

# Being Woman: from Equality to Freedom

A Cultural Perspective of Femininity & Empowerment in China, France and USA

A self-funded study by Centre of Curation, Ipsos UU | October 2021



# Introduction to **Being Woman**

This study seeks to understand what it means to be a woman and gender through a cultural lens. The report is a product of curation, using Ipsos assets as well as external sources.



We find that **modern-day femininity is very much a product of social culture**. And being a woman means very different things in different countries/cultures:

- **In the US**, the bastion of individuality and freedom, we see strong trends of polarisation and intersectionality. This creates vulnerability for women to express their individual identity in a truly free way.
- **In France**, with a more feminine culture, openness co-exists with hierarchy. Being woman, while more expressive, is also still about desirability.
- **In China**, the quest for success leads to competitiveness and being woman can often mean inherent disadvantage in the race.

# Understanding Gender through a Cultural Lens

**CULTURE**  
one of the most critical aspects shaping gender today

## GENDER in Nature

- Biological, 'sex' roles , no gender
- No conflict, no hierarchy
- No quest for 'equality'



## GENDER in Humans

- Socially determined 'gender' roles
- Combined with inner sense of identity
- Learnt concept, shaped by culture

**Gender is a uniquely human, social construct, shaped by social culture**

# Understanding Femininity & Gender through a Cultural Lens



## METHOD: Curation

- Synthesizing from multiple sources of data/information available
- Combined with expert inputs for topic (gender), markets (China, France, USA) and categories (beauty, technology)
- Brought alive with topical examples, case studies, thought starters



## ASSETS

- Global Trends Survey data (reviewed by gender X market) for past 3-4 years
- Global Advisor studies on gender
- Ipsos What-The-Future series on Gender, Beauty, Technology
- Ipsos Knowledge Center – country Flair reports
- Ipsos Knowledge Center – General Briefing Papers published on gender, beauty, technology, countries, trends
- Ipsos Global Cultural Insights Network, Global Value Bank
- Ipsos practice & market experts

## SOURCES

- Demographic data – World Bank Data | Statista | CIA Factbook
- Women's Confidence Briefing Paper – IT Cosmetics + Eranos
- Accenture reports on Digital Fluency, Honing Digital Edge
- World Economic Forum – World Gender Gap report (2021, 2020)
- Trendwatching reports for sectors, regions
- Desk research, literature scanning

# Cultural Transferability:

Introducing the Ipsos Cultural Profiling and Transferability framework

## UNIVERSAL VALUES



Empirical Frameworks  
Intersected with Category /Market,  
Brand, Function

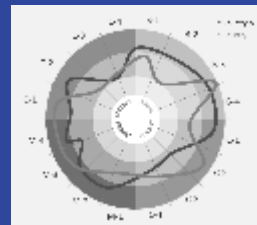


Culture + 3 Optional Pillars  
with actionable dimensions

## LOCAL CULTURE



Ipsos Knowledge Assets  
Fluency in 88 Cultures, CIN  
Domain X Market Expertise



Profiling similar/dissimilar  
countries/segments/generations

## BUSINESS IMPACT



Activated for "Glocal" Impact  
Inspiration of local texture for  
universal themes



Providing cultural meaning  
inspiration for localization

# The 3 things we learn about gender from culture

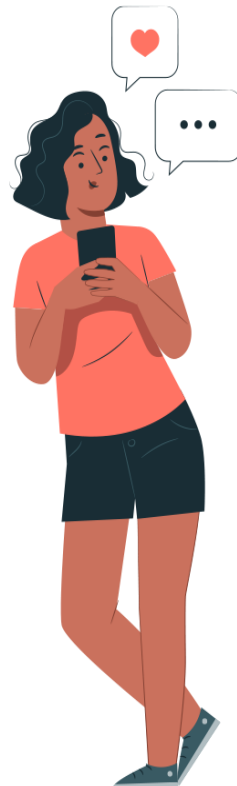
1.

The struggle for women is not as much about equality – but **freedom** to be their own woman



2.

To engage with women, we need to understand **WHAT** issues are relevant to them in their own culture, as well as **HOW** to engage on these in a social culture that includes men



3.

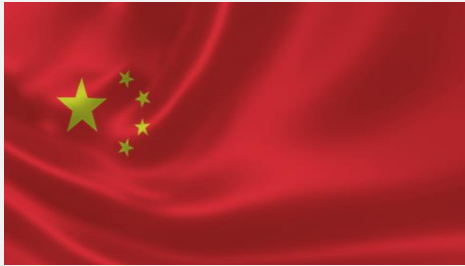
The emerging **gender assets** that help accelerate gender development across cultures are:

- Policy participation
- Design & Interface
- Digital Fluency



# Culture

Laying the roots of modern femininity



single-child  
nationalism  
pragmatism  
wen-wu  
**money**  
irreligious

Tensions are around femininity milestones and roles – especially motherhood

**BINARY POWER**



privileged  
desirability  
Ideals  
**egalite**  
effortlessness

Greater acceptance of seeming inequalities, as long as there is openness, freedom to express

**HIERARCHY VS EQUALITY**



vulnerability  
freedom  
intersectionality  
advocacy  
**young**  
polarization

Tensions are around identity beyond gender

**INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY**

# Emerging Gender Assets

## 1

### Policy/Political Power Participation

in policy accelerates gender issues

World Economic Forum cites that female participation in policy making significantly accelerates closing the gender gap – it also remains the area of widest gender gap currently

## 2

### Design/Interface

One area where women do not strive to be like men

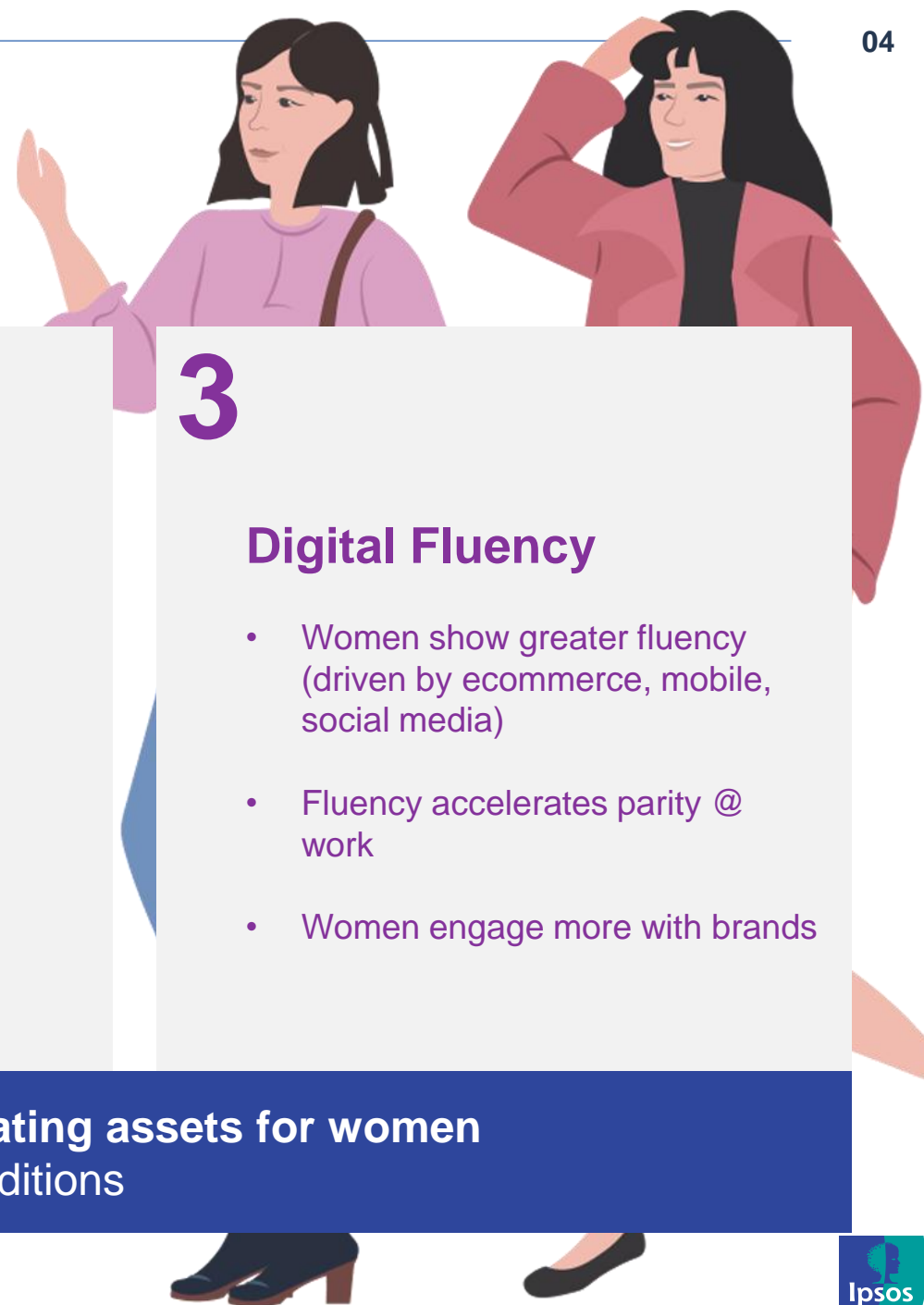
Seek a more human, intuitive and friendly interface – rejecting male design

## 3

### Digital Fluency

- Women show greater fluency (driven by ecommerce, mobile, social media)
- Fluency accelerates parity @ work
- Women engage more with brands

**Overarching enablers that can act as accelerating assets for women**  
cutting across cultures and traditions





# How can we drive Femininity & Empowerment more effectively?

## 1

**Culture is the X factor** shaping gender trends, conversations and issues.

Are you investing in integrating culture in all your gender programs and activations?

## 2

**Gender issues are dynamic** – spawning a **unique gender culture** (lead by women) that then interacts with the larger social culture (a product of patriarchal history). If you do not cover both, you will not have the right inputs for the WHAT (content strategy) and the HOW (the activation strategy).

## 3

**You can shape Gender Culture** through a) defining gender identity  
b) shaping gender aspirations  
c) building gender support sources and  
d) shaping the gender roles and relationships.

## 4

**Every country will be shaped differently** on Gender Culture – and respond differently to Gender activation. You can anticipate this and have culture inputs as you build strategies for different culture clusters

## 5

For women, **Equality is not necessarily empowering**, often just making them adopt male strategies. The real tension for empowerment is the struggle for freedom vs equality. How can you build freedom for women in your markets?

## 6

Even among women, there is a **sharp generational divide** – with younger generations becoming increasingly gender-blurred.  
Are you approaching your generations differently?

# THANK YOU!



To build a strong, culturally  
nuanced gender strategy,  
please contact:  
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