

BUSINESS NEWS

Holiday Shopping Starts Off Strong

By CHARITY L. SCOTT

American shoppers increased their spending by 16% over the five-day shopping period between Thanksgiving Day and Cyber Monday, according to new data, signaling U.S. consumer confidence hasn't wavered in the face of global economic uncertainty.

Nearly 190 million shoppers made purchases during the period, a 14% increase over the previous year, and more of them shopped online than in stores, data from the National Retail Federation and Prosper Insights & Analytics show.

NRF President and CEO Matthew Shay said the shopping habits of consumers of all ages have converged. "We saw older consumers actively engaged in research and purchasing online," he said.

The NRF survey found 124 million people shopped in stores while 142 million shopped online. Black Friday drew more online shoppers than Cyber Monday for the first time.

The Washington-based trade association, which represents retailers including Walmart Inc., Amazon.com Inc. and Macy's Inc., said earlier that half of the consumers who planned to shop during the holidays started ahead of Thanksgiving, making almost a quarter of their expected purchases before the holiday.

Due to a late Thanksgiving, there are six fewer days in the holiday shopping season compared with last year.

The NRF has forecast retail sales would rise in a range of 3.8% to 4.2%—to about \$730 billion—for the period from Nov. 1 to Dec. 31.

Shoppers spent an average of \$362 on holiday items during the five-day period that ended Monday, compared with \$313 a year ago.

Huawei Gets Tougher With Critics

Huawei Technologies Co., which has been on a public-relations blitz to convince the world that it isn't a bad actor, has added a legal front in its battle to bolster the company's image.

By Dan Strumpf in Hong Kong and Drew Hinshaw in Warsaw

The Chinese telecommunications giant is waging legal campaigns against overseas critics large and small. In France, it has filed a defamation complaint against a researcher who claimed Huawei is state-controlled. It secured a court judgment against a small newspaper in Lithuania that admitted mistranslating a German magazine's report of a data breach in Africa. Huawei also has threatened to sue the Czech Republic for saying the company's smartphones aren't secure.

The initiatives, building on Huawei's broader PR push, take aim at allegations that in many cases echo critiques about the company's purported ties to the Chinese government.

"There seems to be a new wave of lawfare," said Martin Hala, the director of synopsis.cz, a website that tracks Chinese political activity in Central and Eastern Europe. "In many of these lawsuits, it might perhaps be understood as an attempt at intimidation," said Mr. Hala, who has been critical of China's ambitions in Europe.

A spokesman for Huawei, the world's largest maker of telecom equipment and the No. 2 vendor of smartphones, said the company is defending itself against false and unsubstantiated claims and that legal action "is always a last resort for Huawei in such cases."

After years of keeping a relatively low public profile, Huawei has published open letters in international newspapers, budgeted millions of dollars on lobbyists and brought thousands of journalists to its sprawling campus in southern China. Company founder Ren Zhengfei, who had shunned public appearances, also has



The Chinese company has added legal action to counter claims it is under government control. A Huawei plant in Dongguan, China.

sat for numerous interviews.

The campaign comes as Europe emerges as a critical battleground for Huawei, which is fighting efforts by the Trump administration to block it from participating in 5G network rollouts in U.S.-aligned countries.

"The debate in Europe on China is beginning to make some of the actors, Chinese and otherwise, nervous," Mr. Hala said. "They'd like to quell it."

Huawei's lawyers have targeted critics like Valerie Niquet, a senior research fellow at the Foundation for Strategic Research, an independent Paris think tank specializing in defense and security issues.

In February, Ms. Niquet, who specializes in Asian affairs, appeared on two news programs in France to discuss Huawei. During one of the segments, Ms. Niquet said the company is under direct control of the state and the Chinese Communist Party. "I know nobody who would have

given to a Soviet company the means to monitor the totality of communications in the Western world, and that's what we're doing with Huawei," she said.

Ms. Niquet said she heard nothing after the program



Founder Ren Zhengfei, who shunned public appearances, has sat for numerous interviews.

aired—until September when she said she was contacted by French police and learned that Huawei had filed a defamation complaint against her. French police later sent her a series of questions by email asking her to confirm the statements she made about Huawei on air with the subject line, "POLICE - Defamation - Questionnaire." Copies of the email were re-

viewed by The Wall Street Journal.

In contrast to the U.S., where defamation cases are handled in civil court, such cases in France can be investigated by the police. News of the complaint against Ms. Niquet was first reported by the French website La Lettre A.

The claim that Huawei is controlled by Beijing is hardly new. U.S. officials have long asserted, without concrete evidence, that Huawei gear could be exploited by China to spy on Americans, and have effectively blocked Huawei from selling telecommunications equipment in the U.S. Huawei says it is owned solely by its employees, operates independently of Beijing and would never spy on behalf of any government.

In an interview, Ms. Niquet said her statements about Huawei's status don't constitute defamation and that similar comments about state control have been made by others

who work on China affairs.

In a tweet last month, the account "@HuaweiFactsFR"—the French version of a Twitter account that Huawei uses to publicize its point of view—said the company had filed three lawsuits for "public defamation" related to the episode.

The Huawei spokesman on Tuesday said: "The individuals in question have repeatedly made unsubstantiated, false statements about Huawei in the media, which have seriously damaged Huawei's reputation. Huawei has sued these individuals in accordance with French law."

Huawei has taken on the U.S. directly this year as well. In March it filed a lawsuit in federal court challenging new restrictions on its business. And the Journal has reported that Huawei is preparing to file a lawsuit challenging a decision by the Federal Communications Commission last month curbing Huawei's business with rural telecom operators.

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