

CONSUMER TRENDS

» Other instances of profiteering

Scalping of limited items getting worse

BY WINONA WEE

FIRST it was N95 masks, then Hello Kitty plush toys. And now, scalpers are turning to highly-sought-after National Day Parade (NDP) tickets to make a quick buck, going by several online auctions and offers.

Behavioural experts told My Paper this reflects the kiasu (Hokkien for being afraid to lose out) psyche of Singaporeans, and some noted that such profiteering could be getting worse.

A check on eBay.com.sg yesterday showed one online auction for a pair of NDP tickets at \$250.

On craigslist.com.sg, one seller was selling "limited edition" Hello Kitty toys with NDP tickets. Buying one Kitty for \$170 would yield one "free" NDP ticket, while, for \$560, four Kitties would come with four "free" NDP tickets.

Another seller was offering a hair clip for \$300 that came with a pair of "free" NDP tickets, according to a post on citizen-journalism site Stomp.

These sales are still happening despite reminders by the NDP organising committee over the years that the tickets are not for sale.

As was the case last year, ticket holders caught selling NDP tickets this year will be barred from balloting for the free tickets for three years. National Day falls on Aug 9.

Dr Adrian Wang, a consultant psychiatrist at Gleneagles Medical Centre, said the profiteering behaviour showed that "the kiasu mentality is very much part of our local psyche".

National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ern Ser said the propensity for profiteering "has always been present" and is "just waiting for the opportunity to manifest itself".

"(Such behaviour) is rational, insofar as people weigh the costs and benefits, and decide that the benefits of securing a Hello Kitty toy far outweigh its costs," he said.

Mr Daniel Koh, a psychologist with Insights Mind Centre,



UNSCRUPULOUS: Tickets to the National Day Parade, which are free, are on sale online. PHOTO: STOMP

likened the behaviour to "emotional blackmail". When there is a limited number of items, they attract more buyers, he said, adding that when buyers cannot get the items, they feel they are losing out.

Technology might have contributed to the profiteering, too, with more online platforms to sell things, he said.

Mr Allan Chia, head of the marketing programme at SIM University, said the profiteering behaviour was a "by-product of consumerism, where one gets attached to materialistic values or possessions".

Dr Lim Boon Leng, a psychiatrist in private practice, believes that the profiteering phenomenon among Singaporeans is getting worse.

"Particularly with NDP tickets, somehow, there is this lack of awareness that they are something that stands for the nation, and selling them is actually a bit immoral," he said.

"All this stems from the fact that, in terms of (society on the whole), our emphasis is very skewed towards materialistic gains," Dr Lim added.

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Profiteering:

牟取暴利 móu qǔ bào lì

Balloting: 抽签 chōu qiān

Manifest: 显示 xiǎn shì

Materialistic: 物质至上 wù zhì zhì shàng

HELLO KITTY PLUSH TOYS

Resellers have been selling McDonald's limited-edition Hello Kitty plush toys online at sky-high prices.

One Singing Bone Kitty was even selling for \$1,000 last Thursday. The toy costs \$4.60 with a meal, or \$10 without one.

Singapore's feline frenzy even

caught the international media's attention, with AFP publishing a report.

N95 MASKS

When the haze situation worsened here, Singaporeans rushed to buy N95 masks. Some stores jacked up prices, and some people sold them

online.

A spokesman for 3M, which makes N95 masks, said the recommended retail price ranges from \$1.80 to \$2.50. The New Paper reported last month that a kiosk at Yishun MRT station had sold the N95 masks for \$10 apiece.

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