

International students complained about stepping into the sales trap of Botanifique

Many international students complained about the sales tricks and after-sales service of the Botanifique shop in Melbourne Central in July 2023, causing them financial losses and psychological harm.

Ashley Lou, an RMIT international student, claimed that Botanifique employees kept her trying the sample of peeling gel, which she thought cost \$50, only to find out it was \$350 when she paid. She was alone at the time and relatively new to skincare products, so she ended up paying for it out of fear and helplessness.

"Because it was too expensive, I searched for this brand I had never heard of after the purchase, and the negative comments from many users made me realize that it might be a scam," Lou said.

Within four hours of her purchase, Melbourne Central only suggested that Lou communicate with the Botanifique. Lou repeatedly approached the store through on-site communication or emails to request a refund for the unopened product. However, the store's responses were vague or denials, which caused her great anxiety.

Lou wrote a report to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)." They called me for feedback, but they spoke so quickly that I didn't hear much clearly," said Lou.

She recalled that the store clerk did not issue her a receipt in time. Instead, the clerk took her to another branch of the same name on Collins Street under the pretext of free facial treatment and tried to sell her \$2000 of products similarly forcefully. After Lou sternly refused, the salesperson finally issued a receipt for the peeling gel and got mad at her.

Lou shared her experience on a popular social platform, Little Red Book, frequented by international students. She said that in more than 300 comments, many people expressed that they had also experienced aggressive product promotion from the Botanifique.

Some netizens in the comments said this store constantly brainwashes customers, the prices of the same product are inconsistent, and some people even get dermatitis after using products from Botanifique.

Lou believes that the Botanifique employs several sales tricks. Their target customers are mainly introverted and international students with limited English communication

skills. Staff often claim to have Chinese relatives or friends, which lowers the interviewee's guard.

"Businesses exploit loopholes; once the consumer has paid, there seems to be no basis for the previous staff misconduct towards the consumer," said Lou.

According to Consumer Affairs, the In-store Policies reveal that if some stores and chains have an in-store policy to offer a refund, this policy should be clearly displayed at the point of sale. The Refund rights reveal, "stores and sellers cannot take away these rights by claiming they have a 'no refund' policy for sale items, or displaying a 'no refund' sign." However, "They put up posters in an inconspicuous place, but they deny it," Lou said.

Lou gave some advice for international students: be brave enough to refuse, not disclose any private information, and, if necessary, they have to communicate with their family and friends in time or seek help from the school.

"These kinds of stores specifically hire foreign workers, and their wages are entirely based on sales commissions. If anyone wants justice, they can contact the local Channel Nine to expose them," said Libra Wang, another employee working in Melbourne Central.