

# BRAND PURPOSE IN ASIA

Eight (8) learnings on  
how brands can use  
the power of purpose and  
drive social currency in the region.



**BBDO VOICES**  
THE 13TH ANNIVERSARY OF BBDO VOICES

# WHY ANOTHER STUDY ON BRAND PURPOSE?

**Because not enough research has been done to examine the relevance of Brand Purpose in the Asian context.**

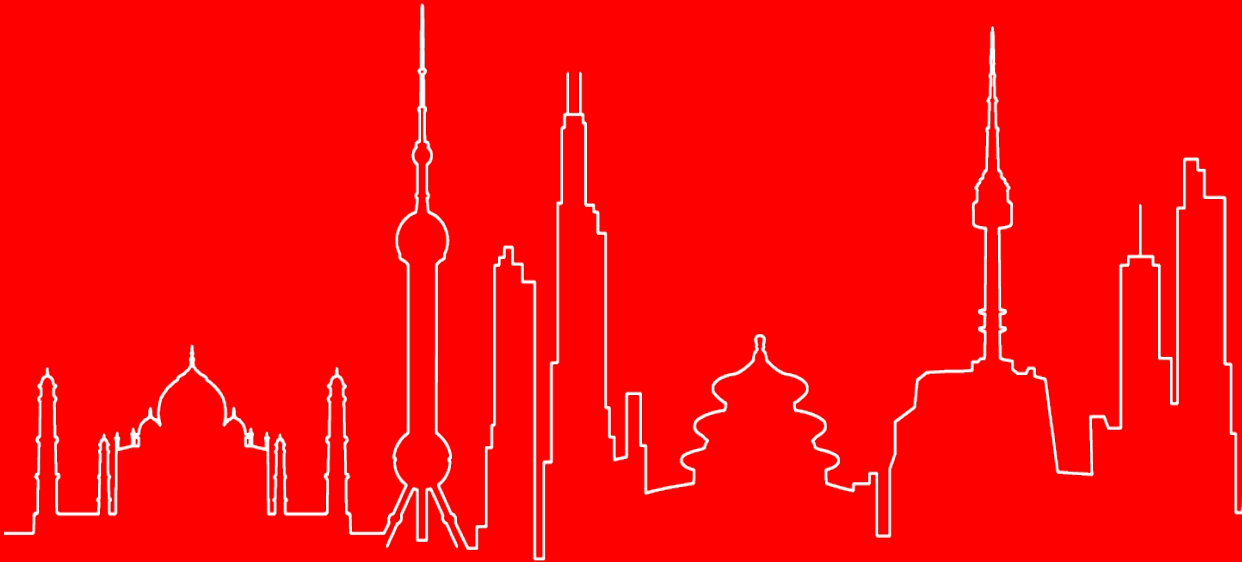
A lot of rich material has been written about Brand Purpose in recent years, but most of these studies have been carried out from the perspective of western markets and only a handful were written with a pure focus on Asia.

Oftentimes these studies focused on identifying the most relevant social topics to consumers in the region without investigating whether a brand positioning based on such topics would make a brand more appealing and distinctive to Asian consumers.

Considering Asia's diverse range of cultures, we also saw the need to better understand the nuances that exist within Asia – be it across countries or within – to enable marketers to adjust brand narratives.

# HOW WE WENT ABOUT THE STUDY

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



**WHAT:** Online survey using a structured questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions

**WHO:** The new generation of Asians (aged 18 to 45 years old)

**WHERE:**

- Mainland China
- South Korea
- Japan
- Thailand
- Philippines
- India

**HOW MANY:** N=300/country; N=1,800 in total

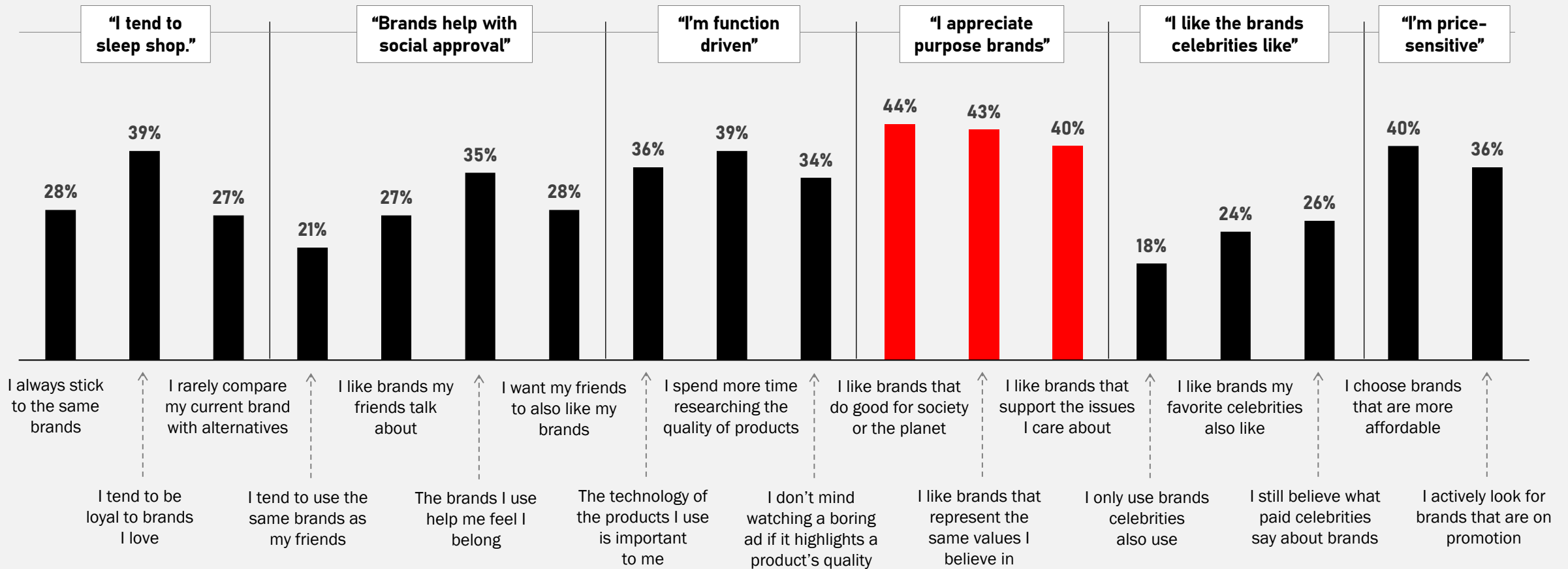
*Fieldwork and data-processing carried out by Pure Spectrum on behalf of BBDO.*

**LEARNING 1:**

**ASIA'S CONSUMERS ARE VERY RESPONSIVE TO BRAND PURPOSE, MAKING IT AN IMPORTANT POSITIONING STRATEGY THAT MARKETERS SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IN THE REGION.**

# ATTITUDES TOWARDS BRANDS

% WHO STRONGLY AGREE\*



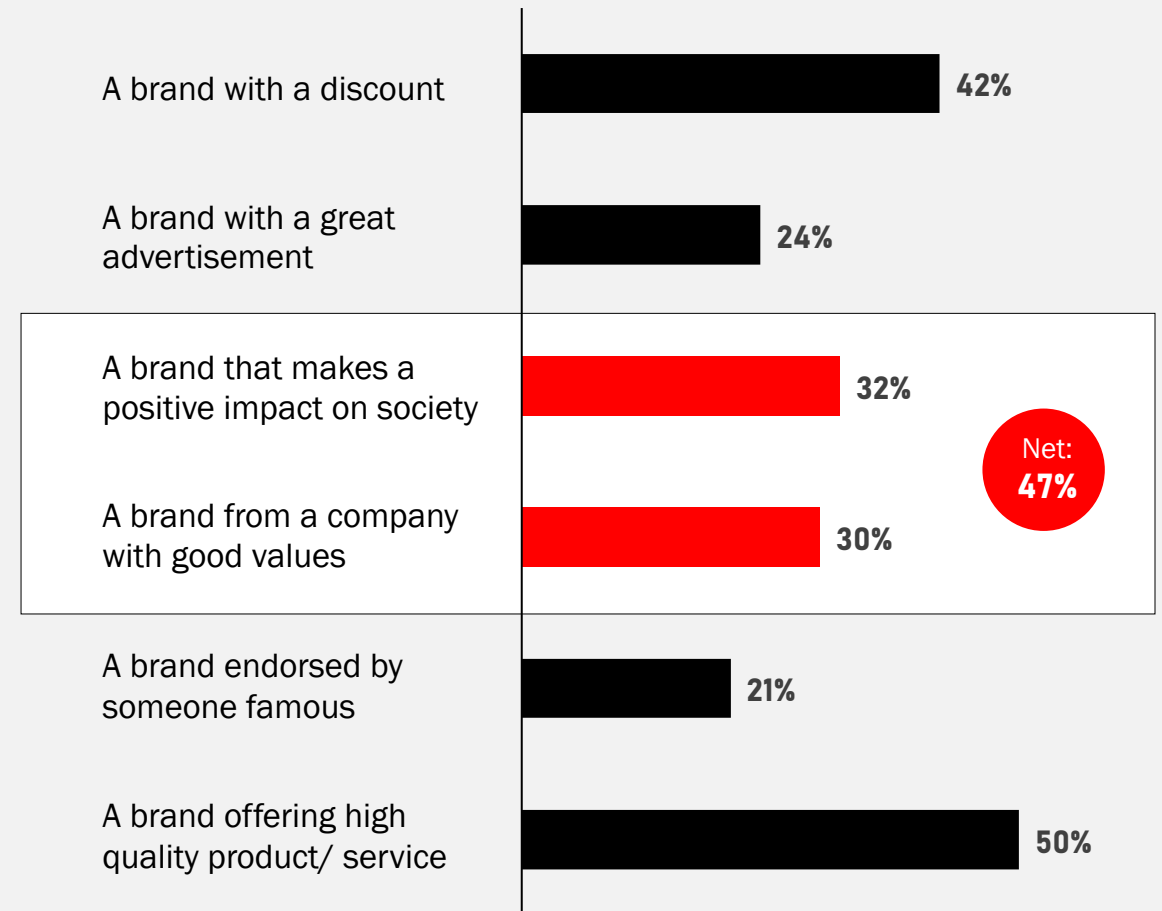
BASE: Total Respondents

\*Measured on a 5-point agreement scale

# IN ASIA, NEARLY HALF OF CONSUMERS SAY THEY HAVE RECENTLY CHOSEN BRANDS DUE TO THEIR SOCIAL PURPOSE.

- It is worth noting, however, there is no brand purpose without an equally compelling narrative about the quality of the brand's products or services.
- Among those who say they expect brands to have a social purpose: 6 out of 10 chose a brand due to its high-quality products or services.

## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DID YOU BUY IN THE PAST-3 MONTHS?

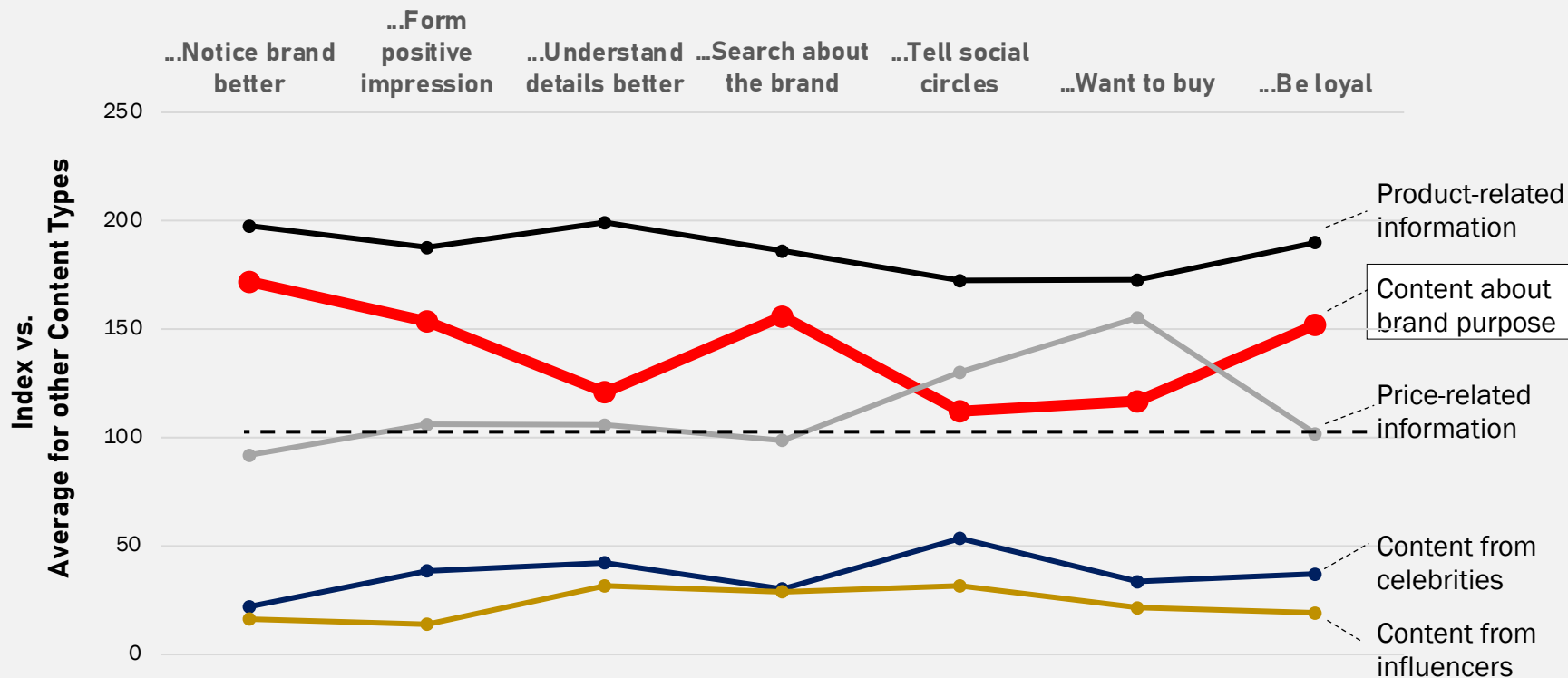


BASE: Total Respondents

# BRAND PURPOSE VS. OTHER CONTENT TYPES: ESPECIALLY RELEVANT FOR 'UPPER FUNNEL' OBJECTIVES

- Brand purpose is particularly powerful in helping a brand build quality brand awareness. It outperforms other types of content when it comes to getting brands noticed, forming positive impressions with audiences, and triggering curiosity among consumers.

## WHAT KIND OF BRANDED CONTENT WILL MAKE YOU...



Note: Index >100 (higher than average); <100 (lower than average)  
Base: Total Respondents

--- Average for all content types

**LEARNING 2:**

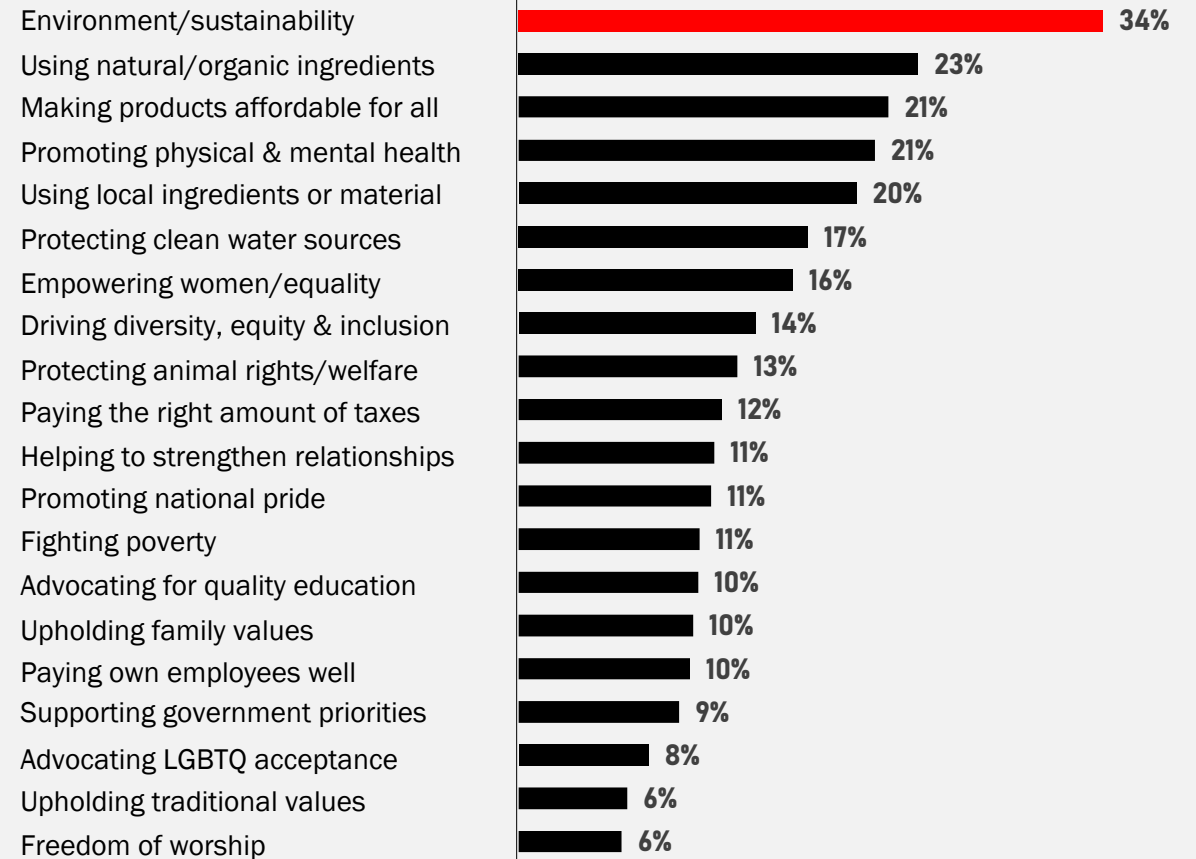
**ALTHOUGH PURPOSE-DRIVEN TOPICS VARY CONSIDERABLY BY COUNTRY, ONE TOPIC RESONATES STRONGLY ACROSS ALL MARKETS: ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY.**



# CONSUMERS ACROSS COUNTRIES WANT BRANDS TO CHAMPION SUSTAINABILITY THE MOST.

- When asked to nominate what causes brands should champion, environment-related themes came out on top.
- Providing affordable products for the masses is immensely relevant to the everyday lives of many in the region, ranking high within Asian consumers' definition of purpose.

## WHAT TOPICS OR CAUSES DO YOU WANT BRANDS TO CHAMPION? (PLEASE CHOOSE 3 FROM THE LIST)



BASE: Purpose-Driven Shoppers

# TOP-5, BY COUNTRY

## WHAT TOPICS OR CAUSES DO YOU WANT BRANDS TO CHAMPION?

Environment and sustainability themes are within the top-5 in all of the countries covered.

### China

**1 Environment/sustainability 33%**

Making products affordable for all	24%
Using natural or organic ingredients	24%
Social justice	23%
Diversity, equality, and inclusivity	21%

### Thailand

**1 Environment/sustainability 39%**

Using natural or organic ingredients	27%
Making products affordable for all	25%
Promoting mental health	22%
Social justice	20%

### Philippines

**1 Environment/sustainability 42%**

Making products affordable for all	29%
Promoting physical & mental health	27%
Using natural or organic ingredients	26%
Using local ingredients or material	23%

### S. Korea

**1 Environment/sustainability 38%**

Social justice	31%
Diversity, equality, and inclusivity	24%
Using local ingredients or material	17%
Protecting clean water sources	16%

### Japan

**5 Environment/sustainability 19%**

Empowering women/equality	25%
Promoting physical & mental health	23%
Making products affordable for all	22%
Promoting national pride	21%

### India

**1 Environment/sustainability 31%**

Using natural or organic ingredients	29%
Using local ingredients or material	25%
Promoting physical & mental health	20%
Protecting clean water sources	19%

# EXPERT VOICE

“Environmental problems and climate change concerns every single one of us. The recent record-breaking heat waves that spanned more than half of the land in China affected over 900 million people – more than the combined population of Europe. These extreme climate events are becoming increasingly common, and they add more urgency to taking action on these issues – brands have a clear role to play here.”

## HARRY CHEN

Group Planning Director  
BBDO CHINA



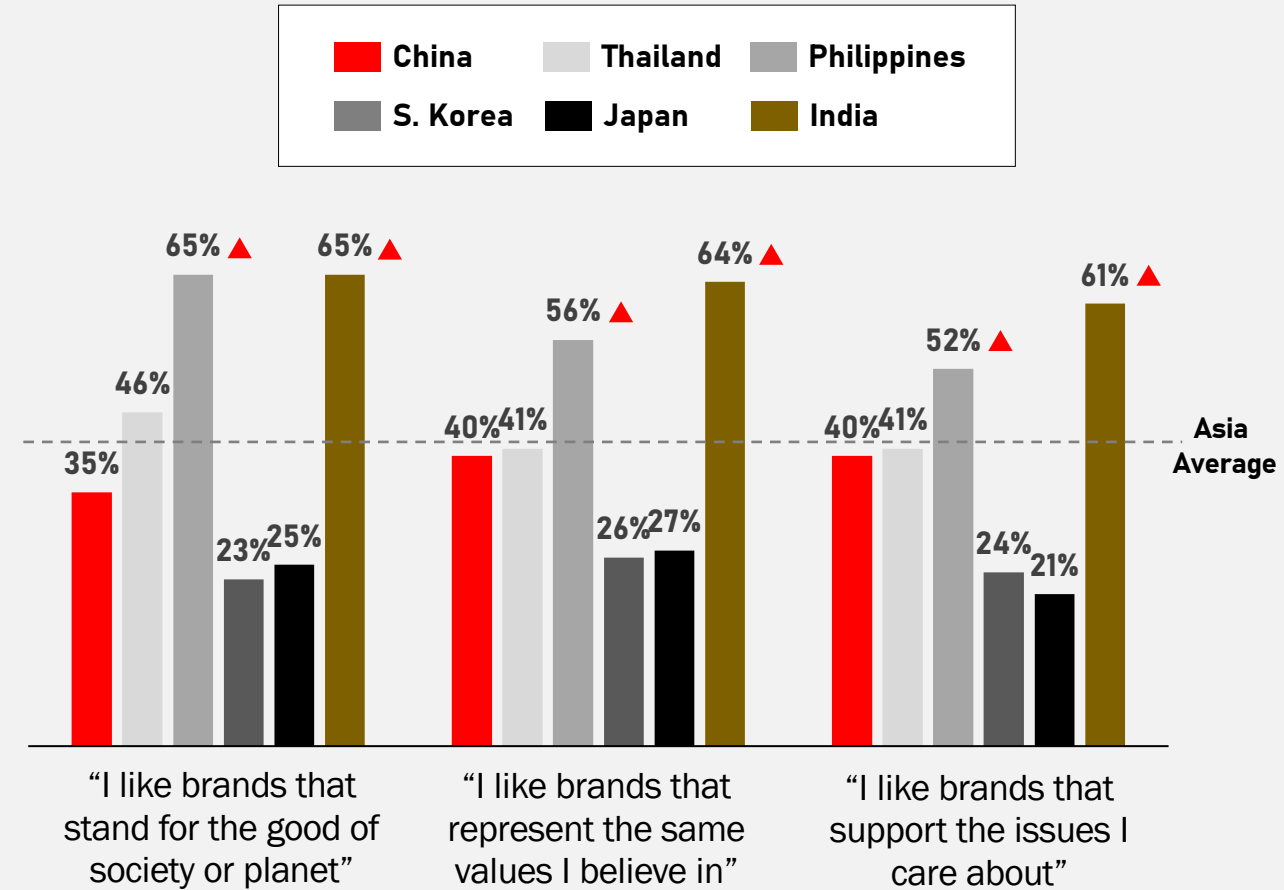
**LEARNING 3:**

**THERE IS A CLEAR PATTERN FORMING –  
THE LESS DEVELOPED AN ECONOMY IS,  
THE MORE STRONGLY CONSUMERS WANT  
BRANDS ROOTED IN PURPOSE.**

# TWO COUNTRIES STAND OUT IN BEING THE MOST INTERESTED IN BRANDS THAT HAVE A PURPOSE: PHILIPPINES AND INDIA.

- Consumers from these less developed economies look to brands the most to play a significant role in society.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS BRAND PURPOSE % WHO STRONGLY AGREE\* - BY COUNTRY

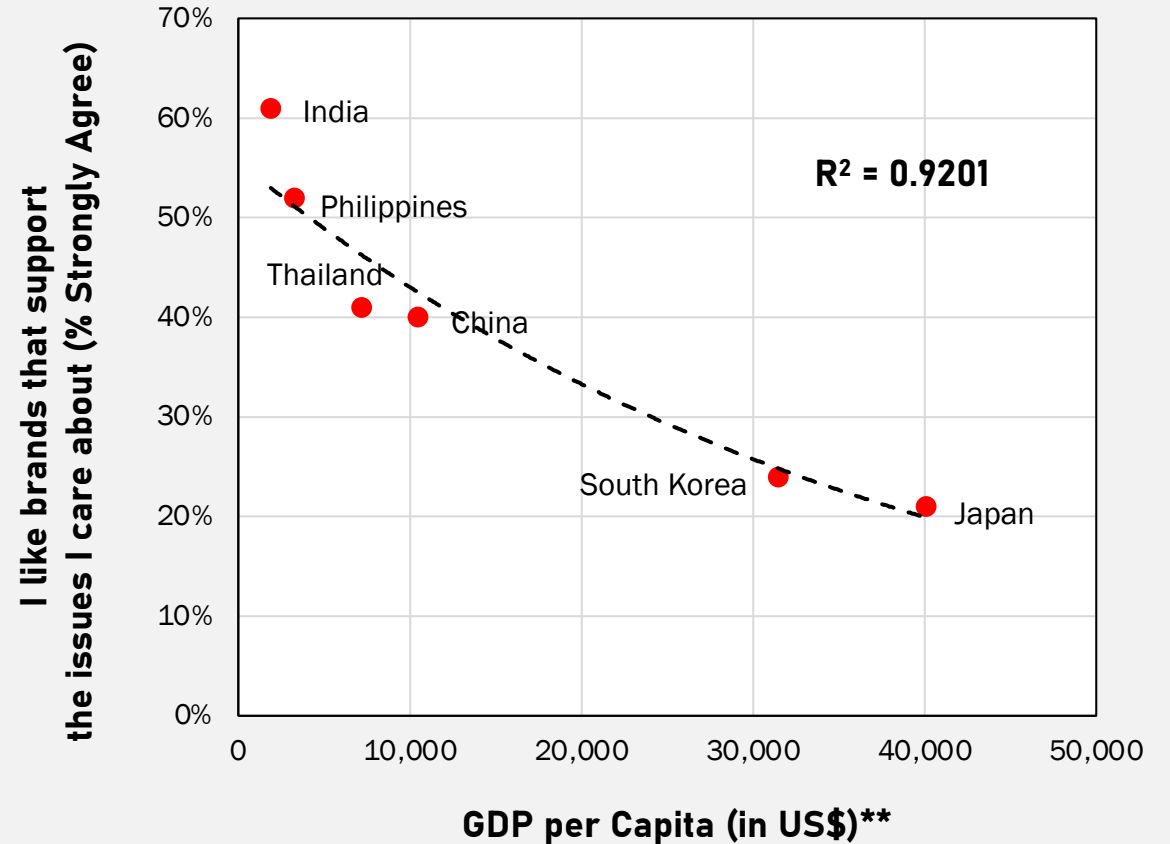


BASE: Total Respondents  
\*Measured on a 5-point agreement scale

# ASIA'S "BRAND PURPOSE PARADOX"

- In Asia, there is a strong inverse correlation between a country's economic condition and its citizens' attitudes toward brand purpose.
- The less robust an economy is (as measured by GDP per capita), the greater people's desire for brands to contribute to society becomes. This is best presented in markets like the Philippines and India where citizens expect brands to fill gaps in society that governments often cannot.
- In contrast, the more robust an economy is, i.e., Japan and Korea, the less likely people will look to brands and corporations to embody a purpose.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS BRAND PURPOSE vs. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



BASE: Total Respondents

\*Measured on a 5-point agreement scale

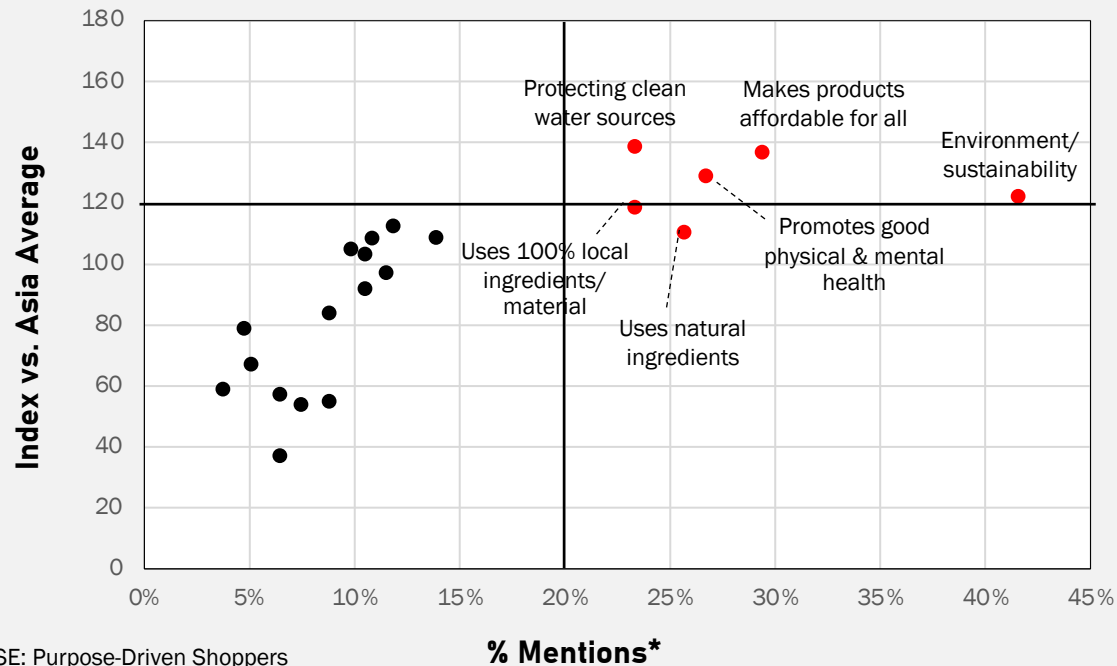
\*\*Source: World Bank

# PHILIPPINES & INDIA:

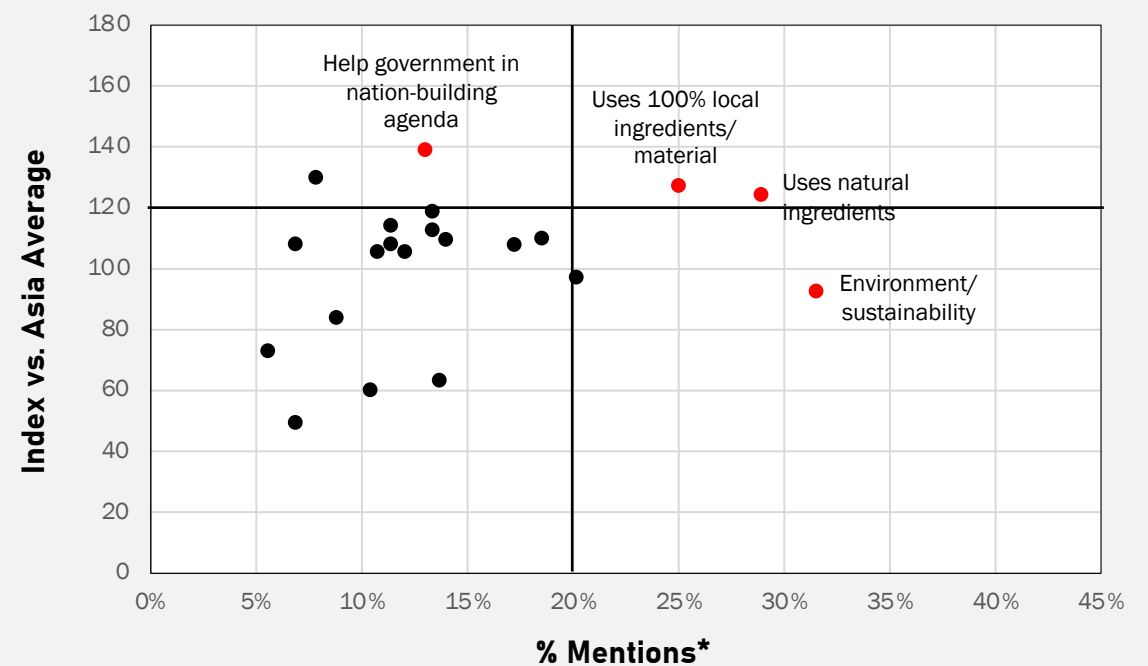
## PEOPLE NEED BRANDS TO ALLEVIATE THE URGENT CHALLENGES OF LIFE.

- In such countries which are highly vulnerable to the effects of global warming, consumers need brands to champion sustainability. Moreover, citizens here also want brands to make products affordable for all, and help local communities thrive (e.g., via use of local ingredients, help on government initiatives, etc.).

Desired Brand Focus  
**PHILIPPINES**



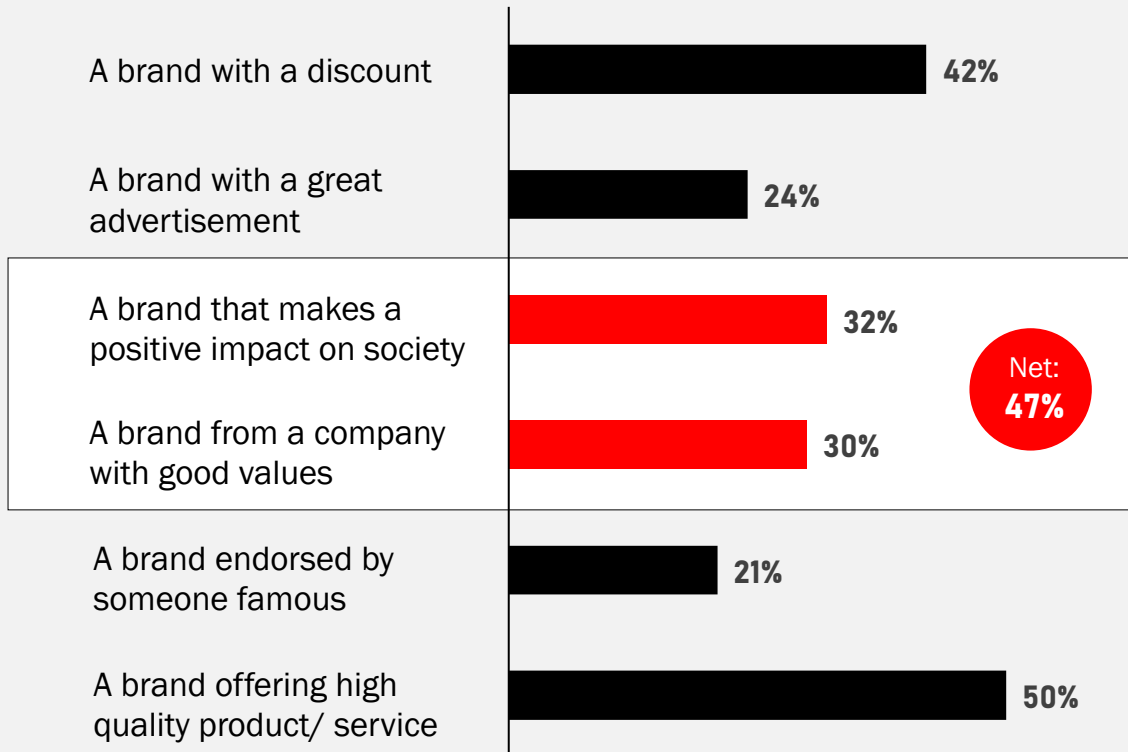
Desired Brand Focus  
**INDIA**



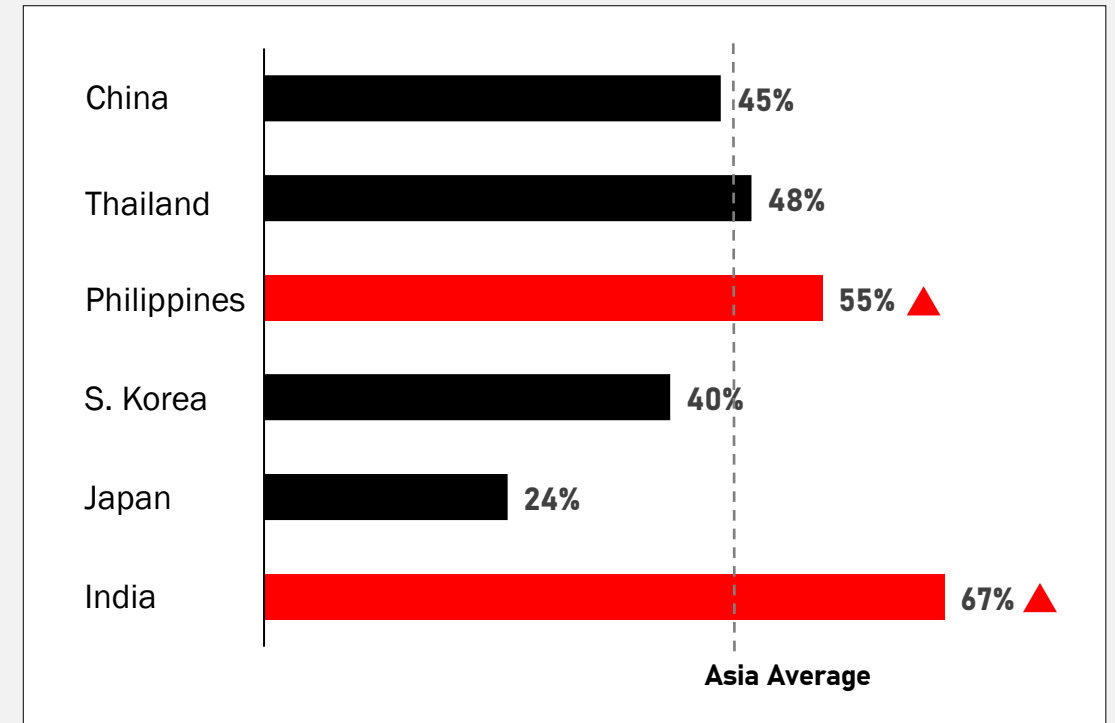
BASE: Purpose-Driven Shoppers  
\*as part of top-3 choices

# THUS, CONSUMERS IN THESE MARKETS ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE BOUGHT PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRANDS.

## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DID YOU BUY IN THE PAST-3 MONTHS? - TOTAL ASIA



## BOUGHT A BRAND FOR ITS PURPOSE\* IN THE PAST-3 MONTHS - BY COUNTRY



Base: Total Respondents

\*Net: Bought a "brand that makes a positive impact on society" + "brand from a company with good values" in p-3 months



# EXPERT VOICE

“A nation throbbing with first world ambition is dampened by third world infrastructure. A large population of young India has to face resistance from old conservative mindset. Apathy of state towards bettering basic quality of life and lack of any cultural playbook that older generation can tap into to respond to new emerging narratives, compels Indians to look up to brands as change-makers! We expect brands to leverage their resources in making meaningful impact beyond sales. Brands can provide social sanction to new ideas, they can bridge the infrastructure gap, they can right any wrong that comes in the way of progress and thus become a catalyst to fulfilling our first world aspiration.”

## **SURAJA KISHORE**

Chief Executive Officer  
BBDO INDIA



**LEARNING 4:**

**THE WEAK RESONANCE OF PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRANDS IN JAPAN & KOREA COMES FROM MEN. WOMEN IN THESE COUNTRIES LOOK TO BRANDS AS ALLIES ON GENDER ISSUES.**

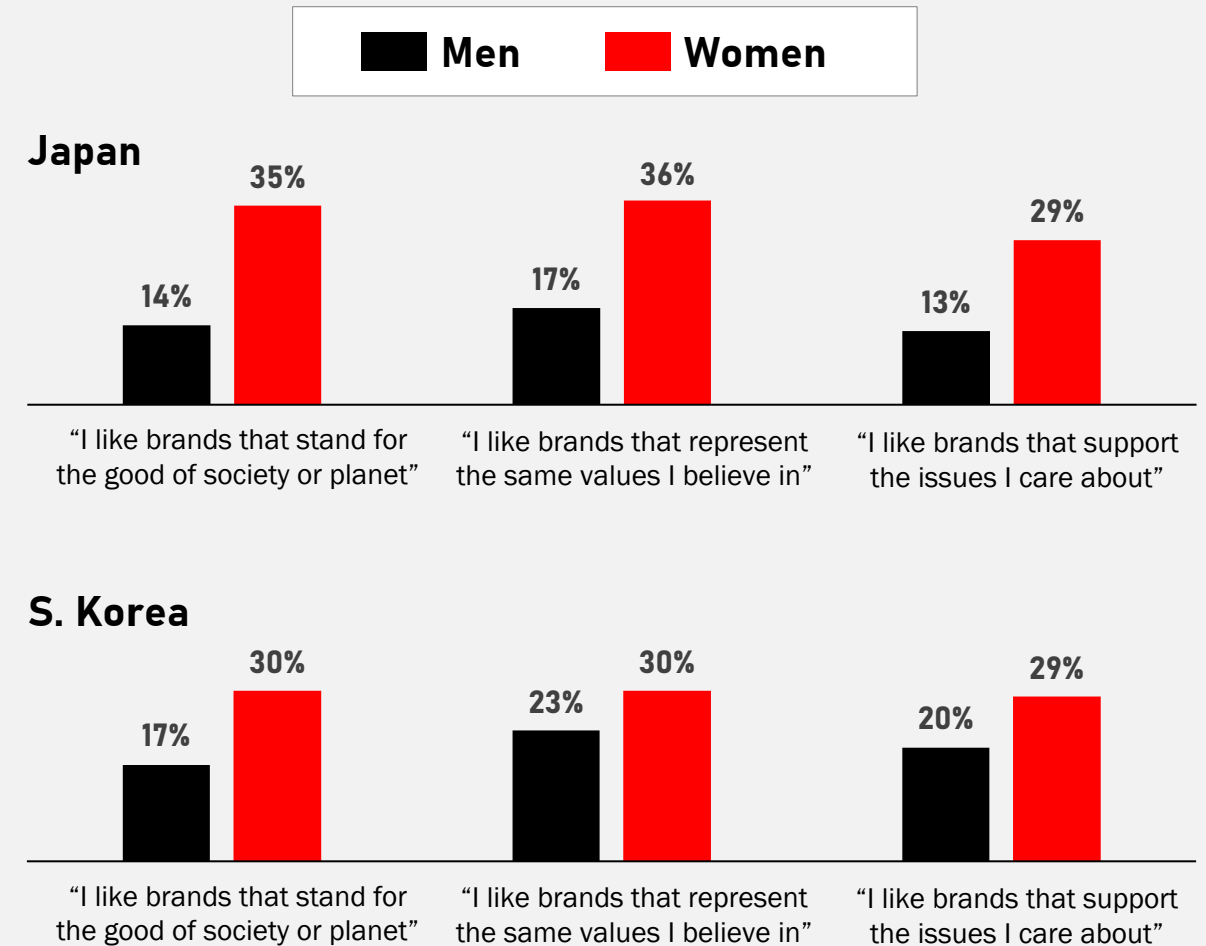
In Japan & Korea,

# WOMEN WANT BRAND PURPOSE MUCH MORE THAN MEN.

- In these countries, women are much more likely to embrace brands that are rooted in purpose-driven values than men.
- This is especially true in Japan where women are 2x more likely than men to seek brands that embody a purpose.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS BRAND PURPOSE

% STRONGLY AGREE\* - BY GENDER



Base: Total Respondents

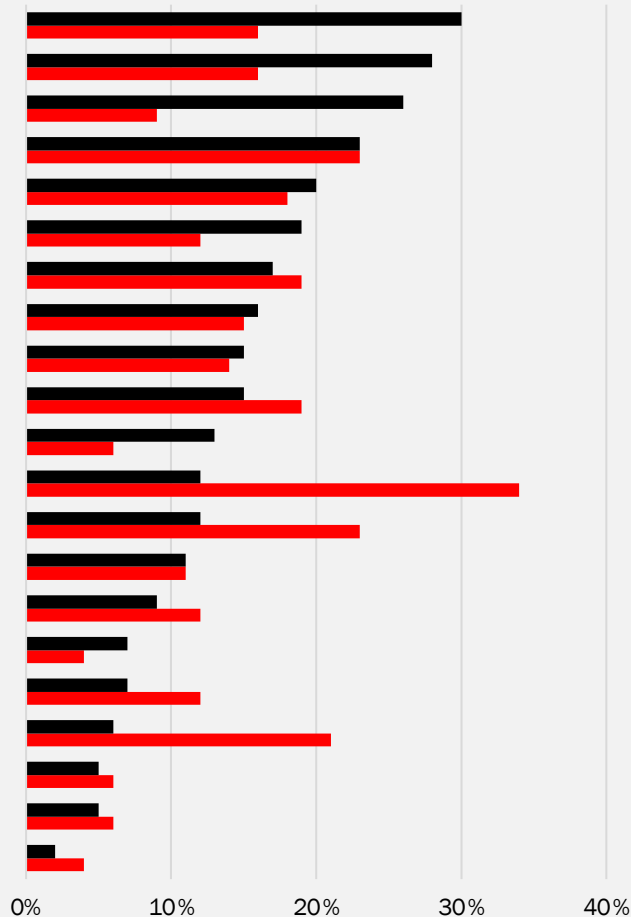
\*Measured on a 5-point agreement scale

# The Gender Divide in Japan & Korea: WHAT TOPICS/CAUSES DO YOU WANT BRANDS TO CHAMPION?

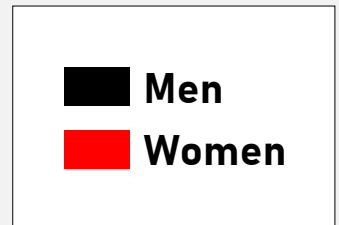
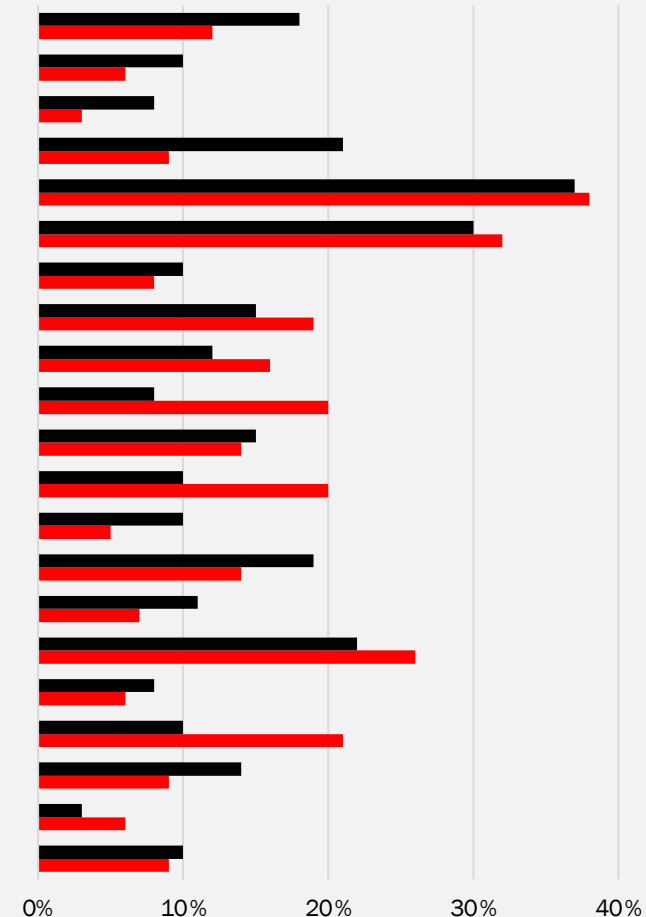
## Top-3 Choices (in %)

- Making products affordable for all
- Promoting national pride
- Paying own employees well
- Promoting physical & mental health
- Environment/sustainability
- Social justice
- Paying the right amount of taxes
- Using local ingredients or material
- Helping to strengthen relationships
- Using natural/organic ingredients
- Advocating for quality education
- Empowering women/equality
- Fighting poverty
- Protecting clean water sources
- Advocating LGBTQ acceptance
- Driving diversity, equity & inclusion
- Supporting government priorities
- Protecting animal rights/welfare
- Upholding family values
- Upholding traditional religious values
- Freedom of worship

### Japan



### S. Korea



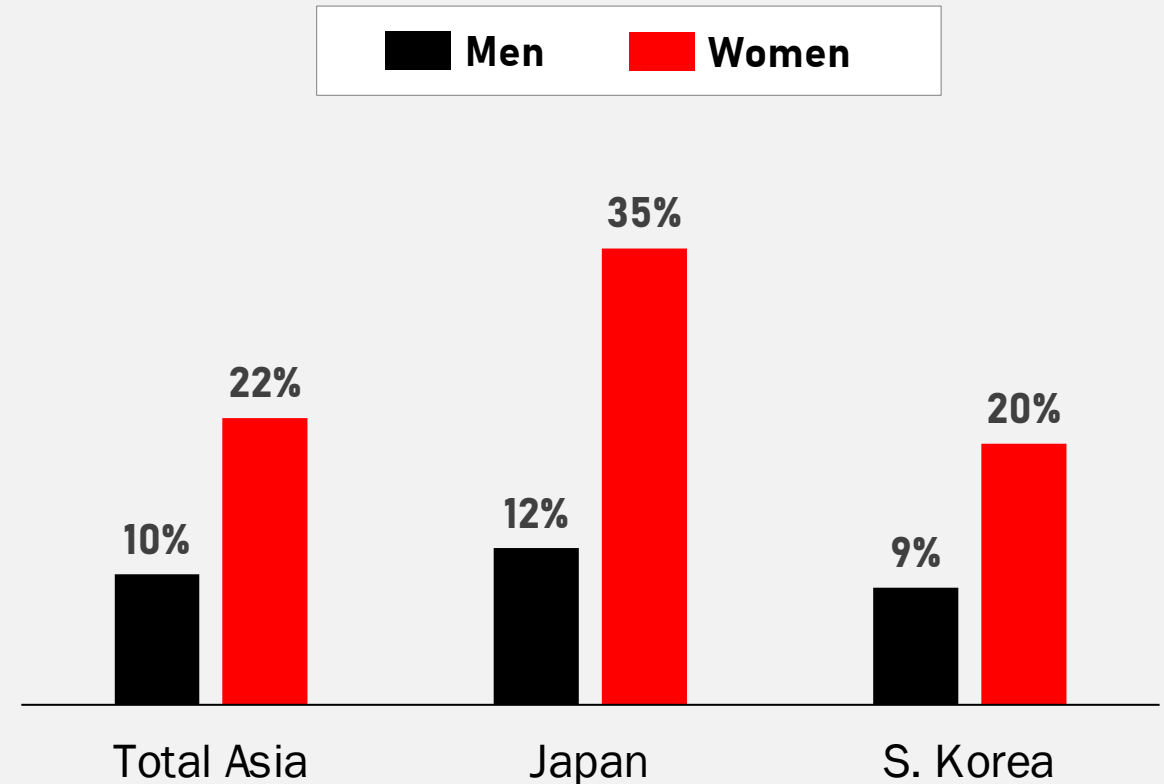
BASE: Purpose-Driven Shoppers  
\*Note: as part of top-3 choices

# JAPANESE & KOREAN WOMEN SEE BRANDS AS POTENTIAL ALLIES WHEN IT COMES TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT ISSUES.

- As the men in these countries are less keen on this issue, women are prompted to find support from other sources in society - including brands.
- In fact, more women in Japan feel it is more urgent for brands to champion women empowerment/equality (35%) than the environment (18%).

## WHAT TOPICS OR CAUSES DO YOU WANT BRANDS TO CHAMPION?

% who said "Women Empowerment/Equality"



BASE: Purpose-Driven Shoppers  
\*Note - as part of top-3 choices

# JAPANESE & KOREAN WOMEN ARE SEEING LESS SUPPORT FROM MALE COUNTERPARTS ON GENDER ISSUES.

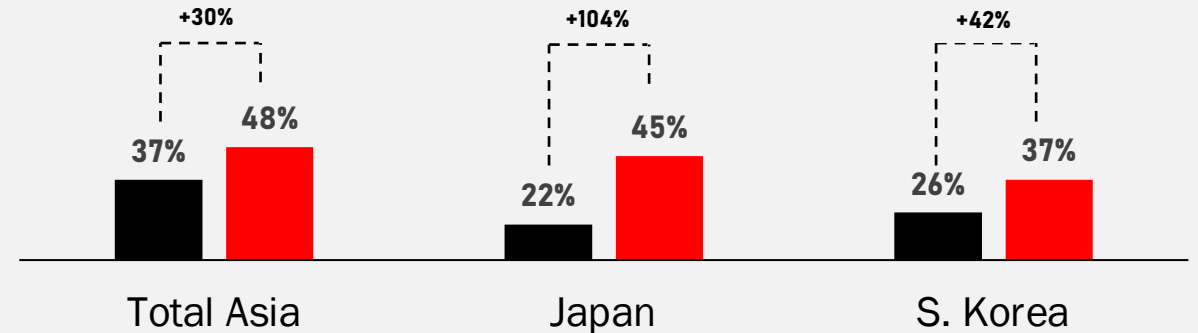
- While there is a gender divide on the issue of gender equality across the region, this is especially more pronounced in Japan and Korea.
- In these two countries, men care the least about gender equality.

## PERSONAL BELIEFS ON GENDER ISSUES

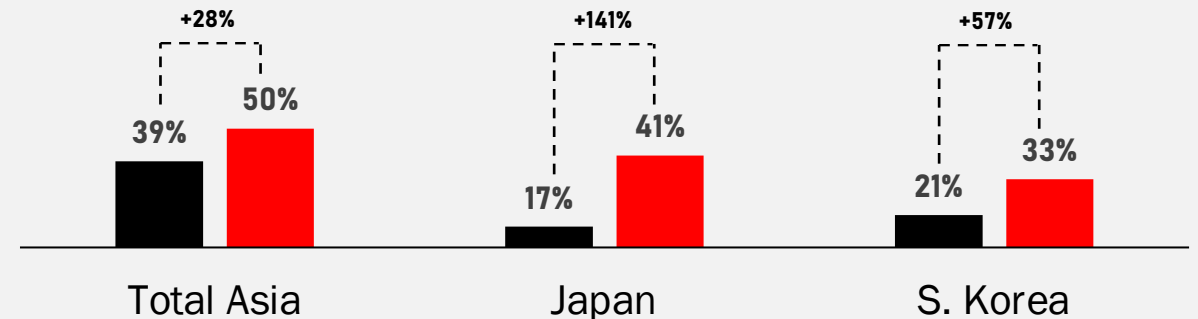
% STRONGLY BELIEVE\* – BY GENDER

Men Women

“I believe ads should not show only women doing chores”



“Ads should help women feel good about their bodies”



Base: Total Respondents

\*Measured on a 5-point scale

# EXPERT VOICE

“Japan's gender gap index ranks 116th out of 146 countries, which is by far the lowest among developed countries. One of the main reasons for this is the income gap between men and women and the low ratio of women in management positions, which Japanese women expect companies (who own brands) to change. On the other hand, since men have not been suffering disadvantages in the gender gap in Japan, the survey results may have revealed that their interest in this topic is not as high as women's. (Unfortunately!)”

## KAORI YATSU

Head of Planning/D&I Officer  
BBDO JAPAN



**LEARNING 5:**

**ALTHOUGH JAPANESE MEN ARE LESS KEEN ABOUT BRAND PURPOSE, THEY WANT BRANDS TO SUPPORT ISSUES THAT CAN HELP THEM FINANCIALLY DURING DIFFICULT TIMES.**

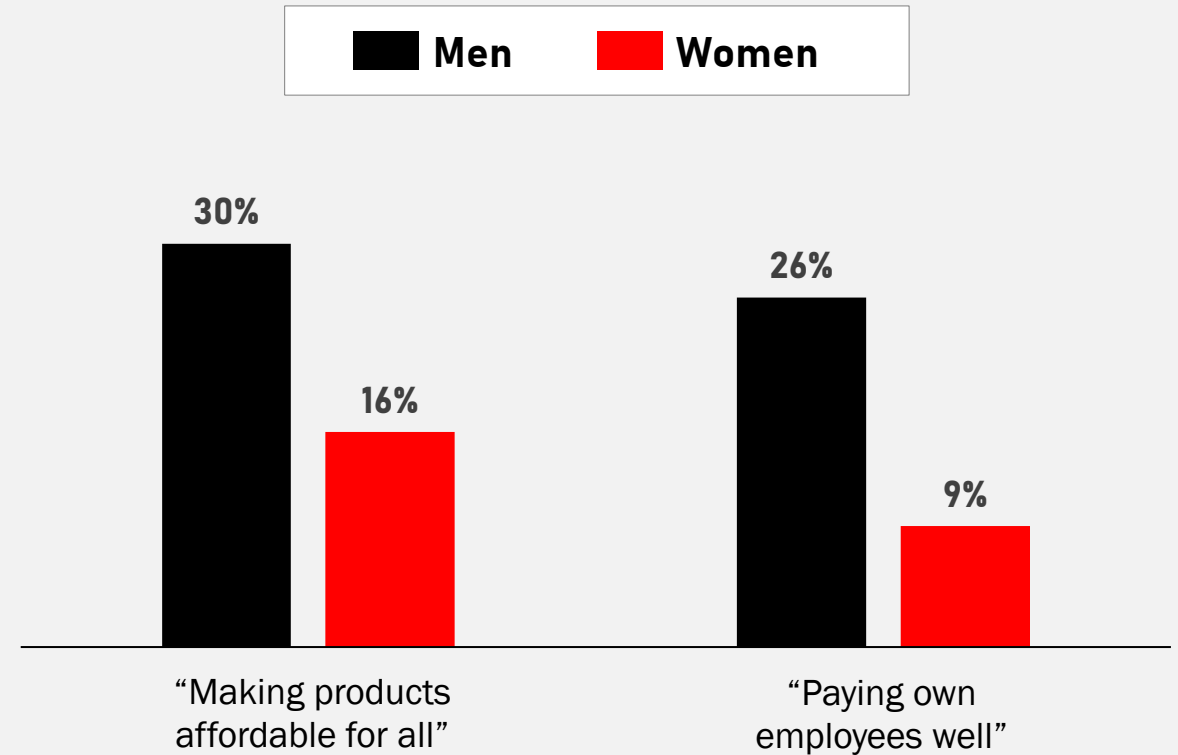


# THE MEN IN JAPAN: FIRST WORLD CONSUMERS ENCOUNTERING THIRD WORLD ISSUES.

- While Japanese men do not demonstrate interest in brand purpose in general, they want brands to help them deal with challenging financial matters, which we also see is common among emerging market consumers from the Philippines and India.
- In fact, making products affordable for all is the top topic Japanese men want brands to champion. In other countries, men prioritize the urgency of environment/sustainability.

## WHAT TOPICS OR CAUSES DO YOU WANT BRANDS TO CHAMPION?

A Significant Difference Between Men vs. Women - JAPAN



BASE: Purpose-Driven Shoppers  
\*Note - as part of top-3 choices

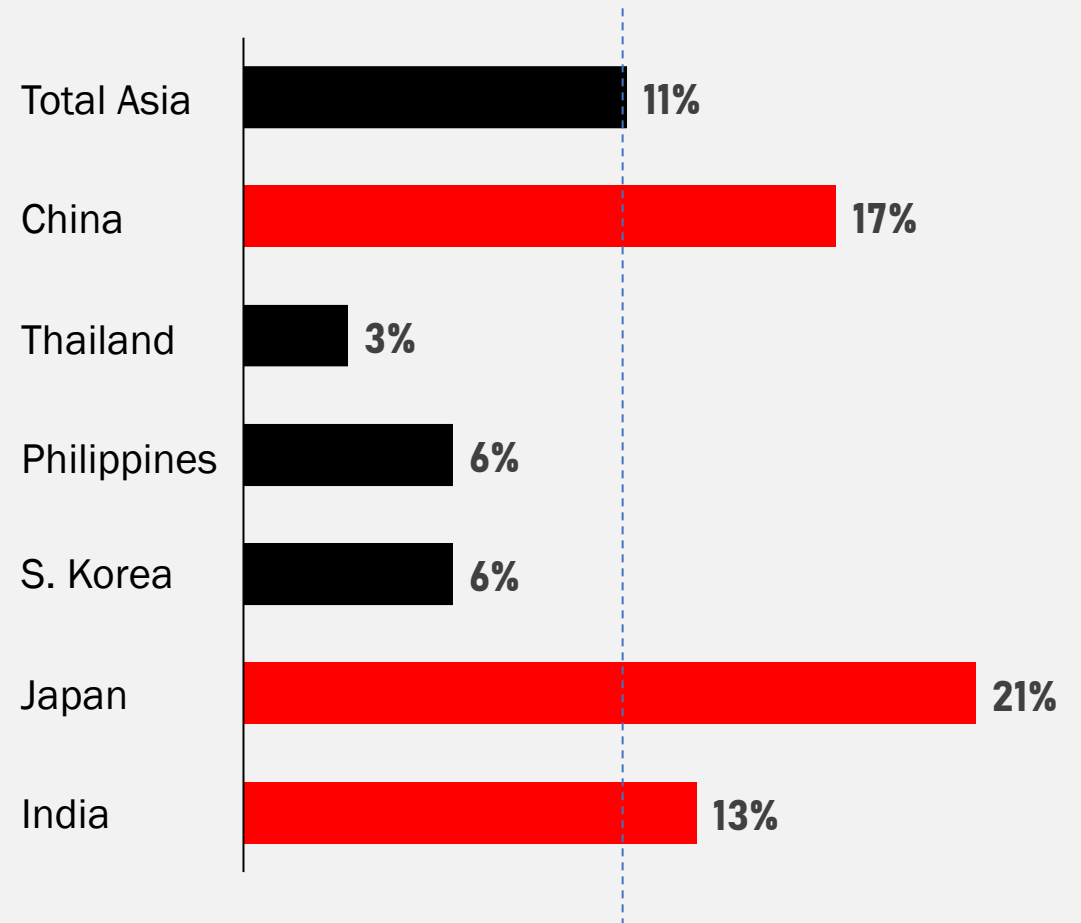
**LEARNING 6:**

**RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ASIA HAVE  
USHERED A NEW ERA OF BRAND NATIONALISM  
AMONG THE MEN IN THE MIDST OF THE  
GEOPOLITICAL STORM.**

# THE RISE OF NATIONAL PRIDE AND THE POTENTIAL ROLE BRANDS CAN PLAY IN STOKING IT.

- Consumers in countries afflicted by geopolitical tensions in the region are more likely to want brands to promote national pride.
- This is reinforced by brands in some parts of the region (e.g., China) that embrace a purpose narrative that celebrates a newfound sense of ascendancy and patriotism.

## % WHO SAY THEY WANT BRANDS TO “PROMOTE NATIONAL PRIDE”



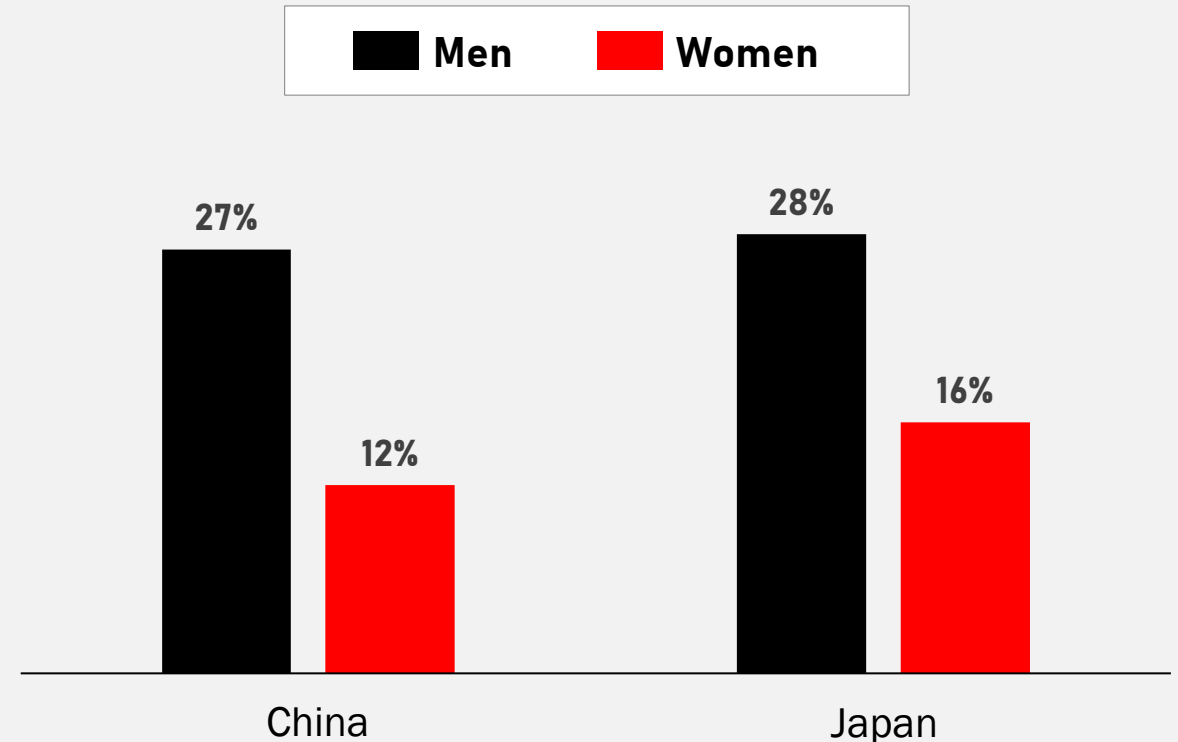
BASE: Purpose-Driven Shoppers  
\*Note - as part of top-3 choices

# IN CHINA AND JAPAN, THE DESIRE FOR 'PATRIOTIC BRANDS' CENTERS AROUND MEN.

- In China, promoting national pride is the #3 brand purpose that men want brands to champion.
- Among Japanese men, this topic is even more compelling than the theme of environment and sustainability.
- Women in these two countries, on the other hand, are less concerned with such nationalistic brand rhetoric.

## % WHO SAY THEY WANT BRANDS TO "PROMOTE NATIONAL PRIDE"

Significant Difference Between Men vs. Women



BASE: Purpose-Driven Shoppers

**LEARNING 7:**

**WHEN IT COMES TO THE POTENTIAL FOR BRAND PURPOSE MESSAGING AROUND LGBTQ ADVOCACY, THE SITUATION IN ASIA IS HIGHLY NUANCED.**

# THE ASIAN REGION CAN BE BUCKETED INTO FOUR (4) WHEN IT COMES TO OPENNESS TO LGTBQ ISSUES & ADVOCACY.

1

## THE ACTIVE ADVOCATES.

A country that already embraces LGBTQ openness, and want brands to advocate for it even more.



Thailand

2

## THE PASSIVE SUPPORTERS.

Countries that already accepts the LGBTQ community, but where people do not feel brands need to advocate for it actively.



India



Philippines

3

## THE SYMPATHETIC NICHE.

Countries where the LGBTQ community is not fully accepted, but a few (e.g., women in Japan) want brands to support it.



S. Korea



Japan

4

## THE HESITATORS.

Countries that do not embrace the LGBTQ community, and also do not want brands to advocate for it.

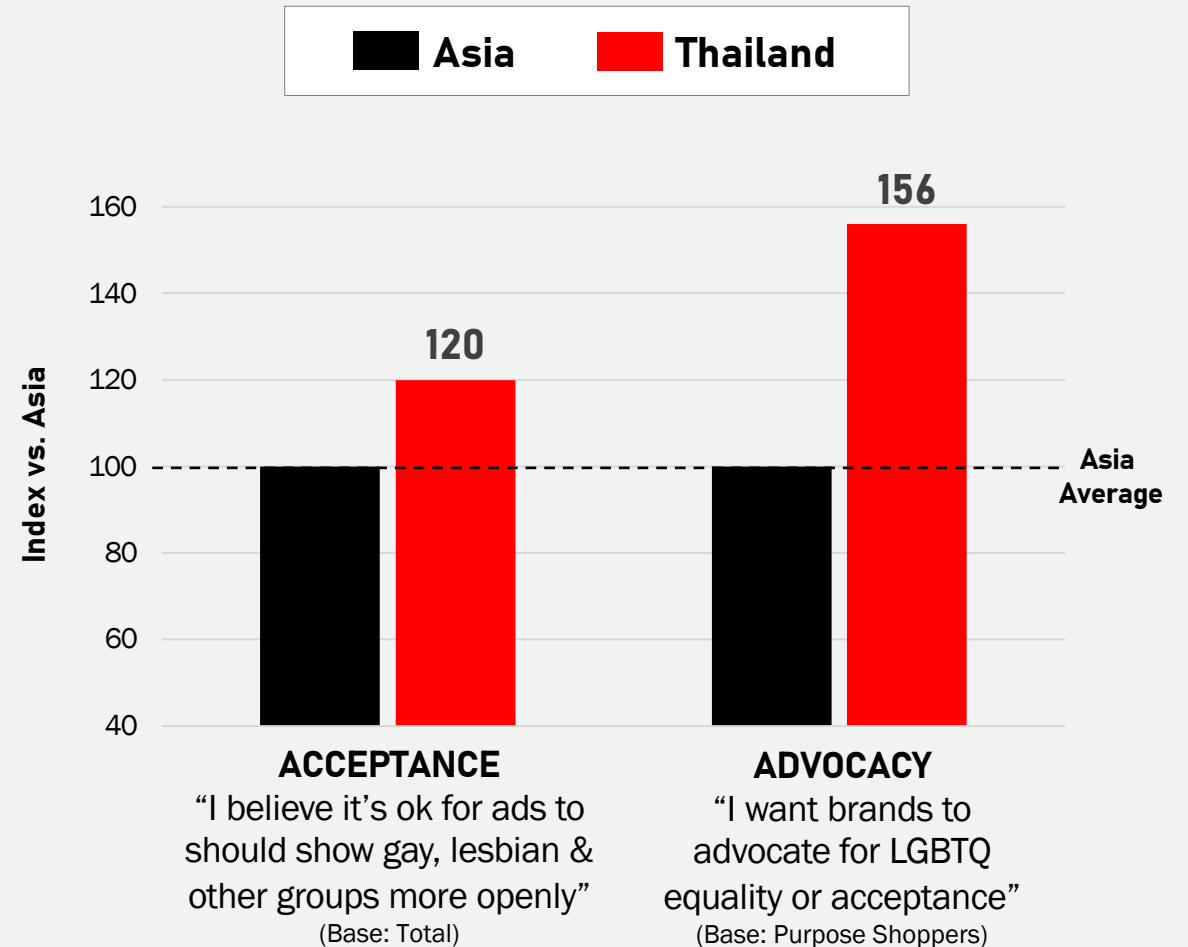


China

# THE ACTIVE ADVOCATES: THAI CONSUMERS

- Consumers in Thailand accept LGBTQ communities more than the average in the region.
- Thai consumers also want brands to advocate for this cause more than those in other Asian countries.
- Thus, in this market, brands have an opportunity to join the fight with consumers.

## ACCEPTANCE & ADVOCACY INDEX: LGTBQ EQUALITY

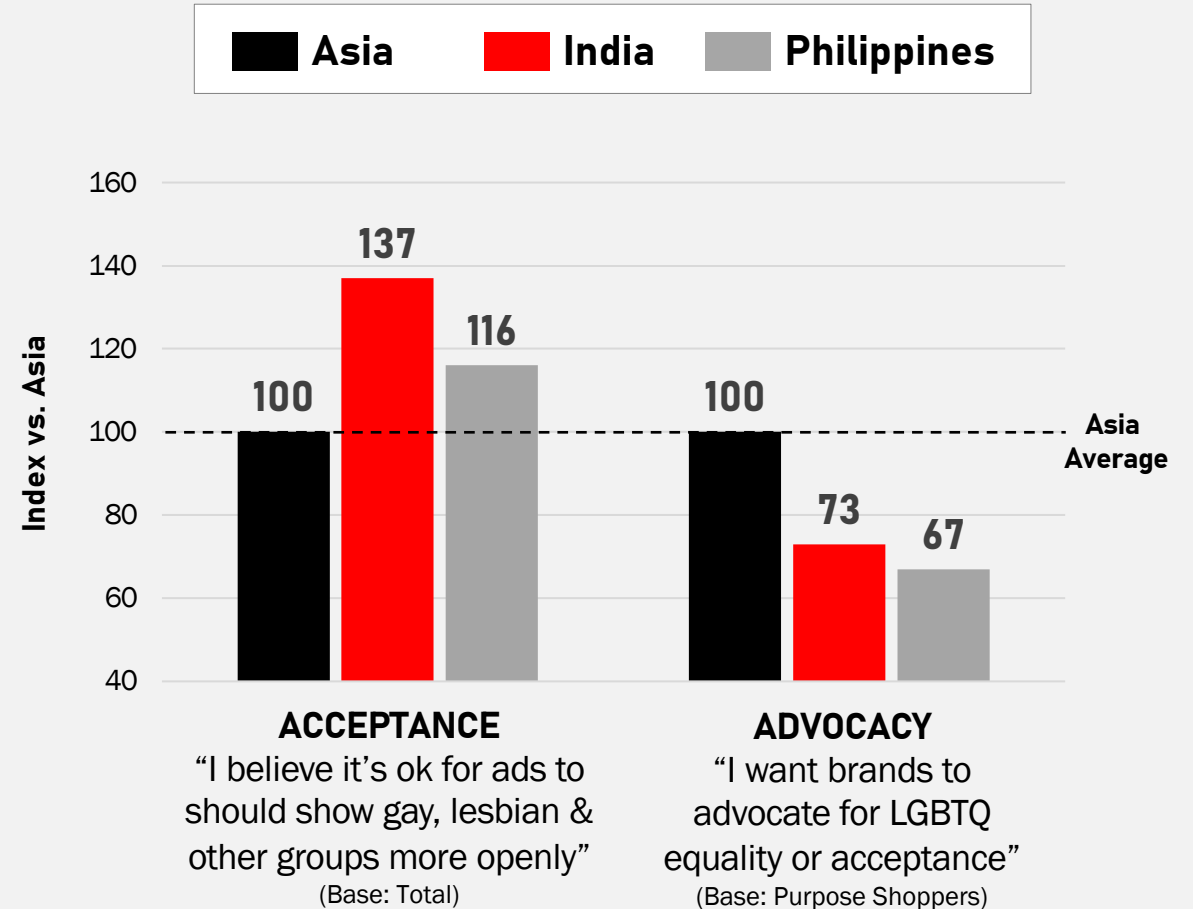


Note: Asia = 100

# THE PASSIVE SUPPORTERS: INDIAN AND FILIPINO CONSUMERS

- Indians and Filipinos – despite being rooted in conservative religions – actually demonstrate higher than average acceptance for the LGBTQ community.
- The consumer desire for brands to advocate this cause is weaker than average in these countries - either because they no longer consider it an issue and no longer need brand advocacy, or because they see more urgent issues in their developing economies.
- Either way, brands still have an opportunity to reinforce change in these open-minded markets.

## ACCEPTANCE & ADVOCACY INDEX: LGBTQ EQUALITY



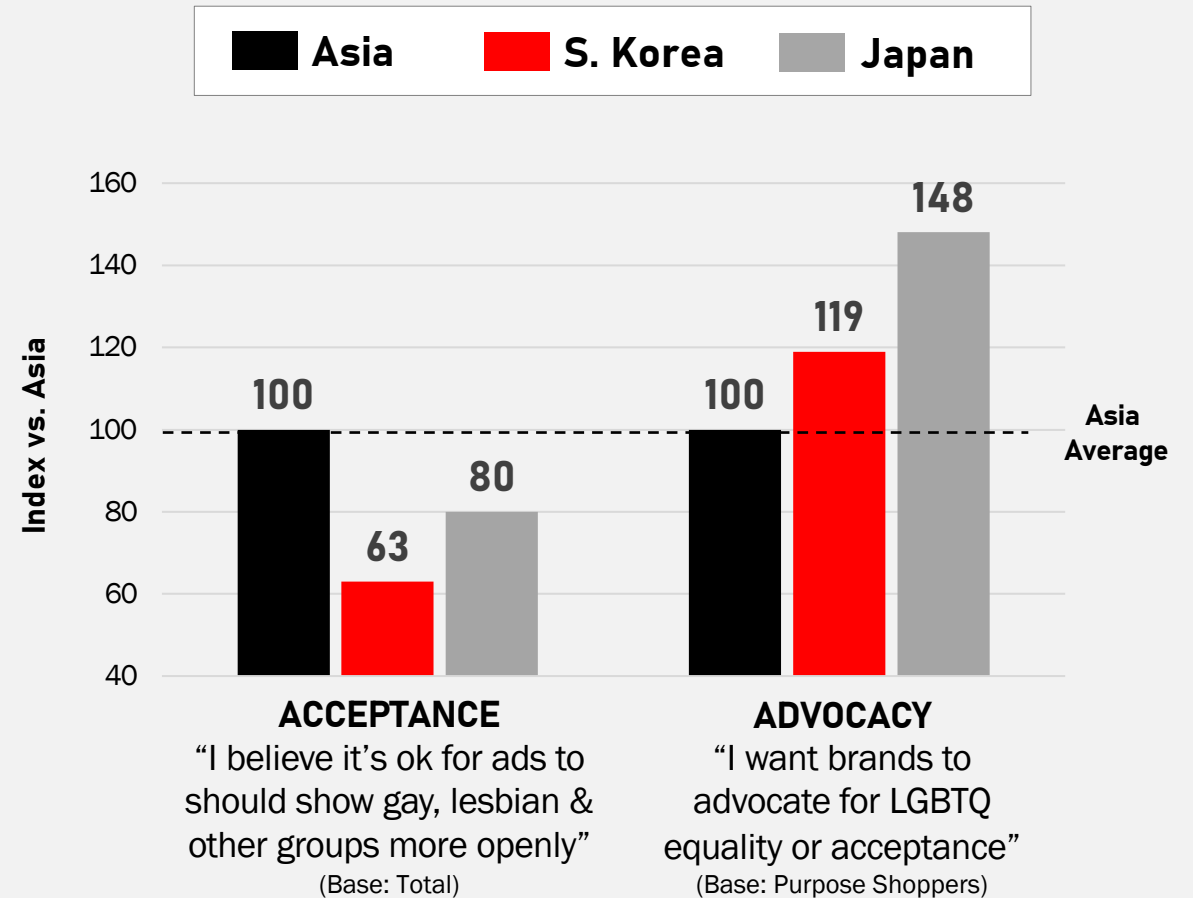
Note: Asia = 100



# THE SYMPATHETIC NICHE: JAPAN AND KOREA

- The percentage of consumers who accept the openness of the LGBTQ community is still quite low in Japan and Korea.
- Nevertheless, progressive supporters of the community – while fewer than in other countries – are very vocal, and really want brands to support it actively. These offer opportunities for counter-culture brands to stand with courage in support of LGBTQ communities.

## ACCEPTANCE & ADVOCACY INDEX: LGBTQ EQUALITY

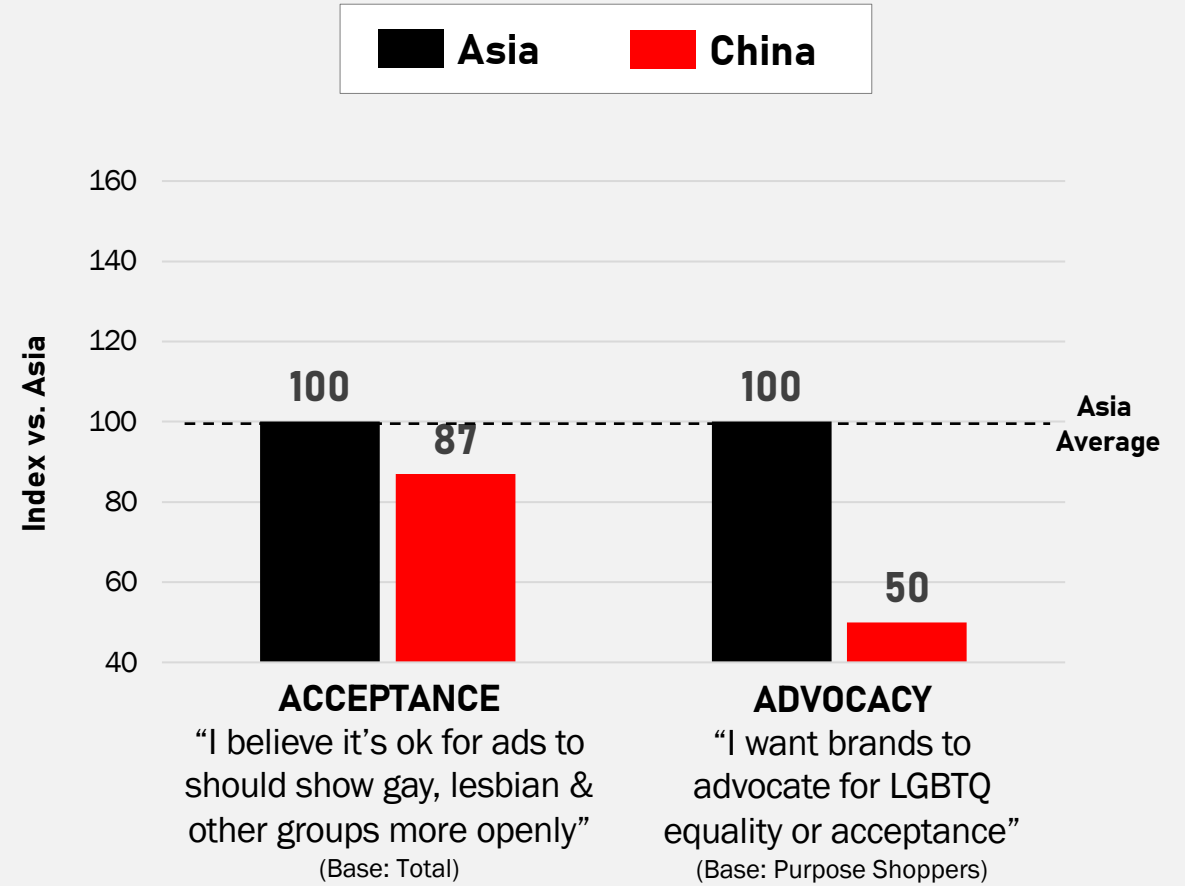


Note: Asia = 100

# THE HESITATORS: CHINA

- There is still a lot of resistance to LGBTQ openness in the Chinese market in general. As such, the desire to have brands champion this issue is weaker than the regional average.
- Brands and consumers advocating this issue need to contend with conservative legal/regulatory barriers to open expression in marketing and communications.

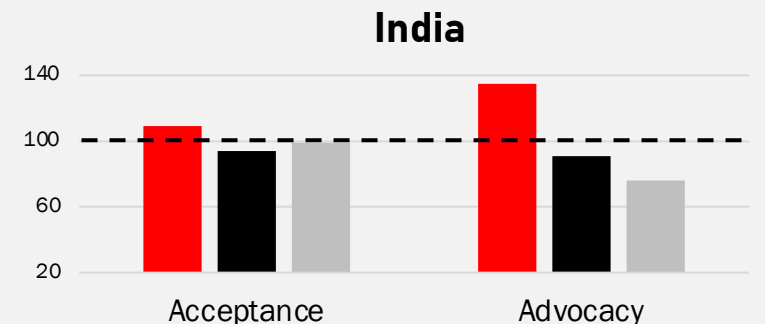
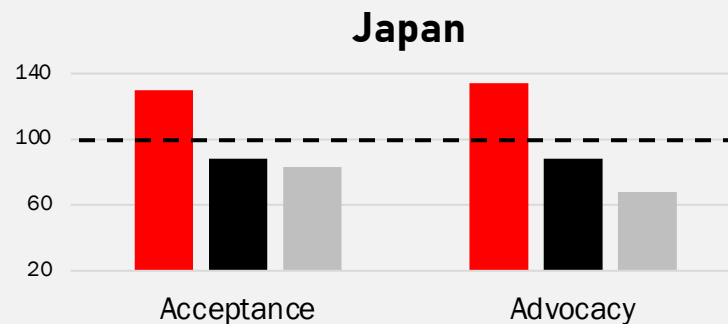
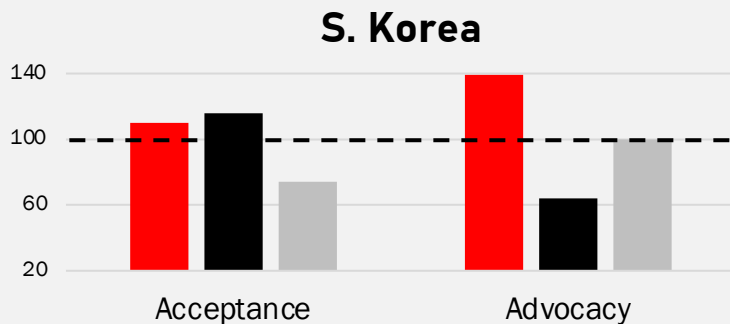
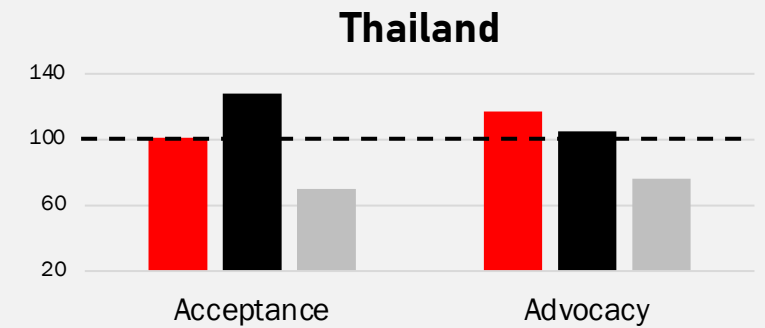
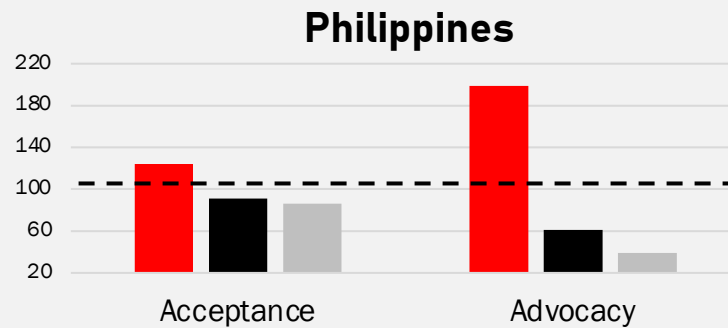
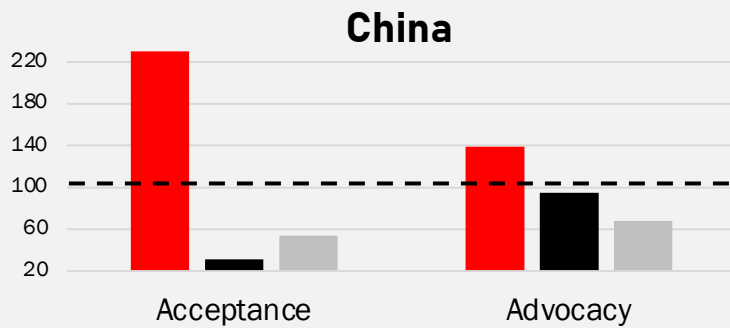
## ACCEPTANCE & ADVOCACY INDEX: LGBTQ EQUALITY



Note: Asia = 100

# REGARDLESS OF THE LEVEL OF LGBTQ ACCEPTANCE & ADVOCACY, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE YOUTH OF ASIA WILL LEAD THE WAY.

18-25 year olds 26-34 year olds 35-45 year olds



Note: Country Average = 100

--- Country Average

# EXPERT VOICE

“We live in an increasingly diverse world. As global demographics shift, it is important for brands to adopt an inclusive, diverse, and intersectional approach to consumer engagement as part of their business growth strategy. The alternative is a brand that will slowly become less relevant. We know that Gen-Z consumers are the most accepting consumer segment as it relates to the LGBTQ+ community, and this study demonstrates how mission-critical it is for brands to align themselves in advocating for this community as well.”

## JASON ROSARIO

Chief Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Officer  
BBDO WORLDWIDE



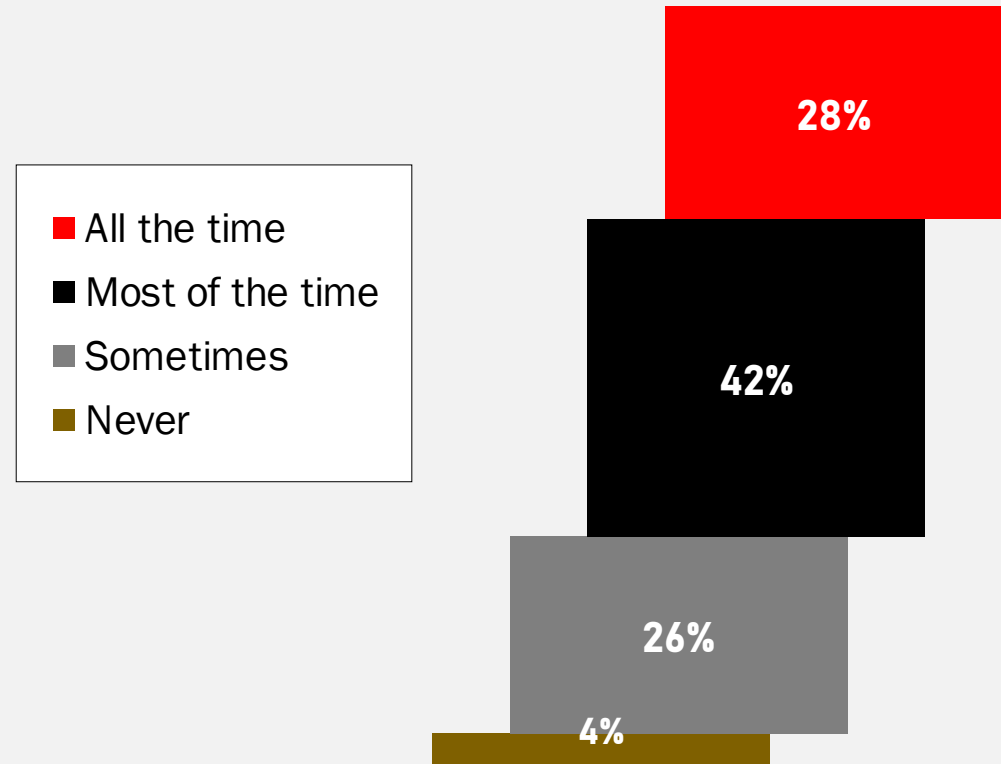
**LEARNING 8:**

**CONSUMERS DO NOT SEEK A SENSE OF PURPOSE FROM BRANDS ONLY. THEY ALSO LOOK FOR IT FROM THE COMPANIES BEHIND THE BRANDS.**

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLE OF CORPORATE BRAND IMAGE IN DRIVING PURCHASE CANNOT BE DISCOUNTED.

- About 7 in 10 Asian consumers think about the company behind the brand they purchase “all the time” or “most of the time.”

WHEN YOU BUY A BRAND,  
HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK ABOUT  
THE COMPANY BEHIND IT?

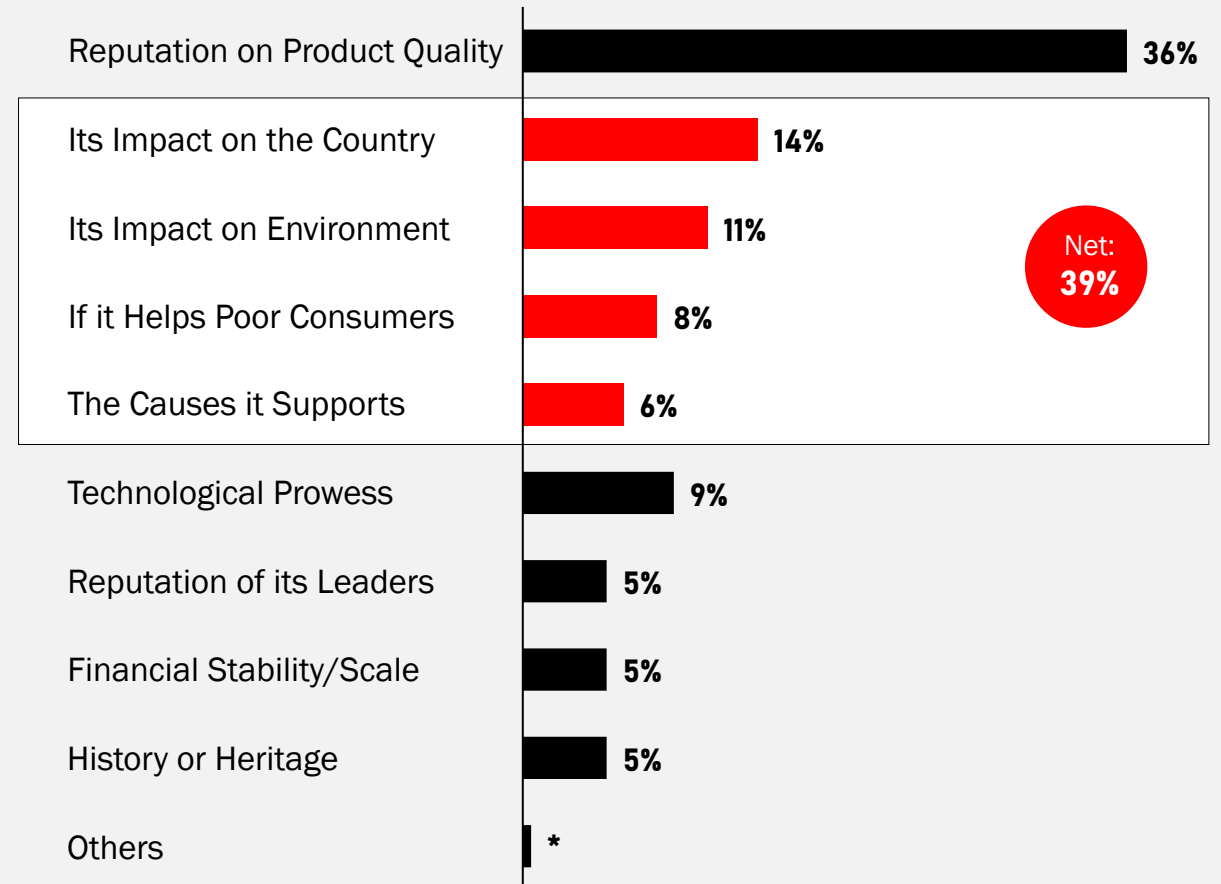


BASE: Total Respondents

# AND A COMPELLING CORPORATE IMAGE IS LARGELY DRIVEN BY HAVING AN ASSOCIATED PURPOSE.

- Adding up the items related to purpose is roughly equivalent to the reputation for product quality. It shows that a company's purpose is becoming nearly as important as its reputation on product quality.

## WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE COMPANY BEHIND A BRAND: WHAT QUALITIES MATTER MOST TO YOU?



BASE: Total Who Think about Companies Behind Brands (All, Most, Some of the Time)

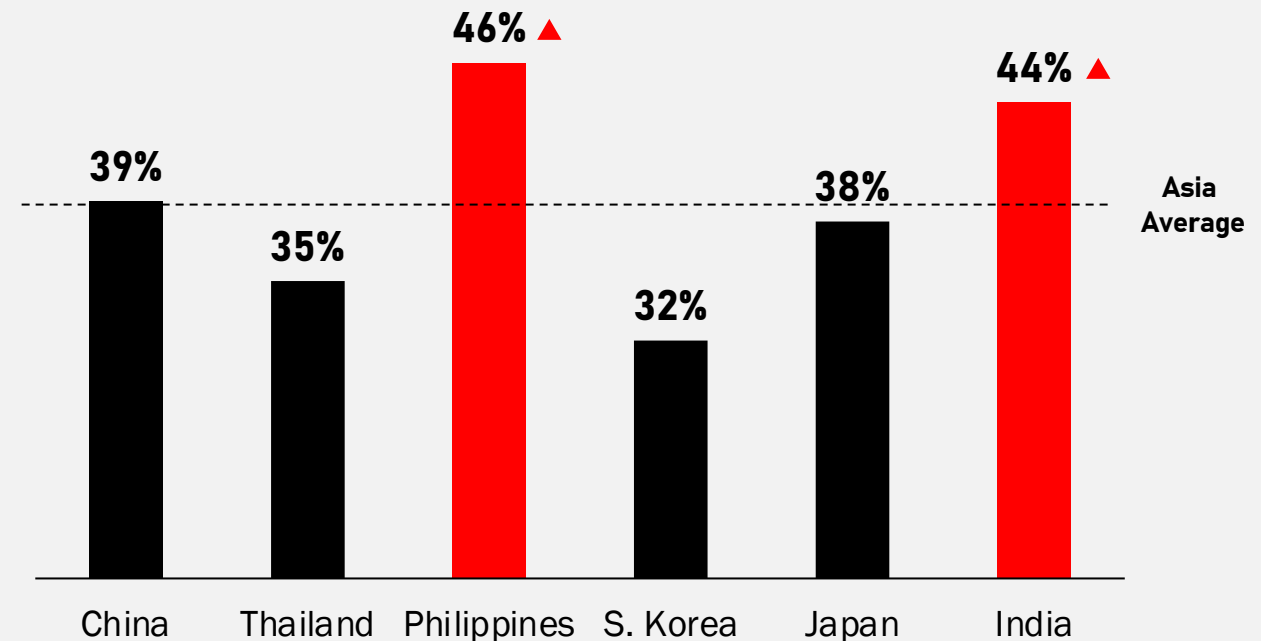
\*Less than 0.5%

# ONCE AGAIN, DEVELOPING ECONOMIES ARE THE MOST PARTICULAR ABOUT A CORPORATION'S REPUTATION.

- India and the Philippines have the most discerning consumers when it comes to corporate entities behind brands.
- In both countries, there is a big interest in how the company impacts the country's development (20% and 14% for China and India, respectively). Environmental impact is also a key topic for both markets (14% and 11%, respectively).

## WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE COMPANY BEHIND A BRAND: WHAT QUALITIES MATTER MOST TO YOU?

% Who Mentioned Purpose-Related Attributes



BASE: Total Who Think about Companies Behind Brands (All, Most, Some of the Time)



# EXPERT VOICE

“Consumers appreciate the efforts of companies in nation-building, especially in third-world countries such as ours where the government is challenged on many fronts. Patriarch companies such as Ayala, San Miguel and SM continue to support with efforts in infrastructure, sustainability, agriculture, healthcare, education and disaster response.”

## FRANCINE KAHN-GONZALEZ

Chief Executive Officer  
BBDO GUERRERO



**IN SUMMARY:**

**WHAT DO THESE TRENDS MEAN  
FOR THE FUTURE OF BRANDS  
AND MARKETING?**

- **CLIMATE CHANGE TO LIKELY SPEED UP THE IMPORTANCE OF BRAND PURPOSE.** As the effects of global warming intensifies, more consumers will look to brands to embrace a sense of urgency and be part of the solution rather than the problem. When this happens, brand purpose will significantly impact brand and customer relations much more than now.
- **BRAND PURPOSE WILL BECOME 'DE RIGUEUR' FOR MARKETERS AS GEN Z ASIAN CONSUMERS COME OF AGE AND TAKE OVER SOCIETY.** While traditional mindsets and narratives still persist in the region, those under 25 demonstrate progressive voices on issues like LGBT+ acceptance and advocacy. They will expect brands to be their voice, and brands that do not stand for a social purpose will lose social currency.
- **BRANDS WILL INCREASINGLY HAVE THE SAME ACCOUNTABILITY AS QUASI-GOVERNMENT BODIES.** This is especially true in the developing regions of Asia where citizens already expect brands to step up and fill gaps which public governance systems often cannot. In this sense, consumers there will continue to expect brands to embrace the same agenda as governments.
- **BRAND PURPOSE IN ASIA WILL HAVE ASIAN CHARACTERISTICS.** Brand purpose in Asia can never exist in a vacuum. A brand's purpose – to be relevant to the region's consumers – will always need to be rooted in what the product or service is supposed to functionally deliver. It also needs to be supplemented by rational/functional content along the customer journey.

# CREDITS

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