In Focus: Christmas: A time For Giving And Receiving

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Consumer desire and initiatives from brands have brought forward Christmas purchasing and offers this year.

Christmas is becoming less of a celebration lasting days than a spiritual feeling that boosts consumption for over two months a year.

Meanwhile, with online retail now part of Christmas shopping for more shoppers, brands as well as consumers must allow extra time for deliveries, often from abroad. High street retailers need to catch up with consumers to attract their attention and benefit from their Christmas shopping plans. By the time shop fronts were ready for Christmas, many had already done their shopping.

Significantly, the act of Christmas shopping is becoming an event in itself â€“ Christmas markets and Christmas shopping tourism, for instance, are as much about enjoying the atmosphere and things like mulled wine as about buying gifts. In todayâ€™s climate, if itâ€™s a successful bargain-finding experience too, consumers will be happier.

Itâ€™s worth stressing that Christmas is a festival of emotions and even hard pressed consumers will be on the lookout for lower priced quality purchases to splurge on -Â as consumers are â€œtired of bad newsâ€• about economics leading them to â€œseek refugeâ€• â€“ and thereâ€™s no better time to do so than Christmas!

A few examples of Christmas around the world:

China
In recent years, there has been an increased focus on Christmas in China, particularly among young people who regard it as an important and fashionable day to celebrate, despite only a small portion of the population being practicing Christians. â€œWe simply just want to have some fun on this day,â€• explains 20-something Sai Wang, who works for an IT company in Beijing. â€œWestern holidays are more trendy for young people. There is no other deep reason at all,â€• he adds. Christmas Day is not legally a national holiday, but it is celebrated as much as any of the traditional Chinese festivals. Some Christmas gifts have been specifically targeted at Chinese consumers. Apples for example, are sent as symbolic gifts. Known as â€œHoly Applesâ€•, they cost five times more than usual and are packed as gifts to wish people a happy Christmas Eve.

Japan
Christmas in Japan has morphed into a romantic extravaganza marked by expensive dates and gift exchanges between young couples. Many consumers take this time to forget about all the worrisome things in life. Elderly couples tend to splurge on expensive tickets costing up to US$500 for dinner shows hosted by major hotels featuring celebrities, to join in the countdown on Christmas Eve. In recent years, thanks to the marketing prowess of Kentucky Fried Chicken, the Christmas Chicken Dinner has become very popular. Many Japanese even make reservations for their â€œKFC Christmas Chickenâ€• ahead of time with customers lining up at KFC outlets across Japan to pick up their orders.

Mexico
In Mexico, a survey published in Excelsior, a newspaper, showed that Christmas trees, snowmen, spheres and shelves with toys have already been present in supermarkets and department stores since early October, and overlapped with the Day of the Dead, celebrated at the start of November. According to the paper, in 2008, the crisis forced some shops to bring special decorations forward, in order to boost shopping in hard times. â€œNow it's become massive, everyone does that,â€• it added. However, some consumers do not see things this way. â€œI am appalled to see everything ready for Christmas. What are shops looking for? I feel the year goes by faster,â€• thinks Francisco HernÃ¡ndez, a family man.

Peru
Unlike the prevailing cautious attitude to spending in Europe & North America, in countries like Peru, according to portal Peru21, shop owners have estimated a 25-30% growth in sales for this Christmas, due to the fact that thousands of families will now be able to really go shopping for presents. â€œThis time we will see a larger number of households which rose from low to mid-income thanks to an increased purchasing power go shopping, many of them for the first time,â€• said Gonzalo Ansola, head of the Association of Commercial Centres, meaning ability to buy in shopping centres rather than street stands.

USA
Several surveys have revealed that many North American families are tired of saving up for Christmas, at least in traditional ways. One of these methods is to go to discount stores. â€œSave money, save money, save moneyâ€¦ doesn't always mean living better!â€• explains a mother of three living in Miami. She referred to Wal-Mart's slogan â€œSave money, live betterâ€•, believing that â€œwhile it's right in most cases, it doesn't always apply, because it is very tiresome to buy the same in

the same place, saving up is very tiring.â€•

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