

AUTOMOTIVE

Will this KOL scandal derail Rolls-Royce Motor Cars in China?

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A misstep in China is never welcome. Image credit: Shutterstock



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British luxury brand [Rolls-Royce Motor Cars](#) is facing a severe backlash in China over a miscast commercial.

On Oct. 14, the automaker posted a commercial featuring married influencer couple Lin Han and Lei Wanying taking a road trip in the luxurious Cullinan Rolls-Royce SUV in the northwest of the country. Immediately, furious netizens denounced the use of the controversial, lowbrow duo who were seen as at odds with the social status of Rolls-Royce owners.

As the company was widely lambasted for its "poor taste," the video was quickly withdrawn from Weibo.

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Rolls-Royce's commercial featuring celebrity couple Lin Han and Lei Wanying was removed from Weibo following netizen backlash. Image credit: Weibo

The Jing Take: In 2019, Rolls-Royce had a record [year](#), with 5,152 cars sold to customers in more than 50 countries. China is its second biggest market after the United States which accounts for a third of sales but during the pandemic it recorded "[pretty close to zero](#)" sales in the country.

Still, in 2020, the company's China director, Leon Li, was upbeat at the Beijing auto show, telling [CGTN](#) that China sales had so far outperformed expectations, and he would stay cautiously optimistic for 2021.

In light of this expected uptick, a scandal is never welcome in this market especially an avoidable one.

Overwhelmingly, citizens are blaming the company for simply failing to conduct proper due diligence and therefore bringing this fiasco upon itself. And, although the company reacted quickly by quite rightly removing the video and issuing an apology, this failed to diffuse reactions.

Even Wang Sicong the son of Chinese tycoon Wang Jian Lin, who founded Dalian Wanda Group added his voice to the thousands castigating the heritage brand online.

Boasting 41.4 million followers, Mr. Wang's comments have sparked a tsunami of support with many endorsing his comment with: "I won't buy too."

In a country where personal endorsement ranks high, public outcries such as this may likely pose a threat to the prestigious car company's expected sales and the brand itself.

"We will work hard to create a better brand experience," Rolls-Royce responded.

But will this be enough to rescue itself from such an avoidable [PR disaster](#)?

Furthermore, with strong parallels to the aftermath of the Dolce & Gabbana scandal, the outspoken Mr. Lin escalated the issue by countering many of the online posts which only drew even more attention to the incident. This unnecessary misstep proves, yet again, just how much rides on keeping your key opinion leader [KOL] strategies on track in China.

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