Alibaba Wraps Its First 11-Day Singles Day With $75B

In the past 11 years, Singles Day has become what Joe Tsai, executive vice chairman of Alibaba Group, called the most important shopping day in China. But, in 2020, it has taken on additional significance as an opportunity for brands to flourish after the pandemic—and to capitalize on consumer desire for so-called "revenge shopping."

Last year, Alibaba set a record of $38.4 billion in just 24 hours. This year, the numbers remained impressive with 498.2 billion yuan ($75.1 billion) over 11 days. It was not clear precisely how much of that total came in on Nov. 11 specifically. However, in a blog post, Alibaba noted it sold 372.3 billion yuan from Nov. 1 to 12:30 a.m. on Nov. 11, meaning it brought in roughly 126 billion yuan ($19 billion) in 23.5 hours on the day itself.

To characterize this as a slump would be unfair. For one thing, the first hour of Singles Day typically sees huge sales. Consider this: It took Alibaba a cool 68 seconds to sell its first $1 billion last year—and it hit $10 billion within the first 30 minutes. This year, however, Alibaba has not disclosed how much consumers spent in the first half hour.

What's more, this strategy of extending an annual sale as years go by is precisely what Amazon has done with Prime Day since 2017 and apples-to-apples comparisons of hourly sales figures are rarely—if ever—made when discussing Amazon's triumphs.

In the first ten days of the extended shopping festival—although technically the first ten days and 35 minutes—13 brands surpassed 1 billion yuan ($150 million) in gross merchandise volume (GMV) apiece. Another 340 brands—including Apple, L'Oreal, Estee Lauder, Nike, Lancome and Adidas—had more than 100 million yuan ($15 million) in GMV. Other impressive stats, per Alibaba:

- On Nov. 1, it took Nike one minute to generate 100 million yuan ($15 million)
- Within two hours, 100 brands reached the same milestone
- Diane von Furstenberg matched its 2019 GMV in 23 minutes
- Coach matched its 2019 GMV in 30 minutes
- 60 million consumers used Tmall's 3D shopping feature to

browse an Ikea store remotely

‘In China today, shopping is a sport and entertainment’

According to Alibaba Group President Michael Evans, as of 11 p.m. local time on Nov. 11, U.S. businesses accounted for more than $5 billion of the total, making it the second biggest source of brands outside of China. Participating U.S. brands included Mattel, Fender Guitars and Bissell.

In a livestream interview with Alibaba, Max Bissell, director of robotics and managing director at the floorcare company bearing his name, said the brand more than quadrupled its 11.11 sales from last year, which he attributed to a 16-hour livestream as the brand seeks to establish itself as a newcomer in the Chinese market.

“I think the one thing to focus on first is to understand the Chinese consumer and what they’re looking for and what are the ways in which you can better engage them,” Tsai said in the livestream, wearing a blue polo shirt with the Brooklyn Nets logo. (He first bought a stake in the NBA team in 2018 and now owns it outright.)

“I would say that in China today, shopping is a sport and entertainment. It’s not just about going on to a website and scrolling through some product catalog, you need to engage the consumer, you need to give them a full experience, almost an immersive experience,” he added.

According to Evans, the “extraordinary, extraordinary” $75-billion haul over 11 days is proof both the Chinese economy has recovered from the pandemic—and consumers are not only “strong and powerful,” they are purchasing at pre-Covid levels. But that’s not to say the pandemic’s impact doesn’t linger.

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