



Trading places: A Moscow store bearing the name of health and beauty brand L'Occitane, but in Russian

NEWS / UKRAINE WAR

# On sale in Moscow... top brands that promised to quit over Ukraine invasion

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TOP brands are back on sale in Russia just over a year after Western firms said they were closing stores in protest at Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

A Mail on Sunday investigation can reveal that many leading shops, including Rolex, Samsung, Apple and Mango, are open in Moscow's busy shopping centres.

This newspaper also found Burberry, Alexander McQueen, Ralph Lauren and Balenciaga sections open in Russia's top department store, Tsum.

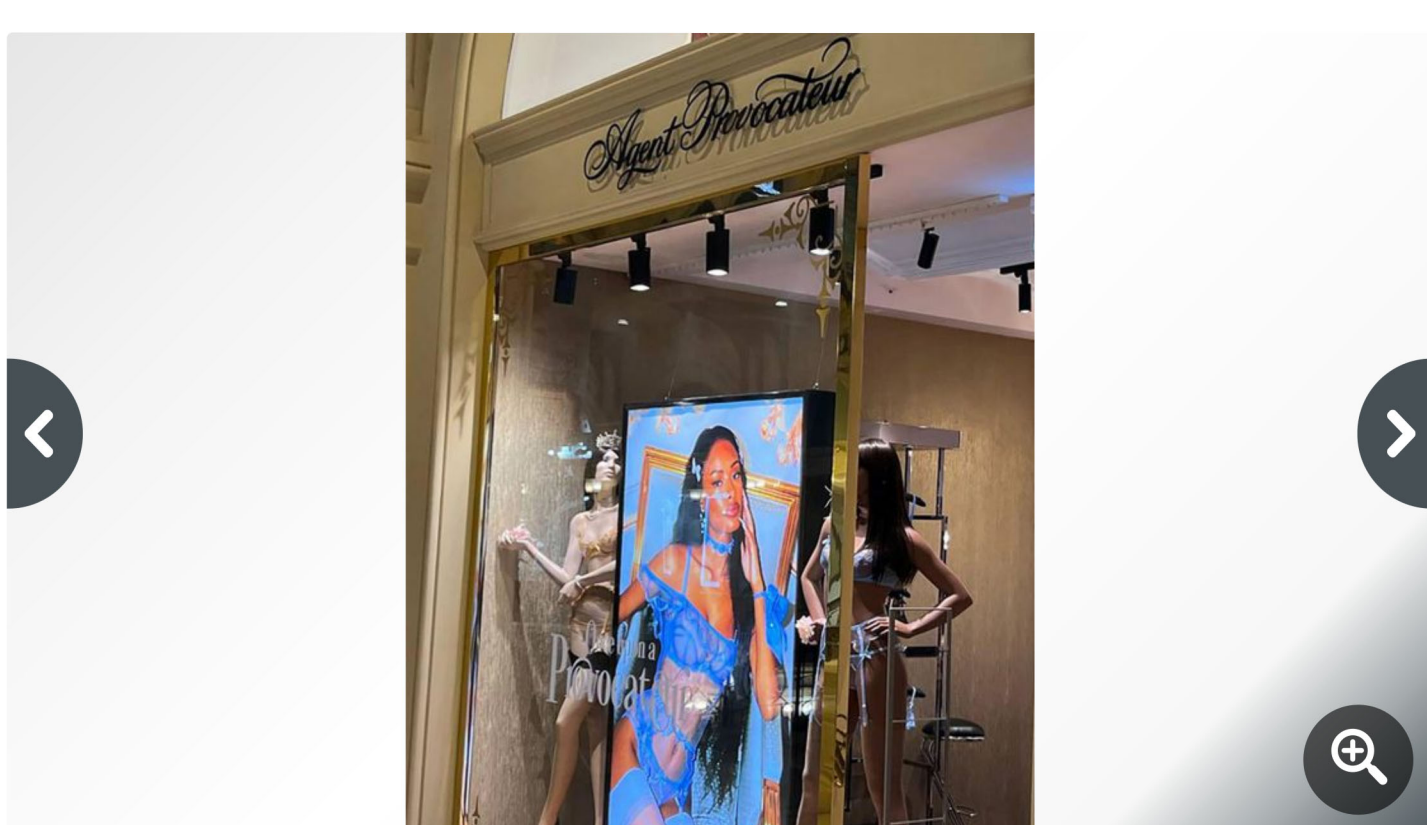
MPs and campaigners last night accused the brands of being guilty of virtue signalling and failing to honour their pledge. The companies claim they have handed over control to third parties operating in Russia, but critics say this is a 'cop-out'.

Dozens of firms pulled out of Russia when Putin's forces invaded Ukraine in February 2022. But last week, our team of reporters found many of those stores open once more in Moscow.

The Samsung store at Aviapark mall stocked the latest QLED TVs priced from £2,000, despite the Korean firm having previously said it had stopped shipments.

The cashier at the Alexander McQueen section in Tsum - Russia's equivalent to Harrods - told our reporter: 'The new collection arrived last week, in all sizes.'

Even the Paul Smith store in Aviapark remained open, despite the UK fashion brand saying it was halting its Russian operations three months ago following a backlash from British consumers.



Lingerie shop Agent Provocateur

One shopper in Moscow said: 'We laugh when we hear we can no longer buy top brands. You can't beat Putin so easily.'

Tory MP Bob Seely, who sits on the Foreign Affairs Committee, said: 'Those that continue to trade in Moscow and elsewhere are going to do themselves reputational harm, and deservedly so.'

'It's not good enough to blame third-party franchises. That sounds like a cop-out. I cannot believe that they do not have a clause in their legal agreements to suspend supply in extreme circumstances. If they have no control over these stores then why have they agreed to license their brand name and logos used in the stores?'

Spanish retailer Mango announced it was going to close its shops and stop online sales in Russia in 2022. But our reporters in Moscow found one of its stores open and trading.

L'Occitane shut Russian stores and operations in April last year. At the time, the firm said it had taken the decision 'given the enormous human suffering being caused by military action in Ukraine'.

But last week, The Mail on Sunday found the L'Occitane store still operating in Aviapark. A spokesman said the firm had 'completed the divestiture of its business in Russia to local management on June 3, 2022, and had no control over the open store in Moscow'.

Swiss luxury watch maker Rolex is also open in the elite GUM department store in Moscow's famous Red Square despite the firm saying it would halt all exports to Russia in March last year.

The shop has the Rolex sign above the door. But a spokesman said it was operated by 'a privately owned local retailer' selling old stock, adding: 'Rolex does not own any companies nor properties in Russia.'

Earlier this year, the Daily Mail revealed that British retailers Paul Smith and Agent Provocateur were still open for business in Moscow. Following a backlash, Paul Smith announced it was closing its stores. Yet both its and Agent Provocateur's shops remained open last week.

A spokesperson for Paul Smith said: 'Under the terms of our contract with the franchisee in Russia, they are permitted to operate the stores independently. We have no jurisdiction over them.'

The MoS also found Apple stores open and selling the latest iPhone 14 Pro models, which were released last September.

The sportswear brand Reebok, which said it was ceasing business in Russia in 2022, was being sold in a store rebranded as Sneaker Box.

In May, Putin legalised the supply of some restricted Western goods from brands including Apple.

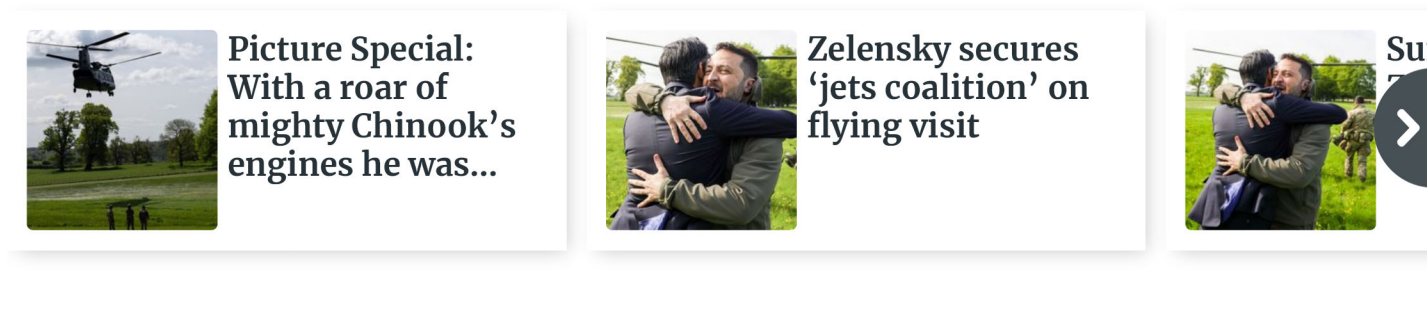
But the Moral Rating Agency, which campaigns against Western firms trading in Russia, said: 'Blaming the franchisee is just another case of moral washing. Having a franchise agreement is zero excuse for failing to pull products or a brand from Russia.'

A spokesperson for Samsung said: 'Samsung does not operate retail stores in Russia. Shipments to Russia remain suspended.'

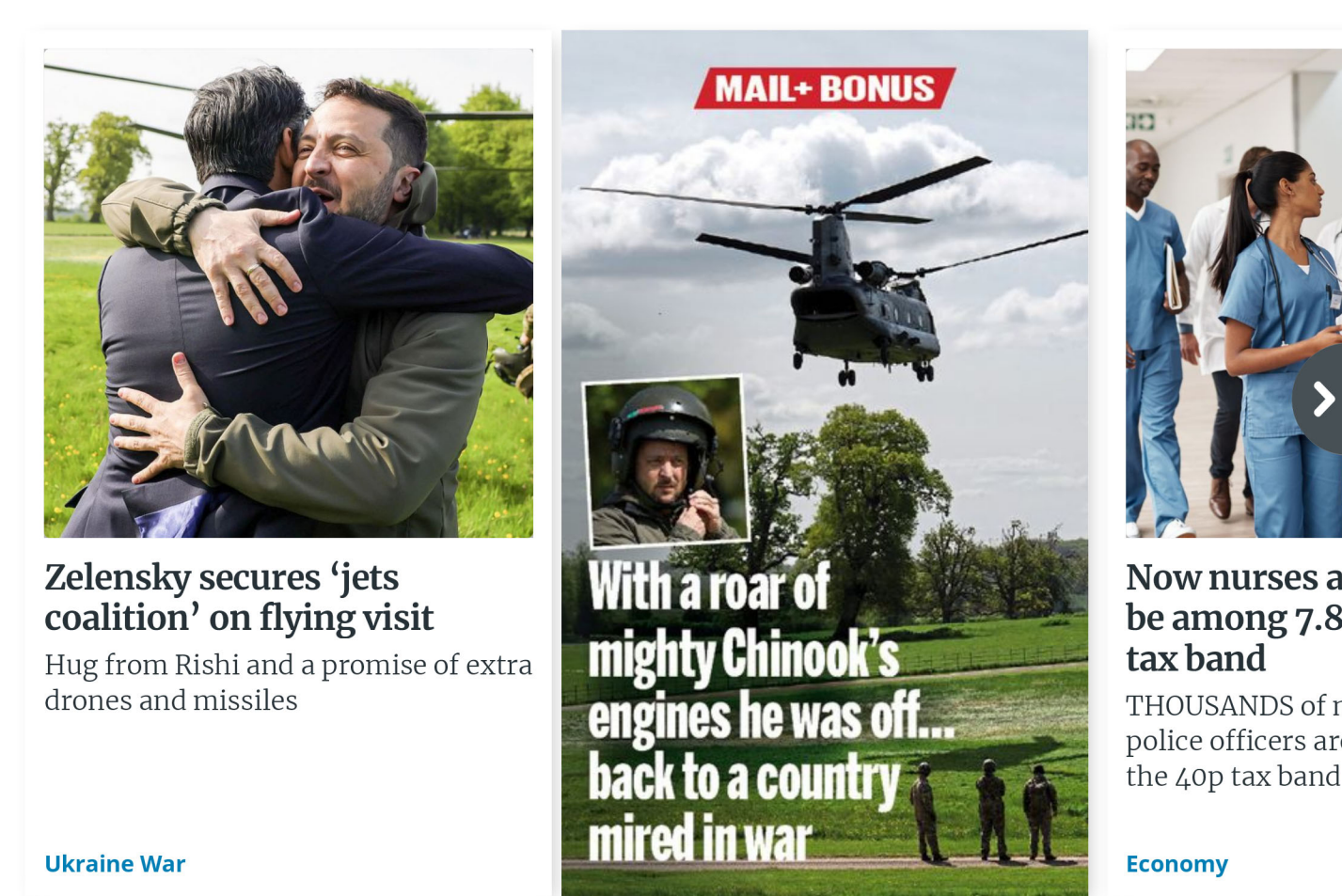
Burberry said all items were old stock and that it is not responsible for wholesale partners, adding: 'Burberry ceased all shipments to Russia in 2022.' Ralph Lauren said its products were sold through franchisees, and Agent Provocateur said the same. A spokesman for Kering, which owns Alexander McQueen and Balenciaga, said: 'Our brands ceased all deliveries to Russia following the outbreak of the war.' Apple, Mango and Reebok did not respond to requests to comment.

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