

RETAIL

Can luxury, Singles' Day and sustainability coexist?

November 9, 2021



This year's Double 11, which is set to be the biggest one yet, coincides with the global climate summit COP26. Can the two co-exist? Image credit: Screenshot of Tmall's Double 11 campaign video, Weibo

By [Gemma A. Williams](#)

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

It is that time of year again as China is gearing up for the world's largest shopping event, Double 11.

Pre-sales kicked off Oct. 20, and with 900 million shoppers expected to take part in the festivities, this is set to be its biggest one yet.

Luxury names such as Gucci, Burberry and Chopard are among the record 290,000 brands that have all signed up to reach China's **900 million** checkout-happy consumers.

Plus, Tmall and JD are no longer the only protagonists of 11.11. Douyin also has its own Double 11 version now as well as Pinduoduo, Kuaishou and Xiaohongshu.

In the first 10 minutes of JD.com's promotion, the transaction volume of 50 high-end brands including Este Lauder, Helena Rubinstein, Clinique and Guerlain rose more than 100 percent overall.

This combined retail blitz will create a surge of activity in terms of computing power and logistics that is, frankly, mind-blowing.

However, as this is happening, so too is the global climate summit COP26, which ends the day after Double 11 officially kicks off.

As a country, China knows the impact of global warming and has suffered its fair share of natural disasters, historically and more recently.

Devastating flooding in Henan province killed more than 300 citizens this summer alone. Luxury knows this too, and **donated millions** to the relief effort. Why? Because China's consumerism propped up global luxury during the COVID-19 outbreak, and with China looking to remain in lockdown well into 2022, companies have been outdoing themselves to open stores across the country.

By 2025, China is on track to become the world's biggest global luxury market overtaking the United States. The often-

strained U.S.-China relationship is crucial for meaningful progress on global climate action at the COP26 summit.

In his speech, U.S. President Biden stated that creating an environment that raised the standard of living around the world was both a "moral" and "economic imperative." So, in a sense, this chimes with Chinese President Xi's "common prosperity" policy.

Still, China has been lined up somewhat as the villain of the event.

President Xi's personal absence has been taken as a slight, a sign of China's lack of commitment to the emergency. But in President Xi's written statement, he called on countries to focus on "concrete actions" and to harness innovations in science and tech to "accelerate the green transition."

No grandstanding then, no falling asleep either just a focus on trying to meet the numbers. As Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said, "Actions speak louder than words."

Only last week, China issued a white paper outlining its efforts to tackle global warming but in it (and perhaps what irks the outside world) China stated it will propose its own Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), including a detailed roadmap and plans to achieve those targets. But, as long as it meets them, what is the problem?

In a recent post on Instagram, Extinction Rebellion reminded the world of journalist and activist George Monbiot's article from 2015, *China Syndrome*. This is as relevant today as ever. It argues that China is not just a country. It is whatever powerful interests want it to be. It can easily be blamed for climate change, or for not doing enough.

In the fashion industry, the country's consumers are often talked about as logo-hungry cash cows by companies eager to enter the market at any cost.

But, attitudes in China are shifting and much of this is coming from the younger generations, understandably.

For example, the majority of [luxury resale](#) buyers in China are under 30. And although Double 11 is expanding, China's biggest e-commerce conglomerate Alibaba is touting this 11.11 as its greenest festival yet.

The festival has \$15.7 million worth of "green-shopping vouchers" up for grabs to encourage consumers to shop sustainably and through gaming is seeking to incentivizing shopping decisions that contribute to an environmentally-friendly lifestyle. The group plans to slash order-related carbon emissions by 30 percent this and each year going forward.

Competitive intelligence platform Vfluencer has found that from Oct. 27, Tmall's Weibo campaigns [## \(#Live a Green lifestyle together#\)](#) has already generated more than 332,000 engagements. By China standards a drop in the ocean but a drop, nonetheless. In fact, this could be a ripple effect: a notable 8 percent of consumers surveyed by Alibaba plan to spend less this time for the sake of "sustainability."

Annie Siara, managing director at 86Connex explained: "In the same campaign on 27th October, Tmall chose four of China's biggest celebrities for livestreaming: Liu Xuan [\(\)](#), a former gymnast, the singer Wang Feifei [\(\)](#) and, of course, the juggernaut celebrity [KOL Austin Li \(\)](#). This line-up shows how committed Alibaba is to shifting public opinions on green lifestyles."

During the first two hours of 11.11 pre-sales on October 20, more than 20,000 shoppers scooped up green home appliances helping to save 300 tons of carbon emissions that would otherwise come from the manufacturing and use of inefficient devices.

The country's top climate negotiator, Xie Zhenhua who was at COP26 said a broad deal on carbon markets was possible at COP26 (he was critical in the forging of the Paris agreement in 2015 which committed countries to reducing emissions). This positive vision has similarly been taken up by Alibaba's chief marketing officer, Chris Tung, who said: "We believe that behavioral change is essential to ensuring a sustainable future."

Still, consumerism is one of the many factors causing environmental catastrophe.

Endless growth is irreconcilable with a planet that has finite resources. Only when we have that systemic change to global capitalism, and when events such as Double 11 and Black Friday are a thing of the past, can the world adequately address climate change.

Published with permission from [Jing Daily](#). Adapted for clarity and style.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.