

Danilo Tesi

# The psychology of German consumers



## Why do Germans still wear socks in their sandals?

*Helpful tips for content creators, marketers, advertisers, and business leaders included.*

## How the world sees the Germans

There are many things that Germany and Germans are known for around the globe: highways without speed limits, Oktoberfest, Bratwurst, socks in sandals, above-average productivity, being one of the leading exporting-nations, good bread, etc. Of course, it is up to discussion whether these are (fun) facts, prejudice or something in between. Either way, they might make for funny conversations but should most probably not become the base of your business decisions when trying to reach and sell to your German clients.

Use this eBook to fact-check your ideas and knowledge about Germany and German consumers and most importantly, have fun while reading it!

Credits to my friend and co-founder of Mango Kollektiv Claudia Müller for giving the best feedback during the creation of this eBook.



## What you can expect from this eBook

This eBook was written to give you a deeper insight into the German nation as such and help you out with any current or future endeavors in the German market. You'll find an elaboration of the national profile established by Hofstede et al. during their extended comparative research and see how it compares internationally. Whenever it's needed, the results will be enriched with findings from other researchers and studies.

To make things a little more figurative and give you a better context, each of the results will be compared with those of the Netherlands, Italy, Japan, and the USA.

The Netherlands is interesting as it is a direct neighbor of Germany and one might assume that people and businesses roll similarly here. Italy has the reputation of being a bit more laid back yet emotional when it comes to people's way of interacting with their peers in private and at work. Japan is an interesting choice as its image suggests that its culture is based on collectivistic ideas in which the individual is less important than the societal context it lives in. The USA, on the other hand, supposedly shares similarities with Germany when it comes to a dedicated working attitude. However, rumor has it that the American people tend to be more over the top when it comes to engaging with others in social situations.

After interpreting the various aspects of the Germans' psychological profile and comparing them to those of the selected countries, **concrete advice for your content strategy, marketing, and general company culture** will be offered.

That way, all sociological and psychological findings will have a direct translation into **actionable insights for your business**.

This is the reason, why the book is titled 'The psychology of German consumers' even though the original studies investigated the nation's people as such on a more theoretical level of psychological dimensions.



## What you need to be aware of before jumping to conclusions

While reading this eBook, please keep in mind that the findings are average numbers which are supposed to give you a general idea of what being German could mean. Think of it as numbers that can show you how Germans as a nation think and feel with regards to a few very important dimensions, which will be explained below.

The findings, of course, do not indicate how a German audience thinks and feels about your products or services specifically. Meaning that you might be able to use the results as a general guideline for your marketing, service, and sales teams, but not as a base to develop your specific business in a way that works for the German market. Also, the research of Hofstede et al. does not take gender, individual personalities, and socio-economic background into consideration.

Besides this, the dimensions do not reflect concrete psychological mechanisms that influence people's buying behavior. If you are curious about those, follow [Mango Kollektiv on LinkedIn](#) or allow our notifications while on the [Mango Kollektiv website](#) to see more content in the future.

If you want more specific knowledge about your business' German audience in order to expand to the German market, improve your current services & products, create better content or publish ads that really speak to them, please contact us at [info@magokollektiv.com](mailto:info@magokollektiv.com). Our team will be happy to help you with gaining all the insights that you need to be successful.

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## About the profiling dimensions described in this eBook

The insights, which Hofstede et al. published after conducting their research, originate from multiple survey-based studies. These were originally executed among thousands of IBM employees around the world and assessed work-related values mainly (1980) and further developed later on.

When evaluating the results of these studies, the team found that the main differences between the psychological profiles of people living in the included countries could be attributed to a limited number of dimensions.

Initially, four main dimensions, also called indexes, were defined: the 'Power distance index', the 'Individualism vs. collectivism index', the 'Uncertainty avoidance index', and the 'Masculinity vs. femininity' index. Based on later research, the list was then extended with two dimensions called 'Long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation' and 'Indulgence vs. restraint'.

In the next section of this eBook, you'll be able to find easy explanations of what each of the dimensions entails. Furthermore, you will be able to read how Germans do with regards to that dimension and how they compare to the Dutch, the Italians, the Japanese and the Americans.

For each of the dimensions discussed, you'll then be able to find out what that could generally mean for your content, your ads, your marketing, and your general communications - internal and external.



## The 'Power distance index' (PDI)

This index also called dimension, indicates how inequality and the distribution of power are viewed by a group - in this case, the people of a nation. More specifically, this dimension reflects how members of a group deal with the fact that power in a group or an organization is distributed unevenly. The index is upward-oriented, meaning it mainly looks at the extent to which less powerful individuals of a group expect and accept the inequality in the distribution of power.

A higher score means that hierarchies are clearly established and people of a group don't doubt and accept it without asking for reasons. A lower score indicates that individuals in a group question authority and would most likely try to establish a more even distribution of power.

This dimension has a large impact on all layers of society as it affects the relationships between people of different ages, between leaders and subordinates, parents and their children (de Mooij, 2019).

The PDI also reflects a level of interdependency between members of a system and feelings of dependency on other people are viewed very differently in different cultures.

### How do Germans do with hierarchies?

Germans have a score of 35 on this dimension. Out of all nations with a value for this dimension, they rank on position 65 which is in the lowest third (see table 1, p. 5). That means that, according to the findings, Germans are less likely to accept established hierarchies without questioning them and would rather establish an even distribution of power compared to two-thirds of the other countries on the list with a value for this index. Compared to the Netherlands (38), Italy (50), Japan (54) and the USA (40), Germans in less powerful positions of a group or an organization are therefore least likely to accept uneven power distribution in a system.

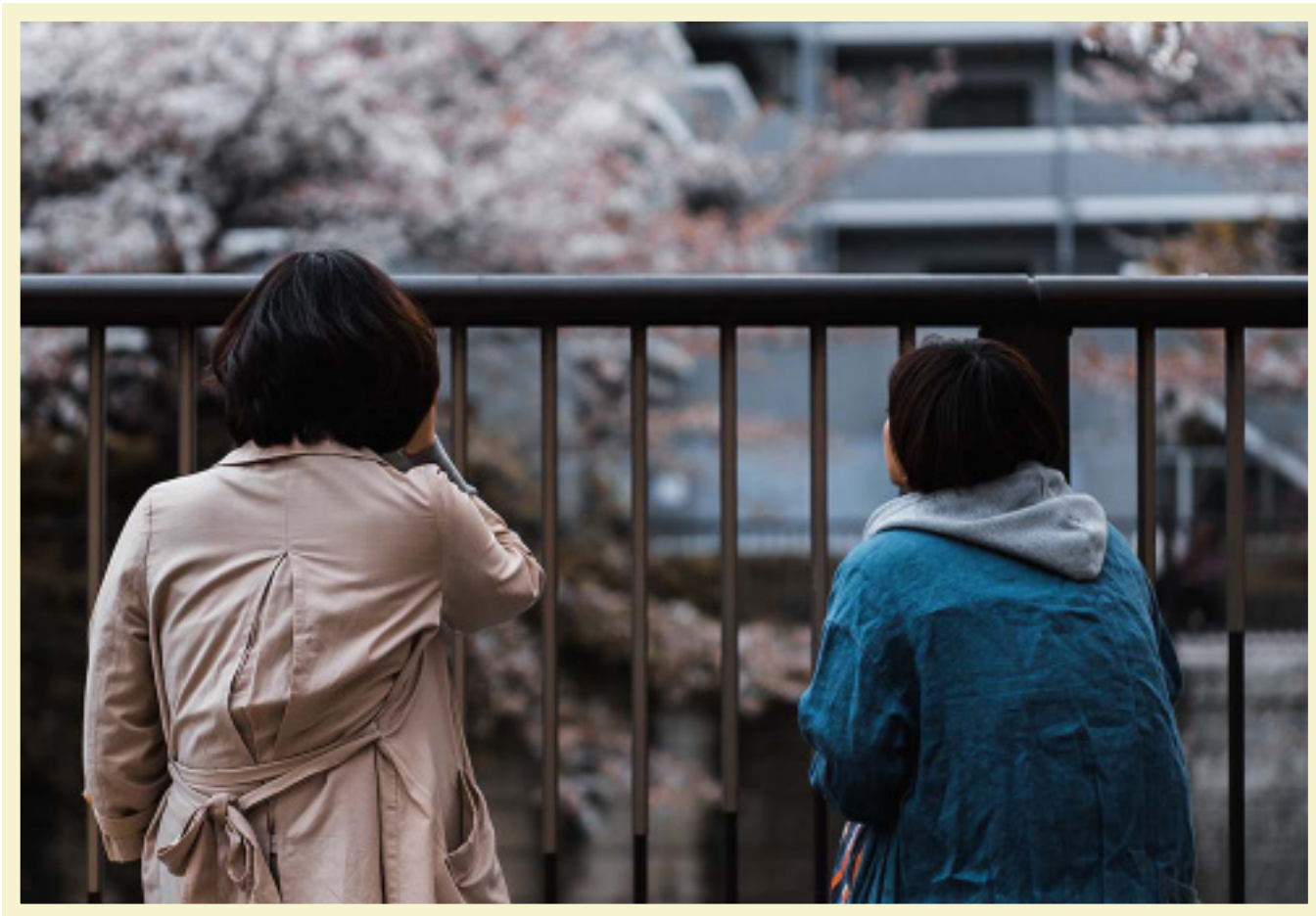
The value could seem like a surprise as it is not uncommon in Germany to call colleagues by their title and last name even after years of working together. Also, it is very common to address people who are similar in age or older with 'Sie', the polite form of the pronoun you - similarly to the Italians in comparable settings.

The Dutch are known for striving to eliminate hierarchies in organizations as much as possible. One could, therefore, assume a way lower score than the German one. However, when looking at the results for the PDI, the Dutch score slightly higher than the Germans (NL 38 vs. DE 35) when in reality their organizational hierarchies can seem extremely flat for Germans.

In reality, the situation is probably more complex than it seems at first sight. The numbers can be interpreted as an indicator of the fact that Germans won't simply accept hierarchies just because they are presented with them. They need to be based on merit and respect and are therefore sustainable over long periods of time. The underlying assumption: 'if somebody has more power than me, it has to be for a reason. If I can see the reason, I accept and play along. If I cannot see why power is unevenly distributed, I will try to establish a higher level of power-equality'.



That is quite different from a typical Dutch organizational structure where hierarchies are not meant to exist formally speaking but are implicitly clear to all members of a group. Among the countries selected for this eBook, Japan or the Japanese people are most different from the Germans concerning their score on the PDI (54). That score indicates that Japanese individuals with less (perceived) power in a group or organization, are most likely to accept an uneven distribution of power without questioning it. Also, they are less likely to attempt fighting the disparity in power than Germans, Italians, Dutch or Americans. Kincaid (1987) goes even further saying that hierarchies in Asia are often accepted as the natural scheme of things.



## **What does that mean for your (future) business in Germany?**

### **Content and content strategy in Germany with regards to the PDI**

Any company's content and the strategy behind its publishing depend on the nature of a product/service and the audience they are meant to be for, of course. However, the score for Germans in the PDI indicates that glorification of power and any content alluding to a disparity in opportunities and influence won't cut it for you. The way towards power, success, wealth, health and admiration might be just as important as the results for your (future) German clients.

Generally, lower scores are associated with a preference for independence, less importance given to one's physical appearance, an active lifestyle with exercise and traveling, actively searching for information, and the importance of information in general (de Mooij, 2019). That seems to confirm the assumptions described above for which 'do little get a lot and look great' content will have a hard time convincing a German audience.

Content which glorifies status and a shiny public image is expected to work better in societies that score high on the PDI.

## **Marketing and advertising in Germany with regards to the PDI**

In terms of marketing and advertising, it is hard to draw general conclusions based on this score. However, it might be wise avoiding imagery and copy which allude to steep hierarchies and power inequality which are not based on merit. For instance: alpha male imagery in ads and copy for high-end cars alluding that a man deserves a car just because he's a powerful man might be perceived as cocky and ridiculous. However, if directly linked to the man's hard work which paid off and resulted in being able to buy such a car, ads might be accepted and even appreciated way more easily.

Generally, younger brands have more chances of making it in the German market as lower PDI scores are associated with less importance given to status and establishment. A start-up doing smart user-centric marketing and advertising would, therefore, be more likely to succeed in Germany than in Japan.

## **General company culture in Germany with regards to the PDI**

In terms of company culture, hierarchies need to be perceived as legitimate by members of a team or the organization in general. If that's the case, Germans are likely to accept established systems as they are. If there is a discrepancy between somebody's perceived status and their qualification or quality of work, it might very well cause friction in teams.

Depending on the business and the targeted customer group, the informal you 'Du' is possible but needs to be considered with caution. The same goes for internal communications.

		<b>PDI</b>	<b>IDV-COL</b>	<b>TVT</b>	<b>UAI</b>	<b>LTO</b>	<b>IVR</b>
<b>Score</b>	<b>Germany</b>	35	67	66	65	83	40
<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Germany</b>	65	21	13	44	6	54
<b>Score</b>	<b>Netherl.</b>	38	80	14	53	67	68
<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Netherl.</b>	65	6	75	57	22	16
<b>Score</b>	<b>Italy</b>	50	76	70	75	61	30
<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Italy</b>	52	9	7	34	31	70
<b>Score</b>	<b>USA</b>	40	91	62	46	26	68
<b>Ranking</b>	<b>USA</b>	60	1	20	66	72	19
<b>Score</b>	<b>Japan</b>	54	46	95	92	88	42
<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Japan</b>	51	38	2	12	3	51

**Table 1:** Scores and ranks in the Hofstede indexes for the five countries selected for this eBook

Source: [geerthofstede.com](http://geerthofstede.com)

## The ‘Individualism vs. collectivism index’ (IDV-COL)

Collectivistic societies are known to put emphasis on the group and the ‘we’ whereas individualistic societies tend to emphasize the importance of the individual, therefore focusing on the ‘I’ much more.

The IDV-COL index, the second dimension which Hofstede et al. identified, reflects exactly this: ‘the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups’. As the name suggests, people in individualistic societies are rather focused on themselves and have tendentially loose ties with others. The closest bonds are often with members of their immediate family.

Individuals in collectivistic societies, on the other hand, often move and live in so-called ingroups, meaning that they psychologically identify themselves as members of those groups. Ingroups can, therefore, be viewed as some sort of psychological membership. A membership that largely impacts an individual’s way of interacting with the world and others. This membership is known to be very solid, loyal and capable of standing conflict.

Another interesting fact about this dimension: Individuals living in individualistic societies “tend to believe that there are values that shared by all” (de Mooij, 2019). This will make a lot of sense when looking at the results of the USA for this index. People from collectivistic societies, on the other hand, seem to accept the differences between the values of different groups more easily.

As far as the poles of this index are concerned, a high value in the IDV-COL index indicates a high degree of individualism whereas values towards the lower extreme indicate a collectivistic orientation.



## How Germans score in the IDV-COL index

Germans score 67 in the IDV-COL index. In terms of ranking, that means position 21 of all countries with a score for this dimension. That positions Germans in the upper 25% meaning that around three-quarters of all nations with a score for this index are less focused on the individual than the Germans.

As a reference: the Netherlands (80), Italy (76), and the USA (91) are all in the top 10 with the USA being the number one country with regards to emphasizing the importance of the individual. The Netherlands follows on rank 6, Italy on position 9. Japan's score in the IDV-COL index is 46 which means position 38 - close to the average of 45.17 points in the IDV-COL index. Japan's result, as well as the one in the USA, seem to confirm the prejudice.

Italy's result on this dimension is rather surprising as Italians are often perceived as social, out-going, and interaction-driven. Yet, they show a clearer tendency towards individualism than Germans, in fact positioning Italians in the top 10 worldwide. The reason might be, that data was collected in the northern part of Italy only, which is considered closer to the northern countries of Europe regarding the IDV-COL dimension.

## What learnings can be taken from the German IDV-COL result?

The most obvious interpretation is that it confirms the orientation of German society towards the individual rather than the group. Meaning that the psychological identification or the sense of psychological membership as described above, are less strong.



It is, however, stronger than in the USA where the identification with a larger group regarding race, culture, age, gender or religion is even less present.

Another possible interpretation for the German score on the IDV-COL index could be that there is certain stigmatization around an egocentric lifestyle for which at least a minimal focus on ingroups is kept up.

Of course, all of this is up to interpretation. Money, however, doesn't seem to be the main influencing force here even though one might think that material wealth correlates strongly with individualism.

The USA ranks highest IDV-COL index while only having the 8th highest GDP per capita (nominal) worldwide in 2019 (65,062\$) with a big gap towards Luxemburg (ranking 1st in GDP per capita (nominal) in 2019 = 115,203\$). For the same reason, money can't fully account for the 24 point difference between the USA and Germany (GDP per capita (nominal) in 2019 = 49,692\$) or the one between the USA and Japan (GDP per capita (nominal) in 2019 = 41,418\$).

That means that the reasons for the differences in IDV-COL index scores are, in fact, most likely cultural rather than material.

## **What does that mean for your (future) business in Germany?**

### **Content and content strategy in Germany with regards to the IDV-COL index**

Being a tendentially individualistic society, there is "generally more explicit, verbal communication" (de Mooij, 2019). De Mooij also describes individualistic societies as less contextual in their way of communication. Meaning that topics can be addressed directly and literally without too many societal codes to mask or hint at them. The German society is seen as a low-context one so literal communication is possible.

Depending on the service or product that a company wants to sell, insisting on a sense of community can work but not too much as Germans are rather individualistic. The option of self-optimization, self-fulfillment and the needs of the individual should always be addressed.

However, praising the greatness of the individual can be counterproductive and even harmful. As discussed for the PDI, merit-based praises of individuals can be okay. A good summarizing claim could be: 'If you earned it, you should be celebrated. Otherwise, take it easy. You're not better than anyone else'.

Due to the country's history, content about race or religion needs to be treated with the utmost care.

In line with the assumption that there is a certain stigma around being too egocentric, content about money and success of an individual can be difficult too and need to be well thought through. Concrete amounts of money are rarely talked about publicly in Germany.

Being an individualistic country, it is not inappropriate to work with content that expresses personal opinions (de Mooij, 2019).

## Marketing and advertising in Germany with regards to the IDV-COL index

Based on the IDV-COL index results for Germany, avoiding imagery that tries to establish individuals as better or too different from their peers seems wise. For instance, bragging, over the top style and fashion or exposure of wealth can be viewed badly.

Regarding this dimension, the balance for a German customer base will always be between addressing the individual without removing it from its societal context. Community yes, but not too much. Individual greatness yes, but not too much.

Important to know for brands: In individualistic countries such as Germany, brands are perceived almost like human personalities. People are therefore willing to identify with brands and enter close bonds with them.

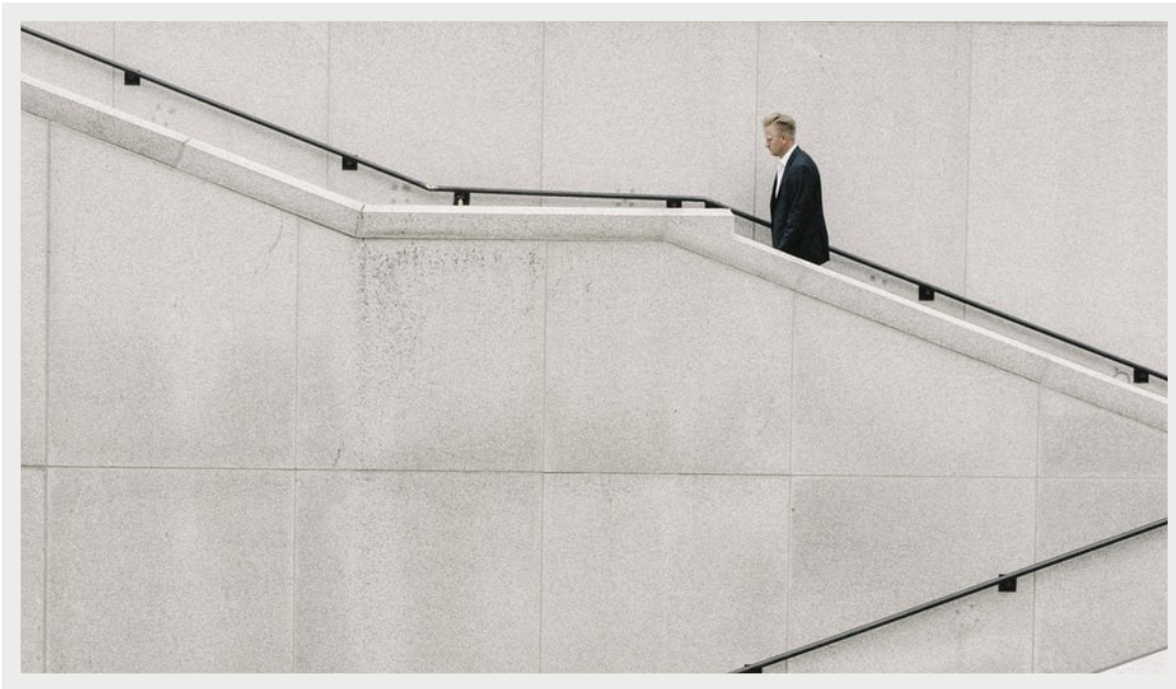


## General company culture in Germany with regards to the IDV-COL index

Career and individual development are definitely important in Germany, however, loyalty to a team is too. Company structures and possibilities of career progression need to be fair and transparent. Rules are important and it will not be appreciated if individuals play outside these rules to create an advantage for themselves. Leaders will most likely be held accountable for accepting any unfair play.

These are of course interpretations based on personal experience and the facts presented in this eBook.





## **The ‘Masculinity-Femininity’ dimension (MAS-FEM), also ‘Tough vs. Tender’ (TVT)**

It is important to state that at the time when Hofstede et al. named these dimensions, the general public’s reflections about gender stereotypes, gender identity, sexual identity, etc. were not what they are today. According to de Mooij (2019), it is therefore important not to misinterpret the dimension as politically incorrect and she suggests that the terms “Gender of nations” or “tough versus tender” could be used to avoid further issues. For this eBook, it was decided to use ‘tough versus tender’ with the abbreviation TVT to leave gender out of the equation. So the comparisons will happen between tough or tender societies and individuals.

Back to the content.

Toughness is associated with an orientation towards success, competitiveness, status, classical western gender roles, a focus on work, emotional detachment and so forth. On the other hand, tender societies care more about the quality of life, equal opportunities for all, non-typical gender roles, compromise, modesty, and inclusion.

In professional life, tough societies carry fewer opportunities for females, whereas in tender societies opportunities for male and female individuals are (more) equal.

Interestingly, individuals in tough societies use the internet more for professional and less for private purposes, whereas the opposite is true in tender societies. As for this point, that might be due to the fact that work often happens online for which more hours are automatically attributed to the ‘professional’ account.

In this dimension, a low score is associated with tenderness and high scores indicate a higher degree of toughness.

## How do Germans score in the TVT index?

Germans reach a score of 66, which grants them position 13 in the list of the toughest countries worldwide (with a value for this dimension).

Here's the overview of the scores of the selected countries for comparison from highest to lowest: Japan (score 95, rank 2), Italy (score 70, rank 7), USA (score 62, rank 20), Netherlands (score 14, rank 75).

Japan and Italy confirm prejudice for different reasons. Japan being very work and career-centered, competitive and male-dominated when it comes to professional opportunities. Italy because of the still very present stereotypical western/Christian gender-roles in education and the huge importance of the appearance (of the individual and the personal ingroup) to the outside world.

The Netherlands' score seems very surprising as it shows a tremendous gap with the German TVT score. Neither general prejudice nor real-life observations could point out a big difference in gender egalitarianism and a sense of inclusion in general. However, work-life balance is way more important in the Netherlands whereas in Germany there is still a strong focus on working hard and making a career for oneself. "The total number of hours they (the Dutch) work is very low compared with the rest of Europe", says chief economist Peter Hein van Mulligen to Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*. According to van Mulligan, in 2016, Dutch men worked an average of 36 hours a week, women worked 26. Some 75% of women have a part-time job ([dutchnews.nl](http://dutchnews.nl), 2017).

## Is Germany a tough nation?

Data suggests it is among the 13 toughest countries. It makes sense with regards to success orientation, competition, a preference for winning, emotional detachment, and the importance of work.

However, other variables contributing to the TVT index point towards the tender polarity of the dimension rather than the tough one: chances for men and women are close(ish) to even - Germany has a female chancellor since 2005 after all. Also, it is not appreciated to care too much about one's appearance in order to show success and - here comes the title of this eBook - pragmatism in clothing is still big in Germany. Hip people in head-to-toe functional wear and older men with socks in their sandals are no rarity. It's not pretty, but it's practical: less slippery and prevents the sandals from smelling bad. We've heard that one!

Yet, these contradictions kind of make sense when looking at the numbers. Yes, Germany is number 13 of the toughest countries in the Hofstede et al. studies. However, the total score of 66 is not a very extreme score. I can, therefore, be assumed that that the score is a result of very high scores in some variables associated with this dimension and rather low scores in others.

## **What does that mean for your (future) business in Germany?**

### **Content and content strategy in Germany with regards to the TVT index**

This is an interesting one as the various variables that make for the total score in the TVT index quite probably had very different, if not contradicting results.

Based on the associated values, it seems likely that content alluding to success, competition, winning, manliness, and working hard can work well. However, as established earlier in this eBook, the status-quo should not be addressed without the way that led there. A slick alpha male that is the best at everything, rich and dominant won't do it for a German audience.

Generally, Germans are big on gender equality and correct pronouns. It's very common to name the female and male version of a noun in the same sentence to avoid discrimination. 'Liebe Leserinnen und Leser', 'Die Teilnehmer/-innen' and similar constructions can and should be found in all official texts. If you take a closer look at the first example, you'll notice that the female version of the noun is named before the male one. A result of years of feminist work that rightfully questioned why men should be named first if all genders are addressed.

Even if pragmatism in this dimension is associated with clothing, chances are that pragmatism is a quality that is characteristic for Germans in general. That shows in price sensitivity and the way of choosing one product over the other. Most marketers and content strategists will be able to confirm that information is key for German audiences. They won't buy if they don't know, even if a product or service is pretty and promising. A leading sentence could be: 'I see, I research, I compare, I approve, I find the cheapest, I buy.'

### **Marketing and advertising in Germany with regards to the TVT index**

The risks of portraying success and status go were already stated earlier in this eBook.

With regard to gender stereotypes, it depends on the product, but it is generally possible to play with what is expected and break it. Here' an example by de Mooij (2019):

Danone (brand) ran the same ad showing a grandfather bringing his grandson to school in France and Poland, France scoring lower than Germany on the TVT index (43) and Poland having a similar score to Germany but with an emphasis on role differentiation between work and household. The ad worked well in France and didn't work in Poland, where it would have been expected of the grandmother to bring her grandson to school, not her husband.

It is assumed that the ad could have worked in Germany the same as it did in France. Not only that, chances are that a video portraying a situation too close to the ancient gender-norms could have caused a backlash.

Surely, discriminative imagery will not be accepted by German customers.

In terms of persuading German customers to acquire products or use a paid service, it will usually not be a one-time impulsive purchase-decision. Pragmatism is key, same as for the functional outdoor wear and the sandals with socks. Inform your audience, and take them through the steps of informing, informing again, and again, comparing, convincing and buying.

### **General company culture in Germany with regards to the TVT index**

Again, similar to what was stated in the context of the PDI: Company structures need to be clear, fair and transparent. If the qualifications are there, everybody should have even chances of succeeding, regardless of their gender, religion, or socio-economic background. That being said, work and success are important motivators for German employees.

Sexism is not an option and will be called out eventually. This tendency even translates to the German legislation: did you know that Dutch fathers only get 3 paid days off after their children were born, whereas German men are free to decide with their girlfriends/ spouses how to divide the so-called 'parent time'?



## The ‘Uncertainty Avoidance index’ (UAI)

The name of this index gives plenty of space for imagination. A first association could be somebody avoiding uncertainty with an anxious, slightly rigid, and compulsive personality. Interestingly, this association seems to be accurate in many ways, as you’ll be able to read soon.

Generally, this dimension is a very interesting one for content creators, marketers and advertisers, as their work is usually meant to persuade an audience to purchase a service or a product that is new to them. At least, the targeted audience most likely didn’t use or purchase it before even if they knew of its existence.

New product equals novelty, novelty equals higher degrees of uncertainty.

By definition, this dimension describes “the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations” (Hofstede, 2001). It makes sense, that societies which score high in the UAI, tend to prefer predictability, rules, a totalitarian approach to what the truth is, transparent interactional codes, certifications, and anything that they know and understand generally speaking. In fact, individuals in societies with high UAI scores tend to adopt any sort of innovation way more slowly than those in societies that are avoiding uncertainty less.

High UAI scores, in fact, correlate with the way people travel, with speaking foreign languages, the way of thinking about health (special Eurobarometer Report, 2004), and even the preference of tap water versus bottled drinking water.

### How do Germans score in the UAI?

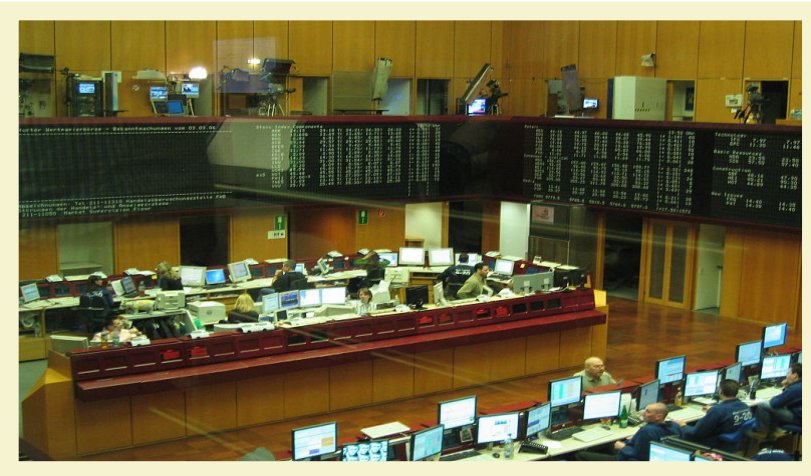
Germany reaches a UAI score of 65, which makes them rank on position 44 of all countries with a registered value. The score is just below the list average of 67.64. As a comparison: Japan (score 92, rank 12), Italy (score 75, rank 34), Netherlands (score 53, rank 57), USA (score 46, rank 66).

While the score and rank might suggest otherwise, Germany is considered a high uncertainty avoidance culture. When it comes to consuming and adopting novelty, there seems to be a clear tendency towards skepticism. Germans like to know things before acting in any way. That would explain why it seems so hard for Germans to get themselves to speak English even though most of them study it in school for at least 6, in many cases even 9 years.

Also, as de Mooij (2019) states, the high uncertainty avoidance culture in Germany creates a preference for rules. This is something that anybody who lived in Germany, worked in Germany or traveled through Germany, will be able to confirm. Rules are everywhere and people often complain about them without actually breaking them very often. Try crossing a red light as a pedestrian and see what happens. Wild guess: somebody will make you aware of the fact that you are breaking the law.



Anyway, since most of the further remarks for this dimension have direct consequences for content creation, marketing, advertising, and general company culture, they will be discussed in the following sub-chapters



## **What does that mean for your (future) business in Germany?**

### **Content and content strategy in Germany with regards to the UAI**

What was stated earlier and becomes relevant again in the context of the UAI: high uncertainty avoidance societies do not take decisions if they are not well-informed. That is most definitely true in Germany. Even though Germans are generally willing to identify with a brand in the long-run, this will not happen without many steps before that. Information is key and so is social or, even better, objective proof. If a product or a service is approved by Germany's biggest and most trusted independent testing organization called 'Stiftung Warentest' it's way more likely to be bought. Content that contains statistics, numbers, independent reviews, graphs, and trustworthy testimonials (i.e. experts) for social validation, can do wonders. In that sense, branding is important but less crucial in the phase of creating awareness for a product or a service.

Generally, Germany is a low-context society as far as communication is concerned. It is, therefore, possible to be very upfront and direct about the features and qualities of a product or a service. Keep in mind all the dos and don'ts already mentioned earlier in this eBook.

If the content is directly calling for an unfamiliar action, it might be less likely to work for Germans as they prefer the familiar over the unknown. That doesn't mean it's impossible to challenge Germans but not before a very thorough warm-up which led to the challenge. If there is a high risk of feeling uncomfortable, it might not happen.

Think of your audience as curious but skeptical, slightly scared but willing to listen to your arguments. Pressure won't work, patient and fact-based persuasion, on the other hand, might.



## **Marketing and advertising in Germany with regards to the UAI**

Marketers listen up: you can and should still apply your beloved funnel strategy to lead your prospects' choice-making process. However, be prepared to spend a lot of time in the awareness and consideration stages of the process. Create a first contact moment, then support it with numbers, create a touchpoint in which your claims are supported by experts, compare your products with others, clearly work out its advantages and so forth and so forth. You get the point, take the customer by the hand and walk very slowly. A fancy brand and a good price without further information won't make you win the game. To be fair: free stuff works in Germany but you will have to offer your customers all of the above during their trial or else you might just have wasted your money.

Talking about money: based on all of the above, it is not surprising that advertising costs, as well as the costs for clicks, are more expensive in Germany than they are in the Netherlands.

That, plus the fact that the stages of creating awareness and prospects considering their purchase-intent often take very long, make (online) marketing quite an expensive undertaking in Germany.

In that context, it can be wise to start with a few focus areas before marketing the country as a whole. Unless you have a lot of money at hand, of course, and/or investors that opted for a more aggressive national approach to becoming successful in Germany.

Interests associated with high UAI scores are technology and health. However high UAI scores correlate with a passive approach to health, meaning that cleaning products and devices, safe foods, supplements, healthy drinks, etc. can work. Why? Because they supposedly increase the chances of staying healthy without needing to do too much for it. Exercise and fitness are part of an active approach to health which can be observed in low uncertainty avoidance cultures more often.

The same counts for traveling. As discussed before, Germans tend to avoid uncertainty, which means that they stick to their guns when it comes to planning their holidays.

A general lead sentence could be: 'Why try something new if what I know is good enough already?'. It's a good sentence to keep in mind as a marketer in the German market.

By the way, would you be surprised to hear that certificates and quality badges really help...?

## **General company culture in Germany with regards to the UAI**

Germans, the same as other high uncertainty avoidance cultures don't tolerate ambiguity. Things need to be clear. Structures need to be clear and so do titles, processes, lines of communication. Chaos and a 'let's see what happens today' attitude will cause trouble and mistrust very quickly.

Things and tasks that were 'kind of well-executed' will not do the job in Germany as high

UAI scores correlate positively with a need for preciseness and sticking to an established process.

What does that all mean? It means that things should be well defined, predictable and clear in German teams. Who's responsible for what? How do we go about things? Who's the expert / who's in charge? All of these questions should be well defined.

A lack of clarity can cause high levels of stress and dissatisfaction in individuals with high UAI scores, something business leaders probably want to avoid.

## **The 'Long- vs Short-Term Orientation' index (LTO)**

As you could probably imagine by the name of this dimension, this index found and named by Hofstede is used to differentiate between cultures with regards to how far ahead they plan and project themselves. However, this dimension goes further than that as there are specific qualities and capabilities associated with the dimension.

An example: in their latest revision of the dimension, Hofstede et al. (2010) state that short-term orientation is associated with a strong religious faith and the belief that one's own actions have less impact on one's personal future than God's will.

The opposite of what is called 'self-reliance' as stated by Minkov & Hofstede (2012). As the name suggests, self-reliance can be seen as the belief that one has to rely on oneself in order to achieve goals. It, therefore, makes sense that self-reliance is a value positively correlated with a long-term orientation.

Short-term oriented cultures tend to be more oral and visual in their way of communicating and passing on information which might be correlated with a lower degree of literacy and reading ability. This was found during the famous PISA study (2009) which compares assesses specific capabilities and skills of students around the world such as reading, writing, mathematics, general knowledge, etc.

Long-term oriented societies trust and rely on written information much more which also makes sense considering the results of the PISA study mentioned. When it comes to purchasing-decisions, they seem to be more price-sensitive, which seems logical as long-term orientation is a direct opposite of impulsiveness. In fact, short-term orientation is correlated with jumping on to trends and buying what's hip and happening more quickly.

A high degree of long-term orientation is associated with the opposite pattern: only buying what's needed, comparing prices and eventually make purchase decisions based on pragmatism. Hence, sales work very well here (Meng, 2011).

More recent values associated with short-term orientation (Hofstede et al., 2010): national pride, tradition, generosity, less attention to real financial resources. Associated with long-term orientation are attention to real economic resources, perseverance (see self-reliance above), and pragmatic choice-making.

In this dimension low scores are correlated with short-term orientation and high scores reflect a high degree of long-term orientation (gold for eastern Asia. The top 4 are Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and China).



## How do Germans score in the LTO index?

Germans score 83 in the LTO index, which makes them rank on position 6 of all countries with a registered value. As a reference: Korea, ranking on position 1, has a score of 100.

It is therefore fair to say, that Germans belong to the most long-term oriented nations worldwide. A reminding summary: that result is expected to correlate with a higher-price consciousness, pragmatism, using financial resources carefully, wanting the most bang for the buck, only buying what's needed, and reliance on own-work as well as on written communication.

For comparison, here are the results of the countries selected for this eBook.

Japan (score = 83, rank 3), Netherlands (score = 67, rank 22), Italy (score = 61, rank 31), and USA (score = 26, rank 72).

Looking at the scores, the Japanese results seem to confirm the prejudice of a nation that is very reliant on hard work, tenacity, and a total approach to problem-solving which is less fast but more effective in the long run. However, in the same context, the American result seems surprising. At least as far as the general idea of the American dream is concerned which incentivizes long-term hard work to achieve one's (economic) goals. One possible explanation is the country's economy which contrarily to the American dream, entices people to consume constantly and everywhere. In fact, it's way more common to use the personal credit card limit in the USA than it is in Germany. The show must go on, it seems!

Italy's results are not striking, neither are those of the Netherlands. However, the large gap towards the German score is very interesting. It can be seen as yet another proof that geographic proximity does not necessarily create cultural commonalities. In fact, regardless of the fact that many of its member states are part of the EU, Europe shows a great variety in the LTO index results (de Mooij, 2019).

# What does the German LTO score mean for your (future) business in Germany?

## Content and content strategy in Germany with regards to the LTO index

As already described for previous dimensions, Germany is a very low-context communication nation. The LTO score confirms this yet again. Words are important, written proof is important.

Generally speaking, content that supports the idea of self-reliance and the fact that things happen if you work enough to make them happen, is recommended. Think of investing in one's abilities, saving money, changing to healthy diets to live longer, and so forth.

Generally, content that appeals to a reader's ratio is expected to do fine considering the high degree of pragmatism correlated with high LTO scores. Again, information is key as it guides the decision-making process more than emotional impulses in high LTO countries such as Germany.

However, these assumptions are based on the idea of creating commercial content, such as ads, advertorials, company blog posts, etc. It is fair to assume that emotional and relatable content will work well if produced for intimate, private moments or for expressing one's personal take on an emotional topic.

## Marketing and advertising in Germany with regards to the LTO index

Ads that promise quick fixes for things that usually take time, can induce hope but will most probably be met with skepticism by a German audience. Think of a drink that will make you lose 10 kilos in a week or a financial product that promises a 500% value increase in 6 months. If not supported with credible statistical data, graphs, quality badges, etc. they are unlikely to be bought.

As discussed earlier, Germans use services and buy products based on real needs. If they perceive a specific lack of something, it's more likely for them to fill the gap. Looked at it from the opposite side that means that without a real need, Germans are less likely to buy anything. A guiding sentence might be: 'I like it but I don't need it so I don't buy it' as opposed to a possible American version which might be more along the lines of: 'I like it, I already have ten of these but this one has glitter on it, so I'll buy it anyway!'.

For marketers in charge of creating funnels to generate sales that can be a hard one to crack as a lot of time will have to be spent on creating the right need. In other words, pressure won't work but assisting consumers in their consideration with compelling arguments might.

However, there is an exception to the rule which is directly correlated with the high price-sensitivity in long-term oriented societies: sales work. In fact, Black Friday is a hit in Germany that no company should miss out on.

However, in order to create a long-term commitment to a brand after Black Friday, more needs will need to be met during the period of interacting with the service or product.

### **General company culture in Germany with regards to the LTO index**

Similarly to what was mentioned in the context of the other dimensions, long-term orientation calls for security and transparency. In fact, it's way more common in Germany to receive lifetime contracts (with a trial period) right off the bat than it is in other countries.

The Netherlands, for instance, is known for way shorter employment periods and more flexibility for employers to get rid of unwanted employees. According to the online platform I Am Expat, "one of the most common forms of employment in the Netherlands for both Dutch and expat employees is to work through private employment agencies" (Brouwer, 2013). A construction that Germans have a hard time imagining. If they commit to an employer, they want employment-security in return, which allows them to project themselves as a part of that company's future.

Besides the duration of employment contracts, it seems evident that German employees will need more clarity about possible career progressions in a company than Americans, for instance. In return, the employee turn-over in German companies can be expected to be relatively low. However, change seems to be happening there, meaning that future projections around work at one specific employee decrease in importance. The online business magazine Xinhua quotes the German Statistical Institute saying that 'In the first quarter of 2019, the German services sector's turnover and employment figures reached new record high levels since official records began in 2003' (Xuequan, 2019).

In other words, it could mean that long-term work security is important but it doesn't have to be with the same employer necessarily. This could reflect a decrease in fear as general employment security throughout the country increases.





## The ‘Indulgence vs restraint’ index (IVR)

How okay and acceptable is it to seek satisfaction of one’s personal needs especially those that go beyond the lowest strata of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943)? Are individuals in a society expected to go for the bare minimum or are their peers happy for them to indulge in activities that allow them to enjoy life and have fun?

These are the basic questions reflected by the IVR dimension.

Unlike the other dimension discussed in the previous chapters, the IVR index is a part of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, however, it was actually developed by Minkov (2007).

Low scores in this dimension indicate a higher orientation towards restraint, whereas high scores correlate positively with indulgence. According to de Mooij (2019), low IVR scores (restrained lifestyle) can be associated with very reasonable buying behavior and an ideal of working hard. High IVR scores come with the willingness to indulge in luxury, owning fun gadgets and paying extra for better quality.

Besides being a value and an attitude, it makes sense that high IVR scores are correlated with the average wealth/GDP per capita. Having more financial means available makes it easier to buy unnecessary items and indulge in some fun but pricey leisure activities. However, money isn’t the main determining factor as many low GDP per capita countries in South American and African rank amongst the top 20 (Venezuela score = 100, rank 1; Mexico score = 97, rank 2; Nigeria score 84, rank 5; Ghana score = 72, rank 11).



## How do Germans score in the IVR index?

Germany's score in the IVR index is 40, which is below the average of 45.39 for all countries with a registered value. This IVR score positions Germany on rank 54. First reaction: it confirms the prejudice of Germans being less into indulgence and more into a rational and pragmatic approach to life. Looking back at the central questions which reflect this dimension, the result portrays Germans as taking care of the essential first before considering to indulge in anything that is fun but unnecessary. Their ideal would be working hard and buying products reasonably or generally be reasonable with anything money-related.

It's, therefore, no surprise that Germans often start saving money on the so-called 'Bausparverträge' as early as from the age of 16.

The unpleasant side to being a restraint-oriented society (if we may judge) is that individuals not only restrict themselves but show less appreciation of their peers' indulgent behavior, too. Another fact which confirms the prejudice according to which Germans tend to roll their eyes about other people's unreasonable buying behavior. 'Did their house really have to be that big?', 'Look at them in their huge car. Feeling all special.' Downward comparisons based on a personal sense of inadequacy (Festinger described by Mussweiler, 2003; Bierhoff, 2006) seem like a logical consequence of high IVR scores.

How do the Dutch, the Americans, the Japanese, and the Italians do on this dimension? Netherlands and USA both score 68 on the IVR index, positioning them on rank 16. Next, is Japan scoring 42 on position 51 and last but not least Italy scoring 30, ranking on position 70 of all countries with a registered value.

The results of Italy and the USA seem surprising as Italy scores lowest amongst the selected countries making it the most restraint-oriented society of the list. Two possible explanations for this are assumed. Firstly, the data was collected in the northern part of Italy only, which is considered closer to the northern countries of Europe regarding the IVR dimension. Secondly, catholicism is Italy's main religion and very present in many aspects of daily life. The Catholic belief and the norms that come with it, value restraint and 3 out of 7 deathly sins are associated with indulgence: Gluttony, Lust, and Greed.

As for the USA, the result is surprising since it seems to contradict their LTO results and the finding that Americans are extremely short-term oriented with a tendency to consume less reasonably than Germans.

Japan scoring similar to Germany in the IVR index is unsurprising.

# What does the German IVR score mean for your (future) business in Germany?

## Content and content strategy in Germany with regards to the IVR score

Most thoughts about this have been discussed in all previous dimensions. Content, especially if business or sales related, should appeal to a German audience's ratio rather than their impulses and emotional wishes since they seem to be disregarded as unnecessary.

Also appealing to people's wish to be better than their peers is tricky, as the wish might exist but social pressure could make it too hard for individuals to follow up on it.

Similarly to the reflections earlier in this eBook, indulgence can be addressed but considering the below-average IVR score and previous results, it's assumed that moments of indulging in pleasures need to be earned. So again, the way there might be crucial to focus on before even highlighting the pleasures themselves. In other words, Germans need a clear permission to be pleasure-focussed - whether it be work, effort, having restricted themselves for long enough, etc. So, placing pleasure in a context as opposed to glorifying it as such, is key!

## Marketing and advertising in Germany with regards to the IVR score

Advertising pleasures, luxuries, and unnecessary gadgets can work but not as easily as in the Netherlands, for instance.

If the services/ products are meant to be used in business or in private, it can work as the financial means to purchase actually exist. However, if luxurious (unnecessary) products will be visible publicly, things become more complicated.

That doesn't mean that indulgence in an advertisement is a no-go altogether. Highlighting product features rather than the status that comes with the product, is a possibility for example. That way the German audience's ratio is appealed to rather than a possible wish for greatness and exaggeration.

For example: 'Buy this over the top gorgeous car and impress everybody' NO. 'Buy this over the top gorgeous car because it has all these features that make your commute to work a little more comfortable' YES.

In a similar fashion, upselling to a slightly more luxurious version of the next planned holidays might work better if underlining that your audience deserves it because they worked so hard.

Praising a luxurious spa visit on a Tuesday morning might be problematic as it might evoke a sense of being undeserving of such pleasures on a working day. However, if it comes at a very cheap price point or if advertisers sell it as a moment of relaxation after fighting with the kids all morning, it could seem justifiable.

## **General company culture in Germany with regards to the IVR score**

Hard work is something that Germans take pride in. Work in general is. Make sure to provide German teams with structures that allow them to work well and perceive themselves as efficient.

A mindset of working hard, earning well but spending reasonably in order to save money, is very prevalent in Germany. Be prepared that money issues and topics around the fairness of salaries in a company can arise.

Friday afternoon drinks, which are quite common in Dutch offices, are still rather unusual in Germany. The division between work and private seems to be stronger there. The famous bell, typically rung in American sales teams when closing important deals, is expected to cause some cringing in German teams. For starters, because they point out the individual to an extent that could feel uncomfortable (see above) and secondly because it's a celebration of a moment when the focus should be on the long-term goals. Understatement and shaking hands while being full of pride are probably enough.

## **Conclusion**

After going through the dimensions and possible interpretations for the results presented in this eBook, it's now time to summarize the findings and paint a global picture of the psychology of German consumers.

### **Accepting hierarchies or fighting for equality?**

Hierarchies are absolutely okay if they exist for a reason. If Germans don't see the point in them, they will start asking questions and try to establish an even distribution of power.

In that context, it makes sense that Germans don't seem to like the glorification of power or any content alluding to a disparity in opportunities and influence. Equality rules here.

When creating content, make sure that it reinforces people's independence, gives less importance physical appearance, and promotes an active lifestyle with exercise and traveling.

The idea of equal chances also translates to the world of business which is good news for young companies. If you manage to communicate with your German audience in a way that speaks to them and respects their need for information and security, you can make it!

As a manager, make sure that career progressions and promotions are equally possible for everyone based on merit as opposed to nepotism or personal preference.

## **DIY or do it together?**

Definitely rather do it yourself than do it together.

Germany is an individualistic society. However, there might be a stigma around extreme egocentrism so don't try and make your German customers feel too special or too different from their peers.

Germans' way of communicating is not very contextual, meaning that factual verbal communication is key. In other words, what Germans say, read or hear, is what they understand. For content creators and advertisers that means that you can be pretty literal in your messaging.

Being rather individualistic, a sense of community around your product is not what entices Germans to buy or use it. Rather advertise the option of self-optimization, self-fulfillment and the fulfillment of individual needs.

Speaking about advertising: Handle all topics related to race, gender and religion as well as public showcasing of success and wealth with care. Mr. backlash is waiting to come for you.

If you manage a German team, make sure that rules are clear and valid for everybody. You will most likely be held accountable for accepting any unfair play.

## **Tough or tender? What are the Germans like?**

Rather tough with some pretty tender sides. Tough because work is important and so are success, competition, and winning.

However, chances for men and women are closer to equal than in many other countries which would qualify as tender. And - here comes the title of this eBook - wearing functional wear all over or sandals with socks usually comes from a very pragmatic place within the Germans' heart. 'It's not the prettiest but it's really convenient'.

Something that people in tougher societies are less likely to think and do.

As far as content and marketing are concerned, you can surely allude to the motivators mentioned above. However, it's not about the status-quo for the Germans. Someone might be the best, but only because a lot of work went into getting there.

In terms of language use, you should get familiar with gender-neutral writing in order to avoid discrimination. The same goes for imagery used in advertisements. Portraying gender stereotypes in a commercial context can be expected to cause a backlash.

When it comes to selling the tender and pragmatic side of the Germans calls for neutral, factual information to be able to make accurate sales decisions. Remember the leading sentence: 'I see, I research, I compare, I approve, I find the cheapest, I buy.'

As a manager, you have to make sure that your team members have equal chances to succeed in your company. Any bias is expected to be called out. Ideally, the way to success should be transparent, as it's an important motivator for your German employees.



## **No risk, no fun! Is that true for Germans?**

Not really. Germans would rather avoid a risk than taking it. Therefore, it seems logical, that Germans have a clear preference for rules, predictability, and avoiding situations that might make them feel awkward (such as speaking a foreign language).

Be transparent about what you want to sell and provide as much supported information as you can. Germans love that! It will help you get through the initial stages of a sales funnel as Germans tend to think: 'Why try something new if what I know is good enough already?'.

Make sure that processes, lines of communication and titles are clear to everybody if you are a manager of a team. If you fail to establish that kind of clarity, German team members could react with high levels of stress and discomfort.

## **How impulsive are Germans?**

Well, not very. They are all about pragmatic choice-making, future-orientation, and the feeling that what they put into something now is what they will harvest later.

Associating themselves with a brand is a decision that is meant to be future-proof. Great for you if you managed to get German customers on your side, difficult if your competitor has the Germans' loyalty on their side. Trendhopping is something you won't see to much in Germany.

However, you have a chance if you use the right tactics. Information, written words, evidence, social proof, and low prices can open the doors for you.



Yet, you should make sure that you keep your promise while Germans try your products and services or else it's time to say goodbye again.

Remember the guiding sentence: 'I like it but I don't need it so I don't buy it' as opposed to a possible American version which might be more along the lines of: 'I like it, I already have ten of these but this one has glitter on it, so I'll buy it anyway!'

If you manage German teams, make sure that you show your intention to commit to the working relationship in the long run. Unusual employment contracts will make Germans skeptical and most likely less committed to the work you want them to do. Allow them to think long-term and you'll get very loyal employees in return.

### **What do Germans think of glitz and glamour?**

The answer is that glitz and glamour are okay but there are more important things to take care of. 'Work hard, spend reasonably' could be a good leading sentence here. It seems like Germans extend this expectation beyond themselves and apply it to their peers, too. The social pressure of how to deal with luxury and showing one's wealth are the consequence of that.

That means that you shouldn't try to make Germans feel too special or different from their peers as that could scare them off.

If you want to upsell to premium or advertise luxuries in general, make sure that it seems reasonable for your German audience to purchase. Either because it's well deserved or because it gives them more bang for the buck.

As a manager, make sure to provide your German teams with structures that allow them to work well and perceive themselves as efficient. Also, make sure to underline how you try to help them with their financial future. Think of pension plans or similar future support. Be prepared that money issues and topics around the fairness of salaries in a company can arise.



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- You can find the results of Hofstede's research about the cultural dimensions mentioned in this eBook here: <https://geerthofstede.com/research-and-vsm/dimension-data-matrix/>



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