

# How Brands in China Are Responding to Consumer Expectations During the Coronavirus

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As shelter-at-home and quarantine measures keep consumers in China at home, brands ramped up their efforts to meet consumers' high expectations for digital services by offering free online tools and courses, streaming live events and adopting new ecommerce strategies.

According to a March 2020 survey by [GlobalWebIndex](#) (GWI), 91% of internet users in China ages 16 to 64 at least agreed that brands should provide free services during the coronavirus outbreak.

**Internet Users in Select Countries Who Agree that Brands Should Offer Free Services\* During the Coronavirus Outbreak, March 2020**

% of respondents

	<b>1</b> Strongly agree	<b>2</b> Somewhat agree	<b>3</b> Neither agree nor disagree	<b>4</b> Somewhat disagree	<b>5</b> Strongly disagree
Australia	22%	32%	33%	9%	5%
Brazil	55%	29%	10%	4%	3%
China	41%	50%	7%	1%	1%
France	42%	34%	17%	5%	3%
Germany	23%	28%	24%	15%	11%
Italy	54%	30%	10%	3%	3%
Japan	18%	32%	42%	6%	3%
Philippines	60%	29%	7%	3%	2%
Singapore	22%	44%	25%	6%	3%
South Africa	42%	37%	11%	5%	6%
Spain	50%	31%	13%	4%	3%
UK	29%	37%	25%	5%	4%
US	33%	37%	23%	4%	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>

Note: ages 16-64; \*e.g., in-store health testing, making free version of platforms available

Source: GlobalWebIndex, "Coronavirus Research Release 3: Multi-Market Research," March 23, 2020

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And brands in China are stepping up to meet these expectations. Youdao Education, owned by gaming and music giant NetEase, provided free online classes to primary and secondary school students in Wuhan in the winter, and expanded these services nationwide in the spring. Alibaba offered its communications platform DingTalk for free, and Tencent expanded the capacity of its WeChat Work videoconferencing tool to 300 people for subscribers, while also offering free telemedicine and online courses to hospitals and schools.

Shelter-in-place guidelines have also prompted brands to integrate live streaming into ecommerce, a practice that had been gaining traction before the pandemic. Shanghai Fashion Week was live streamed to 700 million digital buyers on Alibaba's Tmall and Taobao platforms in March, and all products shown were available for purchase. Chinese ecommerce giant JD.com partnered with Anheuser-Busch and Rémy Cointreau to live stream DJ sets to promote their beverages. The success of these live streams has prompted JD.com to **extend** the initiative to at least May.

Technologies that were previously more experimental became viable means of conducting business: In response to consumer fears of contracting the coronavirus through deliveries, JD.com and ecommerce platform Meituan quickly introduced contactless delivery through driverless vehicles and drones. Though these efforts will likely be limited in scale, they offer some degree of assurance and play into the long-term ambitions of supply chain automation.

The biggest digital brands have rolled out relief efforts aimed at helping small and medium-sized businesses during the pandemic. JD.com offered a number of incentives to help sellers on its platform, including promotions, live streaming help and content marketing support. Alibaba has also provided free services and waived fees for its sellers. It's providing further support to farmers—whose businesses have been significantly disrupted—through free training on how they can digitize their businesses.