

Durex: Controversy About Marketing Campaign on Sex Well-Being

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On April 19, 2019, Durex initiated the #419SleeplessNight topic on Weibo and took the opportunity to interact with the popular brand HEYTEA in the milk tea industry. “419” is referred to as “for one night.” The joint marketing campaign, advocating for sex well-being between the brand Durex and the milk tea brand HEYTEA was very eye-catching. The two brands engaged in a dialogue through their official social media accounts. However, this dialogue was also widely discussed and criticized by the public and netizens in China. Many netizens considered that the dialogue contained strong sexual insinuations. Considering the current situation and cultural background of sex education in China, this case study on the Durex 419 event aims to provide a reference for the brand communication and product marketing of sexual well-being brands in the Chinese market. This case study will first introduce the brand communication and marketing strategy of sex well-being brands in China. Then, it will present the netizens’ reactions as well as the brand response.

BRAND BACKGROUND

Type of Business

Durex conducts a strategic combination of demographic and psychological strategies to provide couples with enjoyment along with safety. Though using a differentiated target strategy, Durex mainly focuses on young people aged 18-40 with middle-to-high income in first- and second-tier cities in China. Durex positions itself not only as a condom company but as a company caring about the sexual and emotional well-being of people globally (Bhasin, 2019).

Durex's products focus on elements of fun, comfort, and pleasure. Durex has three product categories: condoms, lubricants, and sex toys. Condoms include the 001 series, the long-lasting pleasure series, the thin air sense series, the intimate ultra-thin series, the X series, the fun and pleasure series, and the safe and confident series. Lubricants include the soothing massage series, human body lubrication series, and women's pleasure growth series. Sex toys include the vibrator series, vibrating egg series, and male boosters 1.

Since different product categories have different customer bases, the pricing policy of Durex is diversified. The young generation requires comfort and fun and is willing to pay a higher price premium than the middle-aged. Flexible policies enable the products to be affordable and reasonable for customers (Bhasin, 2019).

Among the three categories sold on Durex Taobao Mall, condoms include five series, lubricants have three series, and sex toys have two series. The condoms are divided according to thinness and softness. From thick to thin, they are the safety and confidence series, ultra-thin series, Air series, and 003 series. The 003 series is softer than the 001 series. Generally speaking, the thinner the softer the condom, the better the sex experience and the higher the relative price. The following is the price of condoms in yuan, and the price in parentheses in USD is based on the exchange rate of ¥ 6.3/\$.

Table 1. Price of condoms in yuan and USD

Series	Price in yuan	Price in dollars
001 ultra-thin	26.4	\$4.19
003 ultra-thin	13.2	\$2.09
safety and confidence	4.5	\$0.71
ultra-thin	5.5	\$0.87
AiR	12	\$1.90

Lubricants are divided into three series: K-Y lubricants, love gel lubricants, and pleasure enhancers. Among them, the love gel lubricants and pleasure-enhancers are designed for females. Hyaluronic Acid Lubricant is one of a series of love gel lubricants, and the product description claims that plant-derived hyaluronic acid is rich in natural hyaluronic acid, which can pamper the private parts while enhancing the sexual experience. The price of lubricants is around ¥ 100 (\$15.9). The pleasure enhancer is mainly to make the female body more sensitive and increase the pleasure of sex.

Sex toys are mainly two series of vibrating eggs and vibrators. Sex toys are mainly designed to take care of the physical needs of and to enhance the sexual pleasure of females. The vibrator comes in three price points: ¥ 349.9 (\$55.5), ¥ 239.9 (\$38.1), and ¥ 95 (\$15.1). While vibrating eggs have two prices: ¥ 89.9 (\$14.27) and ¥ 129.9 (\$20.6).

Durex holds more than 30% market share worldwide. Durex's products are available in numerous countries due to its various distribution channels, like supermarkets, adult stores, and online shopping portals (Arsalan, 2018).

The main marketing concept is enhancing pleasure during sex. Durex adopts aggressive promotion strategies, using numerous media - both traditional media like television, magazines, and newspapers and social media like Weibo and Instagram - to promote its positive brand awareness around the world.

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