

Asian women accuse Sephora of discrimination in blocking accounts

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Four women have filed a lawsuit in New York accusing the Sephora cosmetics concern of discrimination in blocking and deactivating the accounts of "Asian-sounding" customers as the company sought to discourage the reselling of its products.

New York attorney Douglas Wigdor on Tuesday filed a class-action lawsuit against Sephora and its parent, LVMH

Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton Inc, in federal court in Manhattan. During an online sale on Nov 6, Sephora's website crashed. The next day the company posted a statement about the crash.

"What caused the disruption yesterday was a high level of bulk buys and automated accounts for reselling purposes from North America and multiple countries outside the US," Sephora said in the posting. "We have, indeed, deactivated due to reselling - a pervasive issue throughout the

industry and the world."

The lawsuit alleges that customers with Asian-sounding names or e-mail addresses with Chinese domains were blocked from the site after it crashed.

"My clients had no intention of selling Sephora products," Wigdor told China Daily in an interview. "If Sephora would have checked their own records they would have found that my clients made small purchases."

Two of the clients, Xiao Xiao and Tiantian Zou, reside in

New York. Jiali Chen lives in Columbus, Ohio, and Man Xu in Philadelphia. Wigdor said the four have chosen not to speak publicly.

Sephora didn't respond to China Daily's request for comment.

The lawsuit said that despite significant media coverage of "shop and frisk" cases where companies have been accused of discriminating against minority customers while shopping in retail stores, Sephora has taken this practice to the Internet.

"It's against the law for a company to take a wholesale approach and target a specific group," Wigdor said. "There are other ways Sephora could have handled this. For example, they could have limited purchases."

He said he is not aware of other ethnic groups that have been denied access or had their accounts blocked by Sephora.

By blocking or deactivating the accounts, customers lost the reward points they had accumulated after making previous purchases.