

How is Vague Language Being Used in Retail Websites for Bamboo Viscose Products?

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Introduction

In a press release dated August 11, 2009, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) announced that “Bamboo-based Textiles, Actually Made of Rayon, Are Not Antimicrobial, Made in an Environmentally Friendly Manner, or Biodegradable”. However, many retailers continue using such claims in their product description or ads for bamboo viscose products. As a result, the FTC was forced to warn 78 retailers “to stop labeling and advertising rayon textile products as Bamboo” and posed a fine of \$1.26 million to four (Amazon, Leon Max, Macys, and Sears) retailers who ignored the warning (FTC 2009, 2010, 2013 & 2016). It appears most of these retailers have stopped such claims. However, what about the many other retailers who advertise “bamboo fiber products?”

Methods

This study was conducted on 115 worldwide retailers who advertised the sale of bamboo fiber products. The study excluded the warned or fined retailers by the FTC in the US as they have revised their ads and descriptions. To collect detailed data, only one retailer of the same manufacturer was chosen when they have similar ads. All the data were collected from retailers’ and their respective producers’ website or by email communication.

Results and Discussions

Most of the bamboo retailers are found to be of the US (42.61%), Australia (17.39%), UK (12.17%) and Canada (6.96%). Retailers from Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, India, Denmark, France, Switzerland, Russia, Japan, Israel, Sweden, Czech Republic, Spain, Belgium, Philippines, and New Zealand made up 17.39%. It was observed that 3.48% retailers did not reveal their country. The biggest portion of the retailers, 50%, did not reveal the country where the product was manufactured on their websites. Those that did tell where the bamboo fiber products were manufactured showed that most are produced in China (23%) and, the US and US-affiliated areas (11%). The majority, 82% of the bamboo fabric products, was found to be viscose through the descriptions or compositions information from the manufacturers’ websites. The other 18% of the retailers’ goods were not identified as either viscose or natural bamboo fiber. Only 10% of the retailers used ‘viscose’ in the product description or ads. In the compositional information, 46% of the retailers mentioned “viscose from bamboo”, while the other 54% of retailers never stated ‘viscose’ or natural bamboo, leaving the description

ambiguous. Only 12% of the retailers described their fiber production processes briefly, while 88% did not include any such information. At least 79% retailers claimed the fabrics to be eco-friendly, organic, biodegradable or of equivalent terms. Of the retailers, 53% discussed the benefits or properties of bamboo plants rather than of fibers. Also, 64% of the retailers declared their fabrics to be antibacterial, antimicrobial or anti-fungal. These properties cannot be associated with viscose just because the starting material is bamboo as noted by the FTC. It can be concluded that though the products are viscose with the starting material as bamboo, most of the retailers were using vague or potentially inaccurate information and descriptions that could lead to confusion for the consumer.

Selected References

FTC. (2009, 2010, 2013, 2016). FTC Charges Companies with “Bamboozling” Consumers with False Product Claims/ FTC Warns 78 Retailers.../ Four National Retailers Agree to Pay Penalties Labeling Textiles as Made of Bamboo.../ “Bamboo” Fabrics. Federal Trade Commission. www.ftc.gov/bamboo-textiles.