

75% of Chinese to give out digital 'red envelopes'

More and more Chinese people have followed the fashion of giving out digital "red envelopes," cash gifts exchanged through a smartphone app, to friends and relatives while celebrating the Spring Festival, also known as Chinese lunar New Year.

A survey conducted by United Overseas Bank (UOB) showed that three quarters of Chinese people plan to give out their "red envelopes" through their smartphones during the Spring Festival holidays, China Youth Daily reported.

And the reason for the increasing popularity of the digital "red envelope" over the traditional ones is because of the freshness, fun and convenience it brings, the survey shows.

Lately, updates to Tencent's QQ and Alipay, two popular apps in China, have added to the fun people can experience while giving out and grabbing the digital "red envelope." With the introduction of Augmented Reality (AR) technology, grabbing the digital "red envelope" through these two apps will be similar to playing the game Pokemon Go.

In the meantime, another survey by Rong360, an online financing platform, has shown some worrying results. It said nearly 21 percent of the people surveyed said they used to be at odds with their friends or relatives because of digital "red envelopes." Nearly 20 percent of the people surveyed said that the atmosphere of New Year celebrations was affected with family members busily grabbing "red envelopes" through the phones.

The Rong360 survey also showed that 46 percent of those surveyed said they had given out "red envelopes" just to get people to praise or forward their postings on social media like WeChat or Weibo. But over 29 percent of people said that they will just ignore these digital "red envelopes".

The giving of red envelopes on occasions like Chinese New Year is a tradition among the Chinese people. Typically, older members of the family give the red envelopes to the children in the family to celebrate lunar New Year.

Hebei to design index that links illness to weather

Hebei will link weather forecasts with health risks, a move to inform people who are sensitive to changes in the weather so that they can take

precautionary measures, authorities said.

“We are doing research into the influence of meteorological conditions on diseases and are setting up a database of information on diseases that can be more easily caused due to weather changes,” said Zhang Zhongjie, head of a service center at Hebei Provincial Meteorological Bureau.

The index will list the possibility of weather conditions causing various illnesses such as respiratory diseases or skin allergies.

They will be generated based on big data from local environmental and meteorological conditions, and recent patterns in diseases, Zhang said.

According to Zhang, Hebei has been studying the influence of air pollution on public health since last year.

“People are starting to pay attention to the weather and air, because air pollution in recent years has greatly affected their lives,” he added.

Ding Xiao, a young mother in Shijiazhuang who has a 10-month-old son, complained about this winter’s weather and smoggy air conditions.

“I have become a frequent visitor to hospitals because my son always catches a cold or gets a bad cough when the weather is bad,” Ding said, adding that many mothers are like her.

People in the province, which has been severely hit by air pollution in recent years, have complained about local weather.

“After all, it is their health that people are worrying about, rather than just the environment,” said Gao Yu, a doctor at the Children’s Hospital of Hebei province.

Gao said it’s necessary and useful to inform people of the specific weather index in advance.

“People need to know when bad weather is coming and how bad it is, just as they need the air quality index, through which people can know if the air outside is good or not and can decide accordingly whether to do outside activities or whether to wear face masks,” Gao said.

[Shanghai mulls red line for jaywalking](#)

Shanghai is considering drawing a red line, or many of them, to combat jaywalking.

The lines, marked on the edge of sidewalks like in Hong Kong, were suggested by some local legislators to curb the common bad habit of jaywalking.

The red lines are marked where people can never cross the street, and violators face severe punishment, Yu Guoqiang, a deputy to the Shanghai People's Congress, the city's legislative body, said at the ongoing annual session on Tuesday.

"When I was in Hong Kong, I learned from residents that they had a very clear concept of the red lines from childhood, saying that in no case would they ever cross the street over a red line," Yu said.

Jaywalking impedes traffic safety in many Chinese cities. In Dalian, Liaoning province, jaywalking caused 155 traffic accidents involving death from the beginning of 2015 to April last year. In Chongqing municipality, nearly half of all traffic accidents involving injury or death were triggered by jaywalking in 2015.

"Changes can start from the current generation, if they have an absolute respect for the red lines and a clear appreciation of rules," Yu said.

Li Feikang, another local deputy, said education on traffic rules, including the red lines, should be compulsory in schools.

"That way, the young generation can spread the information to their parents," Li said.

"If the law stipulates that anybody crossing the street over a red line, and causing his or her injury or death in a traffic accident, will assume full responsibility for the accident, then I believe it will force people to cross the street only at legitimate crossings," he said.

Under the current law, the driver needs to pay 10 percent of the medical costs of an injured pedestrian after an accident, even if the driver is proven to be faultless.

Another lawmaker, Chen Danyan, said such a legal provision is unreasonable and doesn't stop pedestrians from breaking the law on the street.

"A group of deputies, including me, conducted traffic inspection at a number of intersections in the city center last summer, and found the number of violations involving pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles was much higher than motor vehicles. Pedestrians' disregard of traffic rules make traffic congestion worse," said Chen.

In March, Shanghai initiated a campaign to crack down on traffic violations, mainly targeting motor vehicles.

"Under the current law, jaywalkers are fined 10 yuan (\$1.45), which is too little to work as a deterrent," said deputy Liu Mingang.

Fireworks sales fall before Lunar New Year

People are buying fewer and smaller fireworks than usual for the upcoming Lunar New Year holiday in Beijing and Shanghai, where authorities have reduced the number of outlets allowed to sell fireworks.



A worker carries fireworks to put on display at a temporary sales outlet in Beijing's Chaoyang district on Monday. [Chen Xiaogen/for China Daily]

The capital approved just 511 stores for the holiday period, down from 719 last year, with none of them within the Third Ring Road. Sales licenses are valid from Jan 22 to Feb 1, according to the firework management office.

In Shanghai, which has a population of 24 million, just seven outlets have been given licenses – all of them in suburban districts – compared with 77 last year.

Traders have seen mixed fortunes in both cities in the first few days of sales.

“Sales are not going well, but we saw this coming so we decided not to stock too many,” said a fireworks seller in Tiantongyuan, a populated residential area in Beijing, who gave his name only as Wang. “The price that distributors are charging has risen, so we have had to raise our prices, thus I don't expect trade to boom.”

Panda Fireworks, the sole distributor to downtown Beijing this year, has predicted a 20 to 30 percent drop in sales, according to Beijing Daily. Yanlong Fireworks, another supplier, is only selling its leftover stock from last year in the capital's suburbs and has announced it is considering quitting the market.

By contrast, in Shanghai's suburbs, demand appears to remain high for some

vendors. The only trader in Qingpu district said he has almost sold all of his stock – 200 cases of fireworks.

However, in both cities, people are purchasing smaller, child-friendly fireworks as opposed to larger-scale, louder bangers traditionally associated with Spring Festival celebrations.

“Most customers are just buying sparklers,” said Tang Banghua, who runs a stall in the capital’s Chaoyang district, referring to handheld fireworks that emit a colorful flame as they burn. “They’re entertaining and cheap, priced at just 20 yuan (\$2.9) a pack.”

A woman in her 30s who visited the stall with her young son said: “I don’t want any myself, but my son insists. He likes the sparklers.”

“It’s not convenient for us to set off big fireworks as we’re not allowed to do so until Lunar New Year’s Eve, and there are many restrictions on where you can use them. Also, the smoke they produce pollutes the air,” she added.

In addition to fewer licenses being made available, authorities have said that the sale of fireworks will be prohibited in the event of orange or red alerts for heavy air pollution.

“We’ll obey the policy, of course, but as traders, we just hope the weather stays clear,” Wang said.

Statistics from the Ministry of Environmental Protection showed the level of PM2.5 – fine particulate matter that is hazardous to health – rose from less than 100 micrograms per cubic meter to 700 on Lunar New Year’s Eve last year, when many people set off fireworks.

For centuries, Chinese have burned firecrackers and set off fireworks to drive away evil spirits, which eventually became a form of celebration.

[Rocket designers set crosshairs on new air purifiers](#)

Chinese carrier rocket designers are using their knowledge and expertise to tap into the public’s demand for fresh and clean air.

The China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology in Beijing, a major developer of the nation’s carrier rockets and ballistic missiles, will soon put on the market an air purifier that developers say incorporates a host of cutting-edge technologies used on rockets.

Beijing Ares Technology Co, a subsidiary of the academy responsible for the development and marketing of air purifiers, has sold 10,000 Alpha-blue air

purifiers, developed by rocket designers, to space industry workers and will launch 5,000 sets on the open market after the coming Chinese New Year.

Wang Libo, chairman of Beijing Ares Technology, said on Wednesday that he expects the product to be popular because it has better capabilities compared with other air purifiers of its kind on the Chinese market, while being reasonably priced.

“Compared with other purifiers of its size, the Alpha-blue has a much higher rate of delivering clear air and absorbing formaldehyde in a given period of time because we powder-coat its filter screens with nanoplatinum particles that are widely used in rocket production,” he said.

“We also made use of our designers’ knowledge of aerodynamics that they gained through the making of rocket bodies and engines to design the air purifier’s intakes and outlets to ensure it has better air circulation compared with other products,” Wang added.

In addition, composite materials and remote control technologies adopted by Chinese carrier rockets have also been used in Alpha-blue, according to Wang.

An Alpha-blue air purifier sells for 4,999 yuan (\$727), much less than other purifiers with its capacity, which usually have a price of at least 8,000 yuan, he said.

“The academy has been transferring its space technologies to medical air purification for many years and has served a lot of hospitals. Now we want to help the public get rid of PM2.5,” he explained, referring to the most feared pollutant in Chinese cities – particulate matter with a diameter smaller than 2.5 microns that can penetrate the lungs and seriously harm health.

Several agents have signed contracts with Ares Technology, while the company is also developing a store on Taobao, the most popular online shopping website in China, Wang said.

Zhao Xiaozhuo, an electronic engineer at China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology who took part in the development of the nation’s newest Long March 5 and Long March 7 carrier rockets, said he adopted monitor equipment used on rockets for the Alpha-blue that allows users to monitor and control the machine anywhere and anytime.

He added that the Alpha-blue’s capabilities have been measured by China’s top quality certification firm and the test results show it has better performance than most purifiers on the Chinese market.