released a statement in response to media inquiries as we take these concerns seriously,” said Hermès.

PETA meanwhile worked to generate more social content surrounding the campaign, staging demonstrations in front of Hermès stores. Here, a woman would dress in an alligator suit and sit atop a platform dripping with blood while protestors held up signs around her.



After looking into the allegations further, Hermès issued a second statement, saying, "We are deeply shocked by the video of alligators being slaughtered in Texas which has been circulating recently. Some of the images are very difficult to watch.

"Some of the sequences from the film, currently being shared on the Internet, were filmed before our partnership agreements with the farms. The farms shown do not belong to Hermès. The Texas farm furnishes tanneries with alligator skins which are mainly used for watch bracelets and not for bags.

"All of our partner farms must respect our rules scrupulously; these rules were established under the aegis of the U.N.O, by the Washington Convention of 1973 which defines the protection of endangered species.

"Hermès imposes the highest standards on its partner farms concerning the ethical treatment of crocodiles in line with the recommendations of expert veterinarians and the Fish and Wildlife, the federal organization for nature protection. These practices have contributed to saving the species in the United States by repopulating the alligators in their natural habitat.

"For more than 10 years Hermès has organized audits and monthly visits to check its partners' practices in the different phases of farming as well as their conformity to expert veterinarians and the Fish and Wildlife in the United States.

"An audit has been underway these last few weeks in the Texas farm and, depending on the outcome, we will decide if we cease purchasing alligator skins originating from this farm. We are continuing our rigorous auditing with all our suppliers. Any breach of these high standards will be rectified and sanctioned."

After remaining off social media from around the time the allegations surfaced, Hermès published a social video for its scarf collection, which shows a woman in a black mask running through the streets of Paris at night. While this does not relate to the debate happening around the brand's leather goods, a couple of posts did mention the PETA standpoint.



Facebook post from Hermès

However, the negative comments were outweighed by positive responses from brand fans, showing the possibility of a slowdown in criticism of the brand.

"Only time will tell whether this approach will fare well for the company, but it's likely to assume they may see a short-term dip in sales, followed by a recovery not too far down the line," Ms. Ferrell said. "Consumers tend to have a short-term memory when issues like this arise surrounding otherwise beloved products."

Response time

Luxury brands have frequently been the target of activist organizations.

International environmental organization Greenpeace put pressure on eight luxury fashion brands to revise their production processes after finding toxic chemicals in their apparel and accessories.

Greenpeace studied 27 children's clothing and footwear items from luxury brands, finding that 16 of those contained one or more hazardous chemicals. With luxury consumers aware of the environmental impact of their clothing purchases, many luxury fashion houses may reform their practices to stay in good public opinion ([see story](#)).

They have also been the subject of news exposes. However, how a brand handles the press make a substantial impact on public perception.

Italian outerwear label Moncler assured its down suppliers' compliance with principles outlined by the European Down and Feather Association following claims of animal cruelty by a television program.

The show, which aired on the station RAI in Italy, showed footage of geese being injured by the plucking methods used by a plant in Hungary. A day after the show, Moncler took to social media and its Web site, issuing a statement to combat allegations of wrongdoing ([see story](#)).

"Hermès likely stayed silent because there is little proof and they assumed it would go away," said Chris Ramey, president of [Affluent Insights](#), Miami, FL. "They may have foolishly thought the truth would set them free.

"PETA, and similar organizations, require issues to increase their own revenue and donations," he said. "Hermès won't allow themselves to be held hostage.

"There will be no long-term impact on Hermès. Hermès clients and best prospects have contempt for organizations that disrupt their lives."

Final Take

Sarah Jones, staff reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/1sF3M7lqzEk>

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