

# Chinese e-shoppers spend billions on “Singles Day”

By Joe McDonald  
AP Business Writer

**B**EIJING — In a bright spot for China’s cooling economy, online shoppers spent billions of dollars on “Singles Day,” a quirky holiday that has grown into the world’s busiest day for e-commerce.

The country’s biggest e-commerce brand, Alibaba Group, said sales by the thousands of retailers on its platforms passed 91.2 billion yuan (\$13.4 billion) in the first 15 hours of the event. That is four times the \$3 billion research firm comScore says Americans spent in total last year on Cyber Monday, the biggest online shopping day in the U.S.

Rivals including JD.com, VIP.com, and Suning offered deep discounts on clothing, smartphones, travel packages, and other goods to attract shoppers.

JD.com, the country’s biggest online direct retailer and Alibaba’s top rival, said it tested delivery by drone to customers in four rural areas in what the company believed to be the first commercial use of such service. The company said its sales passed last year’s Singles Day total at 1:33pm, but gave no financial amount.

Singles Day was begun by Chinese college students in the 1990s as a version of Valentine’s Day for people without romantic partners.

The November 11 date was picked to be “11.11” — four singles. Young people treat each other to dinner or give gifts to woo



that special someone and end their single status.

The spending gives a boost to the ruling Communist Party’s efforts to nurture consumer-based economic growth and reduce reliance on trade and investment.

E-commerce sales in China rose by 26.1 percent in the first nine months of the year. Economic growth for that period held steady at 6.7 percent, but that was its lowest level since the 2008 global crisis.

Forecasters expect the economy to cool further next year as regulators try to rein in a boom in bank lending and real estate sales that is pushing up debt levels and housing costs.

China has the biggest population of internet users at 710 million, according to government data. Some 410 million people shop online for goods ranging from clothing and groceries to manicures and plane tickets.

“Online shopping is getting more and more common,” said He Mei, an employee of a health products company in her 30s who had waited for Singles Day to buy an indoor air filtering machine at a discount.

“Young guys, especially those in their 20s, don’t really go out to buy things, and they buy pretty much everything online,” she said. “It’s so easy and it saves time and money.”

**EXTREME E-COMMERCE.** Models take part in a fashion show to coincide with “Singles Day” at JD.com headquarters in Beijing, China. In a bright spot for China’s cooling economy, online shoppers spent billions of dollars on Singles Day, a quirky holiday that has grown into the world’s busiest day for e-commerce. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

The migration of Chinese consumers to online commerce and entertainment is squeezing traditional retailers, cinemas, and other businesses, forcing them to improve service and add offerings.

E-commerce has risen from three percent of Chinese consumer spending in 2010 to 15 percent last year, according to Boston Consulting Group. It forecasts online spending will rise by 20 percent a year, hitting \$1.6 trillion by 2020, compared with six percent growth for offline retail.

Researchers attribute the rapid rise of Singles Day to demographics and timing.

University graduates who adopted the holiday earn more and shop online. Also, Singles Day comes as people receive monthly paychecks and need to buy winter clothes.

Unlike other events such as the Lunar New Year, China’s biggest family holiday, it involves few other expenses such as travel or banquets, leaving more money for gifts.

This year, Alibaba hired actress Scarlett Johansson, football star David Beckham, basketball legend Kobe Bryant, and pop-rock band One Republic for a pre-sale gala that was broadcast online to drum up attention.

## China bans ‘fatty’ Kim Jong Un nickname on websites

**B**EIJING (AP) — Chinese websites are censoring “Kim Fatty the Third,” a nickname widely used to disparage North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, after officials from his country reportedly conveyed their displeasure in a meeting with their Chinese counterparts.

Searches for the Chinese words “Jin San Pang” on the search engine Baidu and microblogging platform Weibo returned no results recently.

The nickname pokes fun at Kim’s girth and his status as the third generation of the Kim family to rule the world’s only hereditary communist dynasty. It’s

especially popular among young, irreverent Chinese who tend to look down on their country’s would-be ally.

Relations between China and North Korea have been strained by the North’s nuclear weapons program, which China has condemned along with South Korea, Japan, the United States, and Russia. But Beijing continues to support the Kim regime with limited trade and diplomatic backing.

North Korean officials, fearing that Kim would find out about the nickname, lodged a formal request with China recently to prohibit names disparaging Kim from

appearing in the media, according to Hong Kong newspaper reports.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said reports of the banning of “Jin San Pang” didn’t “comply with facts.”

“The Chinese government stays committed to building a healthy and civilized environment of opinions,” he added. “We disapprove of referring to the leader of any country with insulting and mocking remarks.”

“Kim Fatty the Third” is such a widely used term in China that it is sometimes

suggested by auto-complete algorithms on web portals such as Baidu, China’s leading search engine. While searches for “Jin San Pang” returned no results earlier this month, Baidu left untouched results for other versions of the nickname, such as “Kim Fat Fat Fat.”

Baidu spokeswoman Tracy Hu declined to comment.

The Beijing-based company has typically said that its policy is to provide accurate search results while also complying with Chinese regulations.

## South Korea to test self-driving car in real traffic

**S**EOUL, South Korea (AP) — Self-driving cars soon will hit the road in South Korea.

Seoul National University professor Seo Seung-woo said that a self-driving car developed by his team will start roaming Seoul streets early next year thanks to a revised law that took effect this month.

His team has been testing automated driving inside the university campus with

a Genesis sedan outfitted with sensors and cameras. The vehicle drove more than 10,000 kilometers without incident in the past two years, but could not leave the campus because of regulations.

The new law allows automated cars to travel public roads around the country.

Seo unveiled two upgraded self-driving vehicles that can navigate narrow streets. One of them will be tested in traffic after it is certified by the government.



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