

Booming business of being single

With more disposable income than previous generations, unattached young people are a lucrative target market

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They are young, confident and single with money to spend on a comfortable lifestyle and brand name products.

Internet shopping is part of their daily lives with door-to-door food deliveries. Online gaming and pets address their emotional needs, while eating out is more than a treat.

Up to 77 million adults in China live alone, an increase of 16 percent compared to 2012. By 2021, this number is expected to reach 92 million, data

Comment from marketing consultancy Euro-monitor revealed. Naturally, this market is now worth billions of dollars, with online

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giant Alibaba reporting that products targeting "singles only" jumped 5.6 times last year compared to 2015.

"A major trend involves products and services that are tailor-made for singles, such as mini refrigerators, small-sized high-end retail stores providing imported goods, and smaller apartments," said Liao Tianshu, managing director of Boston Consulting Group (BCG) Greater China.

Part of the reason behind this is the decision by affluent singles to marry later in life, especially in major metropolises.

In 2014, the average age of men getting married in Shanghai was around 30. For women, it was about 28, according to the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau.

This might have something to do with the fact that China's four biggest cities, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, also have the highest divorce rates.

Research by BCG showed that about 16 percent of the urban population in China lives alone.

"The concept of being single is no longer negative, and it's natural for them to dine and travel by themselves," BCG stated in a report.

During the past two decades, single people have also become wealthy and a key component of China's middle class.

Single holidays are booming, while food delivery services and restaurants have rolled out services to suit their busy lifestyles.

To cater for this niche market, the Haidilao hot-pot chain based in the southwestern Sichuan province has come up with an innovative move at its 200 restaurants. Fluffy toy bears sit next to single diners so they do not look so alone.

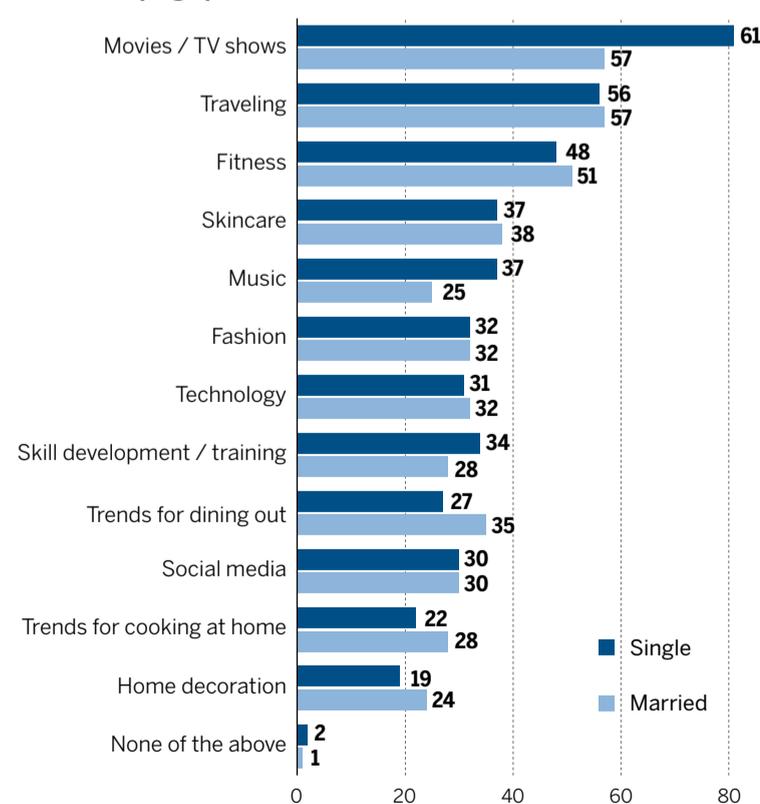
"Services provided by (outlets such as) Haidilao are tailored for single diners," said Neil Wang, China president at consultancy Frost & Sullivan.



A moviegoer looks at a poster for the Chinese film *Wolf Warrior 2* at a cinema in Fuyang, East China's Anhui province. WANG BIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Topics that interest singles and married people

"Which, if any, of the following trends would you like to spend more time on keeping up with?"



Base: 3,000 Internet users aged 20-39
Source: QQSurvey / Mintel, December 2016

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"Other restaurant brands have also launched similar services, such as providing set meals and seating places for one person," he added.

Apart from the decision to push back plans to marry, singles appear more confident about their financial prospects.

Many have spent years in further education and that is starting to pay off, as far as their careers are concerned.

"The main reason for the increasing number of singles is because people are financially and emotionally feeling more secure on their own," said Alina Ma, senior research analyst at the global consultancy Mintel Group.

"Economic and social development contributes significantly in eliminating insecurity issues caused by the lack of a partner," she added.

A survey released by the World Economic Forum earlier this year underlined the point that today's singles are better off than the previous generation and are willing to spend. The report showed this section of society was under the age of 35 and spent 40 percent more on various products than their predecessors with the same income.

In a poll conducted by Mintel, movies, television shows, traveling and fitness regimes were the most discussed topics among Chinese singles.

"This is partly because they need to enliven their lives and the result of the booming Chinese entertainment industry," Ma at Mintel said.

Zhai Chunming is a regular moviegoer, despite the heavy workload as an English teacher at a privately owned institution in Beijing.

He loves his visits to the cinema and believes the experiences enrich his life.

"I am used to going to the cinema on my own," the 31-year-old said. "The good thing is there is no limit on the genre of the movie or when to go. I can even watch a movie at midnight and no one will interrupt me to chat about the film," Zhai added. "These are the blessings of being single. If I need to discuss my views about the movie, I can do it online."

Lifestyle retailers, such as Japan's Ryohin Keikaku or Muji, have been quick to move into the singles market by selling small rice cookers, ovens and kettles.

"Not only manufacturers have launched special-size products tailored for singles, but service providers are also moving into the sector," Wang at Frost & Sullivan said. "For example, more real estate agencies have introduced single rental apartments," he added.

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