

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Moncler faces criticism for perceived racist cartoon

July 15, 2016



FriendsWithYou's Malfi the Penguin

By STAFF REPORTS

Outerwear label Moncler is apologizing after a cartoon penguin character used in its products and marketing offended consumers.

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Malfi, which is featured as part of Moncler's collaboration with artistic duo FriendsWithYou, received criticism from consumers who felt its face too closely resembled that of blackface minstrel caricatures. Moncler has apologized to consumers for any "distress," but has not made any mention of changing its marketing or pulling products from stores.

Courting controversy

Moncler intended to show its lighter side by working with joyful Los Angeles art collaborative FriendsWithYou.

Originally launched exclusively at Moncler's Ginza Tokyo boutique, the collection brings some of FriendsWithYou's recurring characters to the brand's parkas, giving them a playful touch. The FriendsWithYou collection centers on the characters Happy Virus, a smiling cylindrical figure; Malfi, a cartoon penguin and Cloudy ([see story](#)).

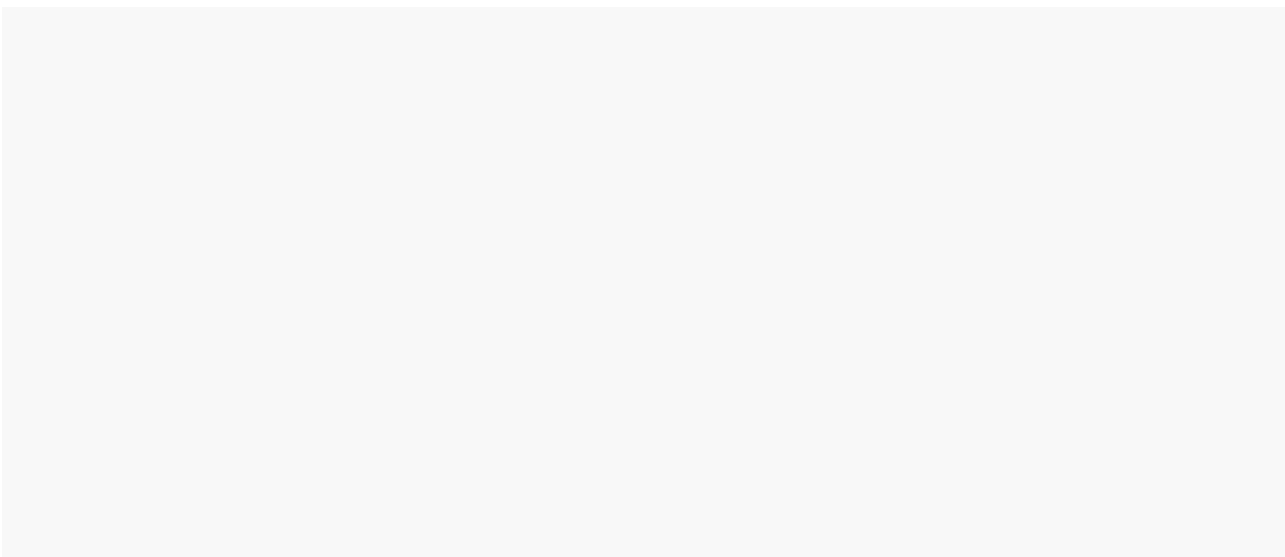
After its initial run in Japan, Moncler is now bringing the collection to global consumers. When promoting the line to consumers on social media, Moncler received many comments that voiced concern over the racial undertones of the character.



Moncler window display featuring Malfi

Some compared it to the golly doll, a fictional black character developed by Florence Kate Upton. This rag doll figure, with black skin, white-rimmed eyes and a large red mouth, appeared in children's books and was produced as a toy until the 1970s, finding popularity especially in Europe and Australia.

In Moncler's apology, it mentions FriendsWithYou's goal to promote "global friendship." However, this message received continued criticism, since Malfi was included in the post.



We are so sorry for any offence caused by the use of the stylised face of the penguin character 'Malfi' on some items of clothing. Malfi the Penguin is one of a cast of characters created by artist duo FriendsWithYou whose message is first and foremost one of global friendship. We are deeply troubled if the face, seen out of its context, could be associated with past or present unacceptable, racially offensive caricatures. This could not have been further from our thinking and we unreservedly apologise for any distress that this may have caused.

A photo posted by Moncler (@moncler) on Jul 15, 2016 at 7:02am PDT

Sometimes brand responses to negative sentiment can only add fuel to the fire.

Some defended the brand, saying that it did not need to apologize for something done as an innocent art project.

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

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 only served to create a new layer of dissent ([see story](#)).

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