

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

Lancme distances itself from controversial pop star following backlash

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Lancme products

By STAFF REPORTS

Beauty marketer Lancme is facing criticism from Chinese consumers over a planned promotional concert headlined by a pro-democracy singer.

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The brand had arranged a performance featuring Denise Ho, a pop star and activist who was arrested as part of a demonstration in support of free elections in Hong Kong in 2014. Responding to online pressure from Mainland China, Lancme made the choice to cancel the concert on Sunday, June 5, a move that has only served to create a new layer of dissent.

Divided disapproval

When Ms. Ho protested for democracy with thousands of others in Hong Kong, it was seen as a challenge to Beijing's power.

Lancme's sold-out mini concert was planned for June 19, with Ms. Ho herself announcing her participation. Global Times, which is supported by the Chinese government, called Lancme's choice into question while referring to Ms. Ho as a supporter of Hong Kong independence. This post led to a lot of backlash on social media as consumers pressured Lancme to sever ties.

In an attempt to quell negativity surrounding it, the brand issued a statement, saying, "Hong Kong actress Denise Ho is not a spokesperson of Lancme. We are sorry for the confusion caused. Thank you for your continuous support of Lancme."

Lancme decided to pull the plug on the event, and it issued a second statement.

"Lancme pays utmost attention to its fans. The aim of the Energizing Factory Event is to create a happy and relaxing neighborhood event. However, due to possible safety reasons, Lancme has decided to cancel the event.

"We are deeply sorry for the disappointment and for any inconvenience this may cause."



Lancôme Juicy Shaker lip product

These statements, meant to appease mainland shoppers, instead angered Hong Kong residents, who saw the decision to cancel as disrespectful to Ms. Ho. Commenters shared their displeasure, saying that they would stop buying from the brand.

Other consumers pointed to the brand's use of traditional rather than simplified Chinese for the statements as out-of-touch, using the language choice as a signifier of a larger cultural lack of understanding.

While operating an international brand, other labels have faced criticism for being out of touch with local customs and culture.

Italian fashion label Gucci decided not to take legal action against Hong Kong shops selling fake paper goods resembling its products.

In China, paper recreations of cars, mansions and other luxury branded goods are burned next to a relative's grave, with the belief that the deceased will be able to have these possessions in the afterlife. After issuing warnings to store owners, Gucci changed its tune a week later, apologizing after gaining an understanding of the custom ([see story](#)).