
HERMES

**Journal of Language and
Communication in Business**

No. 65 – 2025

Published by the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University

ISSN: 1903-1785

**Alisa Kasianova / **László Kovács*

Culture and brand communication: An analysis of Facebook advertisements of Volkswagen in Germany and Italy according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Abstract

The current study explores the connection between Hofstede's cultural dimensions and advertising elements by analyzing Volkswagen's Facebook posts targeting German and Italian consumers. For the analysis, 96 German and 57 Italian advertisements were collected from Volkswagen's Facebook page. Texts and pictures of advertisements were analyzed using the semiotic approach, to identify how the cultural dimensions of Hofstede are present in the posts and how they reflect characteristics of the given culture. The analysis proved that German and Italian posts share certain common features; however, Volkswagen adapts the advertisements – both language and visual elements – to align with cultural expectations, balancing both universally appealing and locally relevant themes.

Keywords

intercultural communication; advertising; semiotics; culture; Volkswagen

1. Introduction

Today, social media has become an inevitable advertising channel. Through advertisements on social media, international companies can instantly reach large audiences in any part of the world. At the same time, these companies need to pay attention to the linguistic and communication aspects of their advertising, since they target customers who speak different languages and share different cultural values.

Culture is described as a system of values uniting members of society and shaping the way they perceive themselves and the world (Bekimbetova et al., 2021; De Mooij, 2021; Kovács, 2024; Peña-García et al., 2020). According to Hofstede (2001), culture can be seen as mental programming that differentiates members of distinct groups or categories, with values serving as stable, measurable components of cultural frameworks. Hofstede's research suggests that cultural values can be conceptualized and analyzed through specific dimensions, providing a structured approach to understanding cultural differences.

Culture has a large impact both on the advertising strategies used by the company and customers' purchase behavior (Bekimbetova et al., 2021; Ellis, 2021; Peña-García et al., 2020). Although standardized approaches to advertisements in different cultures may be used, adapting advertisements to the needs and expectations of the target audience makes them more understandable and appealing to consumers and, as a result, more persuasive and engaging (Anholt, 2000; Ellis, 2021).

The interest towards the research of the influence of culture on advertising is increasing (see De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Researchers in intercultural communication, linguistics, and marketing focus on different aspects of intercultural advertising. For example, Bonilla (2018) explored the cross-cultural use of multimodal metaphors, and Li, L. (2024) analyzed the translation of business advertising slogans from the perspective of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Considering the

* Alisa Kasianova
Faculty of Humanities
Multilingualism Doctoral School
University of Pannonia
asianova.alisa@gmail.com

** László Kovács
Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Business Communication and Marketing
Eötvös Loránd University
kovacs.laszlo@sek.elte.hu

multimodal nature of advertising, recent studies focus on both verbal and visual aspects of cross-cultural advertising (Bonilla, 2018).

While previous works effectively address linguistic and communicational challenges of cross-cultural advertising, there is a need to consider the dynamic nature of contemporary cultures. This research emphasizes the need to explore how rapidly changing social and cultural contexts, including globalization, technological advancements, and social movements, influence advertising strategies.

The current study explores the connection between cultural aspects and advertising through the example of Volkswagen – a German automobile manufacturer. We chose a global automotive brand because cars and car brands are especially culture-laden, representing culture and transmitting cultural values (De Mooij, 2021; Miller, 2020; Parment, 2014). Volkswagen, as a global brand, is perceived as a German car brand of the mass market segment. Although the global brand is located in Germany, in its advertisements, it must consider the cultural characteristics of the target audience, thus the first objective is to seek an answer to the following research questions:

- (1) How do German and Italian advertisements of Volkswagen reflect Hofstede's cultural dimensions?
- (2) In a second research question, we wish to see whether current changes in society can be captured in car advertisements on Facebook:
- (3) To what extent do German and Italian Facebook car advertisements share the same features or differ in their attempt to adapt to the target culture?

To capture the difference in cultural values represented in German and Italian advertisements of Volkswagen, we choose Facebook as a platform for data collection, since research has also shown that marketers tend to focus resources primarily on Facebook to promote a brand (Unnava & Aravindakshan, 2021).

In the first part of the study, we describe the connection between advertising and culture and show how the analysis of signs can be applied to social media posts. Then, we analyze Volkswagen's Facebook posts on the official German and Italian pages of the company and show how these posts are connected to Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the broader contexts of the target cultures.

2. Literature review

The rapid evolution of social media has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of branding and marketing communication. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have become indispensable tools for marketers to engage with consumers, build brand awareness, and foster loyalty. Research highlights the multifaceted role of social media in integrated marketing communication: it serves as a platform for targeted advertising (Voorveld, 2019), interactive brand storytelling (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012), and community building (Laroche et al., 2012).

In social media like Facebook, individuals create connections, interact with each other, exchange information or express their emotions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media have changed marketing in several ways: they can be used as the place of promotion, the place the product is sold on, as a source consumer-connected data, as a platform for brand value co-creation, and as a general marketing tool (Li et al., 2023). In social media, connections are paramount: companies and consumers are connected and interact with each other directly or indirectly (Li et al., 2023).

An increasing trend in marketing communications connected to social media is influencer marketing (Joshi et al., 2023; Vrontis et al., 2021). For brands using influencers, it is important to choose the authentic influencers for the brand, depending on the marketing goal of the given campaign or post (Vrontis et al., 2021). In recent years, a shift towards micro-influencers and long-term partnership between the brand and the influencer is observable (Kim, Kim 2023). Another, more recent shift is towards virtual influencers: today, human-like influencers emerge, which are not real

persons but computer-generated personalities (Landgrebe, 2024). Marketing communication in social media is also influenced by electronic word of mouth: social media posts are used as information source and the obtained information may influence consumer decisions (Leong et al., 2021). Today, social media and social media marketing cannot be left out of a company's marketing communications activities (Rehman et al., 2022), since social media advertisements influence consumer decisions (Khan, 2022), and social media marketing may increase the willingness to pay more for a product (Farzin et al. 2023).

It is important for brands in this new environment to differentiate, create emotional connections, and build brand knowledge more effectively (Kohli et al., 2015). The task is, however, not easy, since through social media, consumers are actively contributing to the value of the brand through user-generated brand stories (Gensler et al., 2013). Brands and marketing experts are less in control of the messages connected to the brand because these messages are constantly generated also through consumers (Kohli et al., 2015). Engagement with social media posts increases not only brand loyalty, but also identification with the brand (Hamzah et al., 2021). Engagement in social media is achieved by focusing on emotions, while sales numbers can be increased by functional (and not emotional) communication of product benefits (Liadeli et al., 2023). Managing brands in the times of social media means that quality will be a key element and that brands need to convey an image consumers can identify themselves with (Kohli et al., 2015).

As social media is about interaction, consumers must be involved in each step of the branding process (Kohli et al., 2015). In this new environment, social media marketing of a brand enables the co-creation of the brand value, adds to brand trust and brand loyalty (Sohaib & Han, 2023; Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022). In social media, entertainment is a key factor: entertainment influences customer engagement, which again leads to brand loyalty (Bazi et al., 2023, Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2021).

Branding is inevitably connected to culture (see Holt, 2004; Schroeder, 2009; Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006). Culture becomes increasingly important in branding in social media (Holt, 2016). For example, culture influences how a brand interacts with consumers (Acar, 2014), while cultural differences of consumers influence how they react to and interact with different social media posts (Khan et al., 2016). While planning for social media, brands have to consider not only cultural characteristics of the target audience, but also social media strategies appropriate for the given culture (Moriuchi, 2021). Cross-cultural social media marketing, as an emerging research topic, may help marketers target consumers more effectively (Buzeta et al., 2024).

Based on these insights, this research explores the role of culture in shaping social media branding strategies. Specifically, it analyzes how cultural values are reflected in the social media posts of Volkswagen in Italy and Germany. By examining these cultural markers, the study aims to investigate how brands adapt their messaging to resonate with different audiences on Facebook.

2.1 Ways to “measure” culture. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory

Culture as a complex phenomenon is studied within different academic disciplines, such as sociology (Spillman, 2020), psychology (Keith, 2019), intercultural communication (Neuliep, 2020), and philosophy (Cahill, 2021). The notion of culture has been used for centuries, and approaches to and definitions of culture are evolving continuously (Baldwin et al., 2006; Faulkner et al., 2006).

Alexander et al. (2023) define culture as the learned aspects of society, symbolic in their nature. Several authors emphasize that culture is a phenomenon transmitted through social interaction (Alexander et al., 2023; Puchner, 2023). Culture includes various control mechanisms governing the way people think, learn, feel and act; it affects our relationships, interactions, and social order, influencing the way we see the world and ourselves (De Mooij, 2021).

It is important to consider that culture is formed not only from the resources of particular communities but also from encounters with other cultures (Puchner, 2023). Borrowed ideas and practices

provide new insights for the individuals and shape their worldview. In today's globalized era, culture can be considered a flexible notion, as different communities may acquire cultural features of each other (Puchner, 2023; Venkateswaran & Ojha, 2019).

As a complex system of values, norms, and beliefs shared by a group of people, culture influences different aspects of consumer behavior, such as buying motives, decision-making, and preferable features of the product or service (De Mooij, 2021; Bekimbetova et al., 2021; Ellis, 2021). Therefore, forecasting values determining the behavior of the customer may help the company make its advertisements more appealing and persuasive to the audience.

The **adaptation of advertisements** to the values of a particular culture is not new in advertising. More than three decades ago, international companies were already practicing the strategy of adaptation. For example, Han & Shavitt (1994) found that Korean advertisements generally reflected interdependence and harmony as essential cultural values, while American advertisements emphasised individuality. Today, international companies often conduct detailed research on the consumer behavior of the target culture in order to reflect specific cultural values and ideas in their advertisements (Karkhanis, 2019). They study the lifestyle and consumption habits of the target audience, the most popular mass media and brands (Karkhanis, 2019). For example, in cultures where health is considered a major value, people pay special attention to health-related products, such as organic foods (Ellis, 2021).

Social processes, which include motivation, needs, emotion, and other aspects steering behavior, may also influence consumer behavior (De Mooij, 2021). For example, for Chinese people, a bicycle is a necessary means of transportation, while for most Americans, cycling is a social need – a healthy entertainment that brings people together (De Mooij, 2021).

The connection between culture, language, consumer behavior, and advertising proves the importance of considering the values of the target culture. One of the comprehensive frameworks describing cultures is **Hofstede's theory** of cultural dimensions. We use Hofstede's theory as a theoretical framework in this study, because it is believed to be one of the most fundamental theories of culture (De Mooij, 2021, Nakata & Izberk-Bilgin, 2009, Minkov 2024) and a theory often used in marketing-related cross-cultural research (Saleem & Larimo, 2016; De Mooij, 2021).

Culture is, according to Hofstede, "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9). The notions "group" and "category" can be applied not only to a national society, but also to "regions, ethnicities occupations, organizations, or even age groups and genders" (Minkov, 2012, p. 11). Hofstede (2001) emphasizes that culture is part of the mental programming, which consists of three parts: human nature, culture and personality. While human nature is inherited in genes and universal in all humans, culture characterizes a specific group or category and is learned, and personality is "a unique set of mental programs", shaped both by culture and personal experiences (Hofstede, 2001, p. 7). Values are one of many manifestations of culture: they are stable building blocks of culture and can be measured by questionnaires (Hofstede 2001). Based on literature, Hofstede (2001) assumed that cultural values can be described in dimensions.

The original theory of Hofstede contained four cultural dimensions: individualism, masculinity, power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980). Today, the model includes six dimensions:

- (1) Power distance index (PDI): the extent to which less powerful social groups accept and expect the unequal distribution of power.
- (2) Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV): the extent to which society prioritizes personal freedoms and is individually-oriented, or if it values coherence and the sense of belonging to a group.

- (3) Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS). In masculine societies, the dominant values are achievement, success, competitiveness and material reward for achievement. Feminine societies are based on cooperation, care for others and modesty; their priorities are comfort and quality of life.
- (4) Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI): the extent, to which the members of a particular culture feel uncomfortable in uncertain and ambiguous situations.
- (5) Long-term orientation vs. Short-term orientation (LTO): the extent to which society has a pragmatic and future-oriented point of view or is conventional and maintains the traditional approaches.
- (6) Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR): the dimension introduced by Hofstede in 2010. An indulgent culture values enjoyment and the satisfaction of one's desires. In restrained societies, positive emotions and enjoyment are expressed less and are restricted by social norms and high moral discipline (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Since the present study focuses on German and Italian cultures, in the first step, we show how the two cultures score on Hofstede's above-mentioned dimensions (Figure 1).

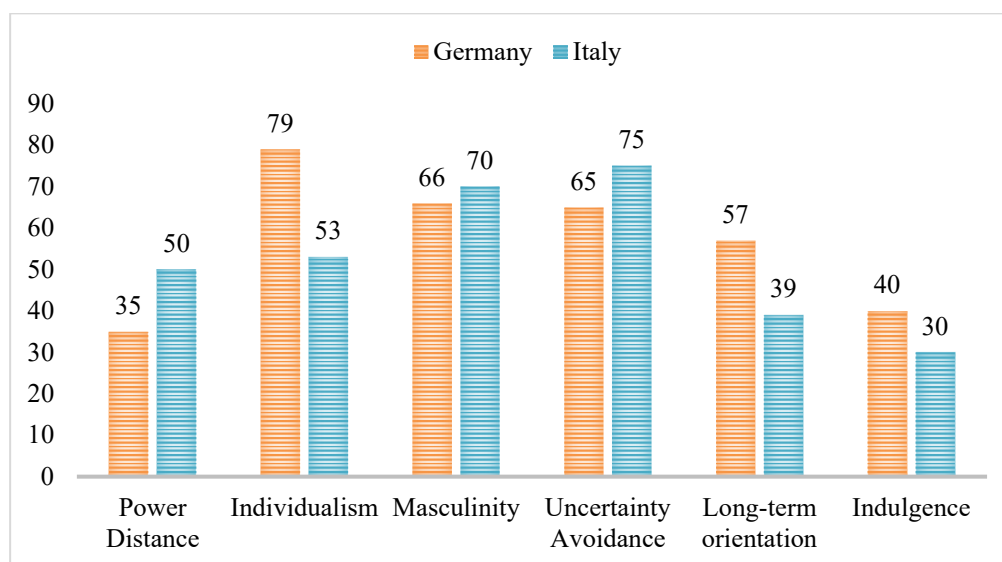


Figure 1. Comparison of Hofstede's dimensions of Germany and Italy (The Culture Factor, 2023)

Figure 1 demonstrates that Germany and Italy share a number of similarities in how they are characterized through Hofstede's dimensions: both cultures are masculine, individualistic, restrained and avoiding uncertain situations. The differences in the cultures' characteristics are also present. Germany is described as a highly decentralized country, while Italy scores average and is characterized by inconsistent attitude to power distance in different regions of the country (The Culture Factor, 2023). Germany is described as a culture combining the features of both long- and short-term orientation, with long-term orientation slightly more evident. Italy, on the other hand, scores low on LTO, indicating that it is a short-term oriented culture with conservative, traditions-based values (The Culture Factor, 2023). Besides, Germany is described as a more individualistic culture compared to Italy, as Italy's score is close to average.

Although Hofstede undoubtedly brought culture into focus in international management and business (Søndergaard, 2024), some authors do not recognize his results, connected to methodological issues and the fact that Hofstede assumed that cultures are „monolithic” (McSweeney 2024). Hofstede sees national culture as a structured system in which each individual has distinct, independent

cultural value sets (Signorini et al., 2009). However, culture can also be characterized by fuzziness and complexity (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). For example, individuals within the same national culture do not necessarily share identical beliefs and attitudes (Signorini et al., 2009).

In addition, Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework conceptualizes culture as relatively stable and measurable, whereas Spencer-Oatey (2000) emphasizes its dynamic and flexible nature. McSweeney (2002) criticizes Hofstede's model as an "extreme" and "uni-level" approach, arguing that it does not sufficiently account for cultural interactions across the globe or the adoption of practices and values from other cultures. Connected to the dimensions of Hofstede, critics emphasize that country scores have changed over time; besides, the data was collected at different times and sometimes 40-50 years apart (Boski, 2024), which makes the results generalizable, partly due to the used method (Schiffinger, 2024).

Despite the criticism of Hofstede's model, his theory is still considered a significant contribution to cross-cultural studies. It provides valuable insight into the concept of national culture from a pragmatic point of view (Venkateswaran & Ojha, 2019). Another advantage lies in the simplicity of dimensions. They are frequently used in cross-cultural studies and allow for the exploration of factors influencing consumer behavior (De Mooij, 2021).

While the concept of national culture and cultural values is essential for the present research, it is also important to consider the car consumer culture. Globalization, characterized by increased interconnectedness through capital flow, technological advancements, and media (De Mooij, 2021; Ritzer, 2010), drives cultural convergence, where different cultures adopt shared values and consumption patterns (De Mooij, 2021). This convergence allows advertisers to use universal themes like success and sense of belonging to appeal to their audience (Schühly, 2022). However, some argue that globalization also sparks a focus on preserving cultural identity (Hills & Atkins, 2013). Further, we will explore the similarities and differences in the values reflected in Volkswagen's German and Italian Facebook advertising, which will provide insights into the processes of cultural convergence and divergence in car advertising.

While this section provided an overview of Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, it is important to understand how exactly they can be identified in Facebook advertising. Further, we discuss the semiotic approach used to identify Hofstede's cultural dimensions in Facebook posts.

2.2 Semiotic approach: verbal and visual signs

Advertising is an interdisciplinary concept that can be studied, besides marketing, within the framework of linguistics (Meer & Pick, 2019), intercultural communications (De Mooij, 2021), psychology (Fennis & Stroebe, 2020), and other fields. In the context of the present research, it is important to remember that meaningful and understandable messages can affect customers' purchase behavior. All meaningful phenomena can be referred to as **signs**, which are studied within the framework of **semiotics** (Chandler, 2017). Therefore, a semiotic approach was chosen for the analysis of cross-cultural advertising of Volkswagen.

When exploring the semiotics of advertising, we consider the role of both verbal and visual signs in the analysis. With the development of technologies and possibilities for visual communication, the role of an image has significantly increased (Li & Xie, 2020). This tendency was described by Mitchell (1994, p. 11), who referred to this change as "the pictorial turn": the social turn towards spectatorship and visuality.

The pictorial turn has gained even greater momentum with the development of digital media. The widespread use of smartphones and the expansion of mobile internet services allow for the instant sharing of images and videos online, reinforcing the dominance of visual communication (Li & Xie, 2020).

This visual dominance is particularly evident in social media advertising, which has become increasingly image-driven (Shi & Wan, 2022). Various visual techniques, such as close-up shots and detailed graphic representations of products, not only emphasize product benefits but also enhance customer engagement (Shi & Wan, 2022). Image-centric social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok prioritize visual content, allowing images to reach global audiences within seconds (Li J., 2024). The pictorial turn in digital media underlines the growing importance of images in shaping public discourse, influencing consumer behavior, and redefining cultural paradigms in the advertising landscape (Li J., 2024).

There are different classifications of visual elements in advertisements. The taxonomy of Berman and Blakeman (2009) includes layout style, visual images, typeface, character or spokesperson representing a product, decorative borders of an image, color, logos, and slogans. Moriarty et al. (2015) identify illustration and photo, color, typography, design, layout, and style. All these elements have their role in conveying the company's message. For example, color sets the mood of the advertisement, while layout and typeface define the visual or verbal tone to be used (Berman & Blakeman, 2009). Verbal and visual elements complement each other and create meaning; therefore, in the semiotic analysis, we will consider both verbal and visual parts of the post.

Finally, we would like to mention the role of signs associated with social media advertisements: **emojis** and **hashtags**. Emojis are graphic symbols that refer to objects, feelings, and abstract ideas (Rodrigues et al., 2017). Used individually or in a string, emojis add an emotional meaning to the message and make it more appealing to the receiver (Shi & Wan, 2022). Nowadays, emojis are not only used by individuals, but are also elements of online advertising (Das et al., 2019). Different brands, from electronics producers (Shi & Wan, 2022) to car manufacturers (e.g., Chevrolet) (Das et al., 2019) use emojis more and more often.

Different studies prove the positive effect of emojis on consumers' engagement. Das et al. (2019) found that the presence of emojis leads to an increased interest in the product and higher purchase intentions. They underline that this effect is more significant in the case of products that meet the emotional rather than functional needs of customers. Another example is recent research by Phan and Wiesinger (2022), who explored the use of emojis in tourism-related Instagram posts. According to their results, positive face emojis tend to contribute to the persuasive power of the posts.

Another peculiar element of social media communication is a hashtag, described as "a form of social tagging featuring the # symbol followed by a word or phrase" (Zappavigna, 2018, p. 1). Hashtags first appeared on Twitter in 2007; over time, their use spread to other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (Mahfouz, 2020; Potnis & Tahamtan, 2021). It is possible to summarize the main functions of a hashtag:

- Categorizing the topics and ideas, enabling an online search (Mahfouz, 2020; Potnis & Tahamtan, 2021)
- Creating bonds between individuals and topics in social media through emphasizing specific topics and ideas (Zappavigna, 2018; Mahfouz, 2020).
- Raising awareness and mobilizing support for social causes and movements (Ta'amneh & Al-Ghazo, 2021).
- Advertising, promotion, and increasing brand awareness (Shi & Wan, 2022; Shin et al., 2018).

The multiple functions of hashtags have attracted the attention of researchers exploring social media advertising. Shin et al. (2018) found that the use of hashtags led to positive reactions from consumers toward the informativeness, enjoyment, and interactivity of the advertisements. Besides, active use of hashtags increased the visibility of brand-related topics to intended customers (Shi & Wan, 2022). Additionally, hashtags can be used to encourage certain behaviors of the audience. A study by Ilhamsyah and Herlina (2019) explores the use of the hashtag #adaaqua by the Indonesian mineral

water brand AQUA, which aimed to raise teenagers' awareness of the importance of drinking water. Therefore, in this research, we analyze emojis and hashtags due to their significance and role in advertising and promotion.

Semiotic signs will be scrutinized alongside Hofstede's model: we identify and analyze verbal and visual signs in social media posts of Volkswagen reflecting any of the cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede.

3 Methods

3.1 Sampling

For the analysis, we collected the advertisements from the official German and Italian pages of Volkswagen on Facebook:

(1) German page: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenDE>

(2) Italian page: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenIT>

Facebook has the most users among social media platforms in Germany and the more even distribution across age groups (Pokrop, 2023). In Italy, user numbers are comparable to those of Germany (44,2 million vs. 46 million) (Statista, 2025a; Statista, 2025b). Overall, 27% of Facebook users in Germany are between the ages of 25 and 34, while only 6% were 65 years or older (Statista, 2025a). In Italy, Facebook also had its largest user base in the 25 to 34 age group, which made up 20,6% of the audience (Statista, 2025b). The 45 to 54 age group accounted for 18,6% of users, while the 35 to 44 group represented 17,4% (Statista, 2025b). Additionally, 11,7% of Facebook users in Italy were 65 and older, and 17,2% were between the ages of 18 and 24 (Statista, 2025b). Comparing the two countries, Germany has a higher proportion of users in the 25 to 34 age group, but Italy has a more diverse age distribution with a stronger presence of users in older and middle-aged categories.

This demographic composition aligns well with Volkswagen's target audience, which typically includes adults aged 25 to 54 – an age range associated with financial independence and car-buying capacity (Shastri, 2025). The company, with its wide range of product, targets diverse consumer groups, which includes people of different ages, occupation, and level of education (Pitko, 2021; Shastri, 2025). Facebook, therefore, can be considered an appropriate platform for reaching potential Volkswagen customers, as Facebook demonstrates wider user diversity compared to other social media platforms.

The analyzed Facebook posts appear to address a broad but strategically relevant target group. While some posts (e.g., those highlighting new models or family-friendly features) are likely aimed at middle-aged adults or families, others (such as environmentally themed posts or those focused on innovation) may appeal to younger users. Therefore, the posts reflect a diversified communication strategy that engages different subgroups within Volkswagen's overall target audience.

The data collection was based on the continuous sampling method. Continuous sampling method implies that all posts published within the given period were considered for analysis, regardless of the advertised model. The examples of models advertised by Volkswagen in the case of both target cultures are GTE, T-Roc, T-Cross, Touareg, Golf, Taigo, and ID range. All advertisements published from January 1st, 2022, to June 30th, 2022, were included for the analysis: 96 German and 57 Italian advertisements, totaling 153 posts. We chose a shorter period (six months), because each post had to be manually categorized according to cultural dimensions. The size of the sample ensured that trends could be observed, but the amount of data remained manageable. The data collection period was chosen, because the number of Facebook advertisements published within this period is comparable. We also decided against using newer advertisements, since, on the one hand, it would be hard to distinguish cultural influences from factors connected to actual political and economic challenges and restructuring. On the other hand, we wanted to analyze human-generated posts. After the

introduction of diverse AI platforms in and after 2023, it is no longer certain whether an ad was created by humans or with AI assistance (cf. Campbell et al. 2021, Chen et al. 2024).

The following parts of the posts were analyzed:

- (1) Caption (text of the post)
- (2) Visual elements: a photo or a video in the post, including text within the picture (if used)
- (3) Emojis (if used)
- (4) Hashtags (if used)

Among the collected Facebook advertisements, 11 German (11,5% of the German-language posts) and 39 Italian (68% of the Italian-language posts) were in the video format. However, most of the Italian-language video posts were slideshows consisting of 3-4 static images connected by style, visuals, and captions. As a result, they were categorized and analyzed as images. Video posts were analyzed dynamically, considering both visual and verbal signs, as well as sequencing, transitions, and timing. Each frame was assessed for composition, color, and objects, while movement, editing, and narrative structure were also evaluated.

Social media advertising is characterized by multimodality, which means that Facebook posts are not simply text-based but rather a complex interplay of visual and linguistic elements. Considering all these elements together, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of how Volkswagen communicates with potential customers and conveys targeted meanings through advertising, reflecting either the cultural values of the target region or the brand identity and strategic values of the company itself.

While various social media platforms offer unique opportunities for cross-cultural advertising research, Facebook stands out as a particularly valuable platform due to its global reach, diverse user demographics, and rich data availability. In 2025, 3.07 billion monthly active users use Facebook, which exceeds the number of monthly active users of other platforms and messengers, such as Instagram and WhatsApp (2 billion in both cases) (Kakadia, 2025). Unlike other platforms, such as Instagram, which is popular among younger audiences, Facebook's user base includes a wider age range and cultural diversity (Laor, 2022). For example, Facebook's user base is substantially more age-diverse than platforms like Instagram: over 50% of users are aged 35+, and roughly 20-30% are 45 and older (Oberlo, 2024). Consequently, Facebook offers a more valid context for analyzing Volkswagen's advertising messages, which target adult consumers across a wide age spectrum, – not just younger millennials or Gen Z. In addition, other social networks have certain limitations regarding their content (for example, Instagram is a visually-based social network (Li & Xie, 2020)). In this research, we are focusing on both visual and textual elements of the post; therefore, Facebook was selected as the most convenient platform for data collection.

3.2 Data arrangement and coding procedure

All advertisements posted within the selected period were collected in a digital database and divided into two groups according to their target culture. For each advertisement, we registered the publication date and the date of access, the advertised model of the car, visual and textual parts of the post, the text of the caption and text within an image (if any), emojis and hashtags. The original versions of the posts in the German and Italian language were used for the analysis.

For coding the posts, we used 12 categories, each corresponding to one of Hofstede's six cultural dimensions and their bipolar opposites. These categories were assigned based on identifiable verbal and/or visual signs present in each post. To guide this process, we used a deductive approach informed by Hofstede's original framework (1980), as well as his later work (Hofstede et al., 2010), de Mooij's (2021) insights on advertising and culture, and the cultural indicators outlined on The Culture Factor platform (2023).

The posts were examined for both explicit and contextually interpretable cultural signs. When a post clearly reflected a Hofstede dimension – either through language, visual cues, or messaging structure, – it was assigned one or more categories accordingly. Posts that lacked any identifiable cultural indicators were not assigned a category. Coding was carried out manually, and a sample of posts was rechecked to ensure consistency in interpretation and application of the coding scheme.

Table 1 lists dimension-specific themes, as well as particular verbal and visual elements representing them.

Hofstede's dimensions	Key themes	Examples of semiotic signs
High power distance	Status, prestige, obedience, respect for authority	Status objects (clothes, accessories). Interrelation of people shown (e.g. older vs younger person, boss vs employee). Formal language, use of titles
Low power distance	Equality, sharing, control is disliked	No distinctive attributes or symbols of luxury People wearing simpler clothes The distance between people of different age or social statuses is less obvious
Individualism	Focus on personal achievement, independence, individual freedom	People depicted alone / with their immediate families / in a small group of friends. Multiple generations of a family are rarely shown People enjoying privacy Being alone as a relaxing activity The use of personal pronouns <i>I, you, we</i>
Collectivism	Group harmony, family, sharing, people, trust	People depicted with family members / in a group of friends / involved in social activities. Showing multiple generations (e.g. grandparents) Being alone as a symbol of loneliness The use of personal pronoun <i>we</i>
Masculinity	Challenge, performance, uniqueness, standing out, achievement, success, traditional gender roles	"...big and fast are beautiful" (De Mooij, 2021, p. 133). Large gender role differentiation Women are shown to be tough Use of hyperbole Assertive tone
Femininity	Focus on cooperation, nurturing, quality of life, compassion Use of understatement	Focus on the "small". Depicting families / friends / couples. If celebrity endorsement is used, famous people tend not to show that they are famous (reflecting modesty) Men are shown to be tender Small gender role differentiation Nurturing tone
High Uncertainty Avoidance	Need for explanation, testing, scientific proof, expert opinion, safety, plan, preparation, secure, check, readiness, avoiding threat	Focus on technical details, showing how a product works Presenters depicted as experts (e.g., professors, competent professionals)
Low Uncertainty Avoidance	Adventure, risk, exploring, openness to change, innovation	Focusing on the result, rather than details A parody on experts or professionals is frequently used

Long-term orientation	Orientation towards the future, practicality, harmony with nature, saving for future, openness to change	A man in harmony with nature and other people Visual objects / activities related to nature
Short-term orientation	Orientation towards the past and present: Sense of urgency (encouraging to buy the product now)	Showing efficiency, quick results Demonstrating the application of the product to the present context Symbols of tradition Showing people fulfilling social obligations The idea of “instant pleasure” (De Mooij, 2021, p. 236)
Indulgence	Independence, freedom, enjoyment, pleasure, desire, adventure, fun	Images of people involved in free time activities Happy facial expressions, relaxed poses Symbols of freedom: open spaces, natural landscapes, motion Activities related to indulgence, spending, consumption Self-expression through luxury goods
Restraint	Restrictions, control, strict social norms, maintaining order	People engaged in work or routine activities rather than leisure activities Working hard, saving money

Table 1. Dimension-specific verbal signs and visual images (De Mooij, 2021; De Mooij, M., & Hofstede, 2010; Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede et al., 2010; The Culture Factor, 2023).

By identifying verbal and visual semiotic signs related to the abovementioned themes, we coded the collected advertisements according to the dimension they represent.

In order to ensure the consistency and transparency of the research, an assistant coder was involved in the coding procedure. The double-coding procedure is frequently used in qualitative studies: it allows the coders to independently analyze and compare the coding results and thus increase the trustworthiness of the analysis (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). In this research, two coders – an Italian-speaking and a German-speaking, – worked on coding of the data. The coders, one with master's degree in Theoretical Linguistics, another – with master's degree in applied linguistics, – were trained according to the abovementioned system of codes prior to the coding process. In the case of the differences in the interpretation of the semiotic signs, the disagreements were discussed to reach a consensus.

Based on the meanings created by the combinations of signs, the posts were coded according to the cultural values they represent.

4 Results: Comparative analysis of German and Italian adaptations

Over the period of six months, 84 out of 96 German-language advertisements and 55 out of 57 Italian-language advertisements contained the features of the cultural dimensions of Hofstede. However, a number of posts – 12 in German and 2 in Italian language – did not contain explicit verbal or visual references to any of these cultural dimensions. These posts tended to be either purely informative (e.g., introducing a new automobile model) or abstract in nature, such as the following:

Drei Buchstaben, die für Gänsehaut sorgen... GTI. (“Three letters that give you goose-bumps... GTI”)

Some of such posts did not focus on cultural aspect but rather contained interaction with the audience:

Leichtmetall-Alarm! Wo sind die Felgen-Profis unter euch? Sagt uns welche ihr hier erkennt! (“Alloy Alert! Where are the rim pros among you? Tell us which one you recognize here!”)

These examples illustrate how certain advertisements focus on general product promotion and engagement rather than emphasizing culturally specific themes.

Figure 2 illustrates the occurrence of cultural dimensions in the German- and Italian-language posts (in percentage), which allows comparing their frequency in the case of both target cultures.

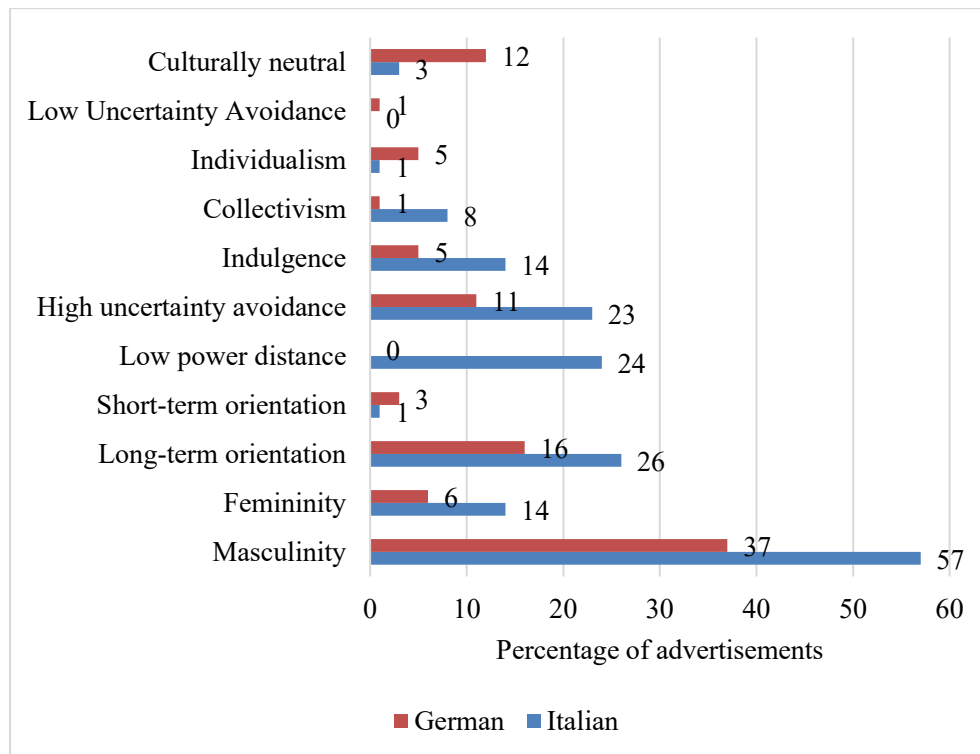









Figure 2. The frequency of occurrence of Hofstede's cultural dimensions in German and Italian posts of Volkswagen

Figure 2 shows that Masculinity and Long-Term Orientation were the most frequently used cultural dimensions in both German and Italian Facebook advertisements of Volkswagen. The brand emphasized power, confidence, and innovation, with a focus on sustainable solutions. Indulgence was also common across the two target cultures, highlighting the brand's role in customer enjoyment and freedom.

Other cultural dimensions appeared less frequently. Femininity was more prominent in Italian-language posts, while Low Power Distance and High Uncertainty Avoidance were present but less emphasized. The Collectivism vs. Individualism dimension was rarely used, with few posts focusing on in-group loyalty or individual achievement. Short-term orientation was also used rarely, reinforcing the brand's forward-thinking nature. Lastly, High Power Distance, Low Uncertainty Avoidance, and Restraint were either not reflected, or reflected in a limited way, suggesting that Volkswagen's messaging prioritized inclusiveness, flexibility, and a forward-thinking, liberated approach, corresponding to the brand's emphasis on innovation and customer freedom.

Table 2 compares the key themes related to the cultural dimensions in the context of German and Italian Facebook advertising, with the examples of verbal and visual semiotic signs representing each dimension. All examples with the references to the corresponding Facebook posts can be found in the Appendix.

Dimension	German-language posts	Italian-language posts
Masculinity	Being noticeable and recognizable	
	<i>optisch zu erkennen</i> (“visually recognizable”), <i>exklusiv</i> (“exclusive”)	<i>icona inconfondibile</i> (“an unmistakable icon”)
	Power and assertiveness (presenting a car with human qualities)	
	<i>Auffällig selbstbewusst</i> (“conspicuously self-confident”), <i>sportlichen Charakter</i> (“sportive character”)	<i>carattere sportive</i> (“sportive character”), <i>piena di carattere dentro e fuori</i> (“full of character inside and out”) English-language slogans <i>Who says you can't?</i> , <i>Born Confident</i>
	Visual signs related to Masculinity	
	Depicting the automobile in motion, at high speed symbolizing achievement, power and dominance (Example 1)	
	Using contrast color schemes, visually emphasizing automobile in the picture or video (Example 2)	
	emojis indicating power and confidence ()	
Femininity	Comfortable driving	
	<i>Der Tiguan bietet seinen Insassen viel Raum in alle Richtungen – egal ob zwei oder vier Beine.</i> “The Tiguan offers its passengers plenty of space in all directions – regardless of whether they have two or four leg”	<i>Perché scendere a compromessi quando si può avere sia l'innovazione che il comfort a bordo di Caravelle?</i> (“Why to compromise when you can have both innovation and comfort on board of the Caravelle?”)
	Importance of relationships	
	<i>Na, schon Pläne für heute Abend? Filme schauen im ID.LIFE ist noch Musik der Zukunft, auf die ihr hier einen kleinen Vorschmack bekommt. Wir wünschen euch einen wunderschönen Valentinstag!</i> (“So, any plans for tonight? Watching films in ID.LIFE is still music of the future, which you can get a little taste of here. We wish you a wonderful Valentine's Day!”)	#SpazioAllAmore (“space for love”)
		A car as home
		<i>una casa che si ricarica anche la casa</i> (“a house that also recharges the house”) <i>C'è chi ti fa sentire a casa ovunque tu sia.</i> <i>California 6.1</i> (“There are those who make you feel at home wherever you are. California 6.1”)
	Visual signs related to Femininity	
	Characters: couples, families, friends spending time together (focus on feelings and bonds) (Example 3)	
	Advertised model: depicting larger, family-size cars (Example 4)	
	Emojis related to love and feelings “Red heart” ()	
Long-Term Orientation	Change, flexibility of the brand	
	<i>Verwandlungskünstler</i> (“quick-change artist”) <i>Verwandlungskünstler, der die Zeichen der Zeit neu interpretiert</i> („quick-change artist that reinterprets the signs of the times”)	<i>La mobilità elettrica è già pronta a cambiare le nostre abitudini</i> (“Electric mobility is already ready to change our habits”)
	Concern about the environment	

	<i>Der ID.4 zeigt, wie attraktiv Elektromobilität sein kann</i> “the ID.4 shows how attractive electric mobility can be”	<i>Entra nella nuova era dei Van elettrici.</i> (“Enter the new era of electric vans”)
	Pragmatic and economic design of the car	
	<i>funktionaler Alltagstauglichkeit</i> (“functional suitability for everyday use”)	<i>...a interni che fondono tecnologia e praticità...</i> (“...interiors that blend technology and practicality...”)
	Visual signs related to Long-Term Orientation	
	Details: focus on technical equipment of the car to render the idea of innovativeness	
	Style: Futuristic style of the automobile (Example 5)	
	Green color and images of greenery and nature as a sign of sustainability and environmental protection	
	green heart emoji representing sustainability ()	
Short-Term Orientation	Reference to the traditions and legacy	
	<i>Der eine hat Geschichte geschrieben, der andere steht in den Startlöchern, um sie fortzusetzen.</i> (“The one has made history, the other is ready to continue it”) – reference to the advertising of new ID Buzz based on the	
	Visual signs related to Short-term orientation	
	Depicting classic models of Volkswagen (Example 6)	Details: symbols related to traditions. E.g., a Christmas stocking as a symbol of Epiphany (Example 7)
Indulgence	Free time, freedom, adventure	
	<i>Auszeit</i> (“time-out”), <i>Fahrt</i> (“journey”)	<i>vivere la città</i> (“experience the city”), <i>libertà</i> (“freedom”), <i>Il bello di viaggiare</i> (“the beauty of traveling”),
	Breaking out of the daily routine	
	<i>Da fühlt sich jede Fahrt wie ein kleine Auszeit vom Alltag an.</i> (“Every journey feels like a little break from everyday life”)	<i>Anche la routine esce dall’ordinatio a bordo di Nuovo Multivan</i> (“Even routine goes out of the ordinary on board of the New Multivan”)
	Positive emotions and enjoyment	
	<i>Fahrspaß vorprogrammiert</i> (“pre-programmed driving fun”).	Per partire con lo sprint giusto, basta fare il pieno di energia. (“To start with the right sprint, just fill up with energy”)
	Visual signs connected to Indulgence	
	Dominant colors: bright, contrast color schemes (Example 8)	
	Characters and settings: Depicting people relaxing, enjoying free time activities	
	Settings: outside the city, picturesque landscapes (symbolizing freedom)	
	Emojis related to positive emotions and free time activities, e.g.: “Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes” (), “Sun” (), “Skier” () “Snowboarder” ()	
High Uncertainty Avoidance	Reliability of the brand	Exploration and discovery
	<i>bringt euch dank seines Dualmotor Allradantrieb zuverlässig ans Ziel</i> (“takes you reliably to your destination thanks to its dual-motor all-wheel drive”).	<i>scoprire</i> (“discover”), <i>spiegare</i> (“explain”) and <i>la risposta</i> (“the answer”).

	Visual signs related to High Uncertainty Avoidance	
	Attention to technical details and safety features	
	Settings: potentially dangerous terrain (snowy roads, off-roads) in posts emphasizing safety	
		Settings: engineering laboratory, uniform (laboratory gown) – symbolizing reliability and expertise of the brand (Example 9)
Low Power Distance		Availability of the brand to general public
		Campaign #ElettricoPerTotti (“Electric for Totti”) and #ElettricoPerTutti (“Electric for everyone”). <i>Un viaggio di due anni ad emissioni locali zero per avvicinare il grande pubblico al mondo della mobilità elettrica.</i> (“A two-year journey to zero local emissions to bring the general public closer to the world of electric mobility”)
		Relatability of the celebrity
		The celebrity (Francesco Totti) is portrayed as an ordinary person who learns about Volkswagen technology (Example 9)
Collectivism	Being together, sharing emotions	
	<i>Der Tiguan Allspace ist bei fast jedem Ausflugsziel dein passender Begleiter</i> (“The Tiguan Allspace is your perfect companion for almost any excursion destination”)	Depicting people interacting (families, group of friends) <i>In viaggio con tutto e tutti</i> (“On a trip with everything and everyone”) Words
	Visual signs related to Collectivism	
	Characters: images of families and friends spending time together (Example 10)	
	Automobile: Depicting larger models	

Table 2. Main themes reflecting Hofstede’s dimensions in German and Italian advertising

The analysis of Volkswagen’s Facebook advertising reveals both similarities and differences in how the brand adapts to its German and Italian audiences. In both cultures, the company appeals to similar cultural dimensions, such as Masculinity, Long-Term Orientation, and Indulgence, reinforcing its brand image as a powerful, sustainability-oriented company, giving freedom and enjoyment to the driver.

Within these dimensions, Volkswagen often focuses on shared values, such as relationships and emotions in the context of Femininity. However, certain aspects of Femininity, such as modesty, were not present in either culture’s posts. This may reflect the brand’s message emphasizing standing out and making an impression, which aligns with Masculinity values.

At the same time, Volkswagen marketers sometimes used different signs to express similar ideas. For example, the color green was frequently used in environmentally-oriented advertising in both German and Italian. However, the Italian posts uniquely featured the slogan “Volkswagen way to Zero,” highlighting the brand’s journey towards sustainability, a message absent in the German advertisements. Additionally, while High Uncertainty Avoidance was represented by reliability and safety in the German posts, the Italian posts emphasized discovery and exploration, reflecting different cultural approaches to risk.

A notable difference was the company’s appeal to Low Power Distance in the Italian market. The use of this dimension is related to a series of posts with the participation of Francesco Totti – an

Italian football player and the ambassador of the company in Italy. According to the plot of the series, Francesco Totti became a part of Volkswagen's engineering team to explore the possibilities of electric mobility and make sustainable driving available to the public. The ideas of equality and accessibility are the important values of Low Power Distance.

Communication style also differed between the two cultures. German-language posts typically included detailed technical information about the advertised model, such as fuel consumption and emissions:

(Polo GTI: Kraftstoffverbrauch in l/100 km: innerorts 7,4 / außerorts 4,8-4,6 / kombiniert 5,8-5,6; CO₂-Emissionen kombiniert in g/km: 131-128; Effizienzklasse: C-B.)

(Polo GTI: fuel consumption in l/100 km: urban 7.4 / extra-urban 4.8-4.6 / combined 5.8-5.6; combined CO₂ emissions in g/km: 131-128; efficiency class : C-B.)

This peculiarity reflects the traditionally precise, detail-oriented nature of the German culture (De Mooij, 2021; Kaynak & Herbig, 2014).

Further, we discuss in more detail to what extent the use of cultural values in advertising reflects the cultural characteristics of Germany and Italy in the view of the broader context of these cultures.

5 Discussion

The analysis of the cultural dimensions of Hofstede used in Italian and German-language posts demonstrates that they do not always correspond to Hofstede's characteristic of the cultures under study. Due to the evolving nature of culture and cultural dimensions, we interpret the results of the semiotic analysis from the perspective of the current socio-cultural processes taking place in Germany and Italy.

5.1 Masculinity / Femininity

Germany and Italy score 66 and 70 respectively on the MAS dimension, which means that masculine features in these cultures prevail over feminine (The Culture Factor, 2023). Volkswagen's frequent use of Masculinity and less frequent use of Femininity reflect Hofstede's description of these cultures.

However, the meanings of masculinity and femininity are evolving. The traditional view on masculinity as traits reinforcing men's dominance is changing as feminist movements and societal values shift (Iacoviello et al., 2021). For example, more German families are seeing women as the primary breadwinners, challenging traditional notions of femininity (Jurczyk, 2019). Similarly, in the Italian context, Scarcelli & Farci (2024) found that female social media users tend to associate femininity and an image of a woman with resilience and ambitions – traditionally masculine values. Additionally, in Italian corporate settings, more attention is being paid to the gender gap (Latura & Weeks, 2023).

At the same time, Ostuni et al. (2022) state that certain gender stereotypes remain in Italy. Some women wish to adhere to stereotypical feminine image and focus on traditional feminine roles, such as taking care of the family rather than, for example, building a career. However, this adherence to gender stereotypes is less common among younger generations (Ostuni et al., 2022).

Volkswagen's advertising reflects this transition. By emphasizing traditionally masculine attributes – such as achievement, overcoming challenges, and status – the brand appeals to both men and women, aligning with the modern redefinition of masculinity as a set of aspirational traits rather than a strictly gendered concept. This approach suggests that while Volkswagen's use of masculinity corresponds to Hofstede's findings, it also adapts to contemporary trends where masculine values are increasingly embraced by all consumers.

Given that Facebook's user base in Germany and Italy includes a high proportion of adults in the 25–55 age range – working professionals and middle-class consumers who are likely to value

performance, reliability, and success, – the platform provides a relevant audience for such branding appeals. This reinforces Facebook’s suitability for analyzing how culturally embedded values, like masculinity, are communicated by Volkswagen in each country.

5.2 Long- / Short-term orientation

Long- / Short-term orientation demonstrates to which extent the culture prioritizes progress, pragmatism and long-term tasks over the conventional approach (Hofstede, 2001). In Hofstede’s analysis, Germany scores 57 on LTO dimension, demonstrating a balanced combination of long- and short-term values. Italy scored 39 on LTO scale, which indicates its preference for traditional approaches rather than innovativeness and forward-thinking.

The results of the analysis, however, demonstrate the long-term orientation of Volkswagen in the case of both target markets. Marketers underline the innovativeness of the brand, highlighting its care about the well-being of future generations and orientation towards sustainability.

The theoretical data from academic sources show the features of long-term orientation in German and Italian society, especially in the context of transportation. Both Italy and Germany pay significant attention to sustainability practices and promote the use of modern technologies for environmental protection (Notermans & Piattoni, 2022). Environmentally friendly solutions are becoming increasingly important in the modern world, especially in the automotive industry (Agarwal & Kumar, 2021). Additionally, the description of the German society by Tomalin (2021) shows that people tend to adapt to the current situation and focus on its practical advantages. Corresponding to this idea, several German-language posts underlined the practicality and functionality of the advertised Volkswagen models.

In contrast, short-term orientation was minimally reflected in Volkswagen’s advertising for both markets. The brand made little reference to traditions or legacy, whether cultural or company related. Instead, the focus remained on innovation and sustainability. By promoting “green” and technologically advanced driving, Volkswagen positions itself as a brand that not only meets present-day needs but also contributes to a sustainable future, aligning more closely with long-term orientation than Hofstede’s initial characterization of Italian culture might suggest.

5.3 Power distance

Low PDI was only reflected in Italian posts of Volkswagen. All cases of low PDI were found in a series of advertisements of Volkswagen ID featuring Francesco Totti – an Italian football player and the brand ambassador of the company. According to the plot of the campaign, Francesco Totti became a part of Volkswagen’s engineering team and learned about different aspects of electric mobility.

Low power distance is manifested in several aspects. First of all, the goal of the entire campaign is to make electric mobility available to general public. Volkswagen presents the features of electric mobility in a clear and relatable manner, reinforcing the idea that technological advancements should be available to everyone rather than reserved for an elite group.

Additionally, the portrayal of Francesco Totti plays a key role in conveying this message. Rather than being depicted as an authority figure, he is shown in a laboratory coat, working alongside engineers as an equal team member. His status is deliberately downplayed, aligning with the values of Low PDI cultures.

The emphasis on LPD can be explained by the shift in Italian politics and society towards equality as the fundamental goal of the country’s development (Di Battista et al., 2018). According to Hofstede (2001), Northern Italians dislike control and prefer equal distribution of resources and power. Southern Italy, in contrast, scores higher on the same scale (50), which means that this part of Italian society accepts a bigger distance between less and more powerful social groups. By positioning Totti

as an approachable figure and explaining electric mobility in an inclusive manner, Volkswagen reinforces the idea of equal access to sustainable transportation for all customers.

5.4 Uncertainty Avoidance Index

Both Germany and Italy are described by Hofstede as cultures with high UAI, scoring 65 and 75 respectively. German-language posts emphasize the reliability of Volkswagen's technology and the importance of safety, aligning with Germany's structured and pragmatic approach to reducing uncertainty. While Italian-language posts also highlight these features, marketers went further by dedicating an entire campaign to educating the audience about Volkswagen's technology and electric mobility solutions. In 14 Italian-language posts featuring Francesco Totti as Volkswagen's ambassador, the company detailed key aspects of the car, such as safety, autonomy, charging systems, and navigation.

According to De Mooij (2021), cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to rely on expert opinions. The presence of laboratory coats and glasses in Volkswagen's ID advertisement series reinforces this idea, portraying the brand as trustworthy and its technologies as rigorously tested. This aligns with Italy's score of 75, indicating a cultural preference for reliability and thorough understanding of risks. By showcasing technical details and demonstrating product functionality, Volkswagen caters to consumers' need for clear explanations, reinforcing confidence in the advertised model.

5.5 Individualism / Collectivism

The dimension Individualism / Collectivism was used least frequently in both German and Italian advertisements of Volkswagen. Germany is characterized as a highly individualistic culture, scoring 79 on this dimension. Italy, on the contrary, scored 53, which suggests the balance of individualistic and collectivistic features.

Collectivistic features were identified in four Italian-language posts and one German-language post, conveying themes of unity and shared experiences. Verbal signs of collectivism included terms indicating in-group relationships and belonging, such as *tutti* ("everybody") and *condividere* ("share"). These findings align with regional variations – southern Italy, in particular, emphasizes family ties and social bonds (De Mooij, 2021; The Culture Factor, 2023). By incorporating collectivistic values, Volkswagen positions itself as a brand that fosters connections among consumers.

5.6 Indulgence / Restraint

While Hofstede's model (2010) identifies Germany and Italy as restraint cultures (with the scores of 40 and 30 respectively), our analysis reveals a prevalence of "indulgent" themes in Volkswagen's advertising.

These findings suggest a potential shift in these cultures towards valuing enjoyment and satisfaction (Sotgiu, 2016). In Italy, young adults tend to prioritize hobbies, well-being, and serenity (Sotgiu, 2016). In Germany, regional and generational differences also play a role, with some areas embracing a more relaxed, enjoyment-oriented mindset (Tomalin, 2021). These findings prove the complexity of cultural values and their potential evolution over time.

Volkswagen's messaging emphasizes pleasurable driving experiences and the freedom to engage in enjoyable activities, appealing to a consumer base that values personal satisfaction. While this does not entirely contradict Hofstede's scores, it highlights the dynamic nature of cultural values and the necessity for brands to adapt their messaging to contemporary lifestyle trends.

5.7 Emojis and hashtags: cross-cultural differences

The analysis of German advertisements demonstrates that emojis and hashtags were used in all 96 posts, totaling 304 emojis and 211 hashtags.

Emojis were used for different purposes, contributing to the overall meaning and emotional coloring of the advertisement and emphasizing particular parts and elements of the post. When used to create a special mood and atmosphere for the post, emojis usually represented facial expressions and convey certain feelings associated with the model or the process of driving. For example, emojis “Smiling Face with Heart-Eyes” (😍) and “Star-struck” (🤩) were used to express the feeling of excitement and happiness associated with the advertised car.

Additionally, emojis were used to visually highlight important information in an advertisement. For example, “Backhand Index Pointing Right” (👉) and “Information Sign” (ℹ️) were used in a combination and were inserted before the links leading to the company’s webpage.

Hashtags used in German posts had less varied functions. Each advertisement contained a hashtag *#volkswagen*, referring to the company's name, and hashtags related to the advertised model or models. Such hashtags usually consisted of an abbreviation of Volkswagen (vw) and the actual name of the model (e.g., *vw + Taigo = #vwtaigo*).

On the contrary, only 5 out of 57 collected Italian advertisements included emojis. In all cases, emojis were used to encourage the interaction between the company and customers. For example, in a post dedicated to World Snow Day, marketers suggested that the audience comment with an emoji about their preferred winter activity: skiing (🎿), snowboarding (🏂) or driving (🚗) (Example 11). Four other posts using emojis featured Francesco Totti – the ambassador of the company. In all cases, the emojis were used within a photo. The company offered a challenge to the audience: to guess a particular technical feature of the advertised electric model through three emojis shown by the ambassador (Example 12).

Hashtags were used in 30 advertisements, totaling 97. Some of them specify the advertised model or range of Volkswagen (such as *#VWCalifornia*). Others contribute to the meaning of the whole advertisement: for example, refer to a specific occasion or holiday (*#GiornataMondialeDellaNeve* (“World Snow Day”), *#SpazioAllAmore* (“Space for Love”), associated with Saint Valentine’s Day).

Emojis and hashtags perform different functions in Facebook advertising. Besides contributing to the overall meaning of advertisements, they are also used to encourage customer engagement or even to visually emphasize different parts of the post. From a semiotic perspective, some emojis may function as iconic signs, especially those that resemble emotions, gestures, actions or notions they aim to express (Danesi, 2016). However, some emojis acquire symbolic meanings through their use in specific contexts (e.g., the “fire” emoji symbolizing excellence or excitement).

While several studies suggest that certain basic emojis, especially facial expressions, can be interpreted consistently across cultures, their frequency, placement, and social interpretation may vary based on cultural norms, communication styles and socio-geographical factors (Barbieri et al., 2016; Leonardi, 2022). To illustrate this example, Barbieri et al. (2016) mention an emoji of a waving hand: it is interpreted differently in American and British English, conveying “goodbye” in the U.S. and being associated with “travel” in the U.K. Similarly, hashtags can carry both global and local meanings, depending on the language, event, or value emphasized (Caleffi, 2015). Although no specific research is known that directly compares emoji or hashtag use in German and Italian advertising, our analysis shows that their communicative functions differ: German-language advertising features emojis more frequently and functionally, while Italian posts show richer hashtag use with rare emoji-based interaction.

Answering the first research question – How do German and Italian advertisements of Volkswagen reflect Hofstede’s cultural dimensions? – we can underline the multimodal nature of

social media advertising in creating culturally adapted messages. Visual and verbal signs were carefully selected to align with cultural values of the target region and with the image of the brand as a reliable, sustainability-oriented and giving confidence and freedom to the driver.

In connection to the second research question – To what extent do German and Italian Facebook advertisements share the same features or differ in their attempt to adapt to the target culture? – we can conclude that Volkswagen primarily focuses on universal branding elements and refers to similar themes and ideas reflecting cultural values important for both target audiences, thus demonstrating the influence of globalization. However, through certain advertising solutions, the company accentuates the nuances of the German and Italian culture: for example, through detail-oriented language in the case of Germany and engaging an Italian celebrity or referring to Italian traditions in the case of Italy. These results demonstrate the importance of balancing consistency and advertising adaptation to effectively reach different cultural markets.

6 Limitations and future research

The current study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions, which was selected due to its frequent use in marketing and intercultural communication studies and its simple application in cross-cultural comparison. At the same time, other models could contribute to the comprehensive study of culture in social media advertising. For example, the GLOBE approach by House et al. (2004) would provide a more modern insight into the representation of cultural dimensions in cross-cultural advertising.

Second, the analysis was made in a time of globalization and changing societal values. In this light, it is not surprising that some of the cultural values reflected in advertising do not correspond to Hofstede's characteristics of Germany and Italy. It is important to remember that culture is a complex notion that is subject to change and adapt to the rapidly developing world (Ergashev & Farxodjonova, 2020). Besides, current processes of globalization affect economic, political, social, and other realms of life; cultures become closer and adopt the views and values of each other (Zhang-Wu, 2023; Venkateswaran & Ojha, 2019). Therefore, in addition to Hofstede's – or any other – theory, it is necessary to pay attention to the current socio-political trends of the culture in question.

Third, the results are based just on one German car brand. It would be interesting to analyze social media advertisements of other brands of Volkswagen Group (e.g., Audi, Skoda, Seat), or of other German car brands (e.g., Mercedes, Mini) and of Italian brands (e.g., Fiat, Alfa Romeo) and to compare the results with each other.

Fourth, the differences in emoji and hashtag use in advertisements could be analyzed in relation to culture and language.

7 Conclusions

The analysis of Volkswagen's German and Italian Facebook posts showed that verbal and visual signs were carefully selected to create culturally specific meanings. These elements complemented each other to convey ideas and emotions aligned with the broader context of each culture.

At the same time, not all advertisements were culturally coded. Several posts (2 Italian and 12 German) did not contain explicit verbal or visual elements related to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, but instead focused on interactive, engaging, or abstract content. These **culturally neutral** posts are analytically valuable in themselves: they may reflect a universal or globally standardized communication strategy, contrasting with the cultural focus seen in other posts. Their presence supports a more nuanced understanding of how brands balance global consistency with local adaptation and highlights the limitations of relying solely on Hofstede's framework to interpret social media advertising discourse.

Considering the socio-cultural context of Italy and Germany was necessary for understanding the choice of advertising solutions for the company. Advertisements reflected both cultures' current social aspects, such as a focus on equality, the shift in gender roles, and increasing role of sustainability. By addressing the issues important to its customers, the company considered the demands and motivations of the German and Italian consumers.

Finally, even though Germany and Italy share certain cultural values and contextual factors of context, there were differences in the use of Hofstede's dimensions, as well as the language of advertisements. For example, German advertisements tend to focus more on technical details, reliability, and safety, whereas the Italian advertisements emphasize discovery, exploration, and accessibility, with more emphasis on relationships and emotions. Overall, Volkswagen adapts its messaging to align with cultural expectations, balancing both universally appealing and locally relevant themes.

8 References

- Acar, A. (2014). *Culture and Social Media: An Elementary Textbook*. Cambridge scholars publishing.
- Agarwal, N. D., & Kumar, V. R. (2021). Three decades of green advertising – a review of literature and bibliometric analysis. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, 28(6), 1934-1958. <https://doi.org/10.1108/bij-07-2020-0380>
- Alexander, J., Alexander, J.C., Thompson, K., Desfor Edles, L., & Capous-Desyllas, M. (2023). *A contemporary introduction to sociology: Culture and society in transition*. Taylor & Francis.
- Anholt, S. (2000). *Another One Bites the Grass: Making Sense of International Advertising*. Wiley.
- Baldwin, J. R., Faulkner, S. L., & Hecht, M.L. (2006). A moving target: the illusive definition of culture. In J. R Baldwin, S. L. Faulkner, M. L. Hecht & S. L. Lindsley (Eds.), *Redefining Culture: Perspectives across the Disciplines* (3-26). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Barbieri, F., Kruszewski, G., Ronzano, F., & Saggion, H. (2016). How cosmopolitan are emojis? *Proceedings of the 2016 ACM on Multimedia Conference - MM '16*, 531-535. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2964284.2967278>
- Bazi, S., Filieri, R., & Gorton, M. (2023). Social media content aesthetic quality and customer engagement: The mediating role of entertainment and impacts on brand love and loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, 160, 113778.
- Bekimbetova, G.M., Erkinov, S.B., & Rakhimov, U.F. (2021). Culture and its influence on consumer behavior in the context of marketing (in case of "Coca-Cola" company). *German International Journal of Modern Science*, 7, 4-6.
- Berman, M., & Blakeman, R. (2009). *The Brains Behind Great Ad Campaigns: Creative Collaboration between Copywriters and Art Directors*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bonilla, J. F. G. (2018). Multimodal metaphors and advertising: a cross-cultural comparison of the use of behavioural multimodal metaphors. *Darnioji Dagiakalbystė*, 13, 94-117. <https://doi.org/10.2478/sm-2018-0013>
- Boski, P. (2024). Hofstede's consequences: criticizing his oeuvre and honoring the pioneer in the history of social sciences. In S. J. Magala, C. Erten, R. M. Bell, M.-T. Claes, S. Yazici & A. Karabag (Eds.) *Hofstede matters* (161-189). New York, London: Routledge.
- Buzeta, C., De Keyser, F., Dens, N., & De Pelsmacker, P. (2024). Branded content and motivations for social media use as drivers of brand outcomes on social media: a cross-cultural study. *International Journal of Advertising*, 43(4), 637-671. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2023.2215079>
- Cahill, K.M. (2021). *Towards a philosophical anthropology of culture: Naturalism, relativism, and skepticism*. Routledge.
- Caleffi, P. M. (2015). The 'hashtag': A new word or a new rule? *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics*, 12(2), 46-69.
- Campbell, C., Plangger, K., Sands, S., & Kietzmann, J. (2021). Preparing for an era of deepfakes and AI-generated ads: A framework for understanding responses to manipulated advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 51(1), 22-38.
- Chandler, D. (2017). *Semiotics: The basics*. Routledge.
- Chen, Y., Wang, H., Rao Hill, S., & Li, B. (2024). Consumer attitudes toward AI-generated ads: Appeal types, self-efficacy and AI's social role. *Journal of Business Research*, 185, 114867. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114867>
- Danesi, M. (2016). *The semiotics of emoji: The rise of visual language in the age of the Internet*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Das, G., Wiener, H. J., & Kareklas, I. (2019). To emoji or not to emoji? Examining the influence of emoji on consumer reactions to advertising. *Journal of Business Research*, 96, 147-156. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.11.007>
- De Mooij, M. (2021). *Global marketing and advertising: Understanding cultural paradoxes* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- De Mooij, M., & Hofstede, G. (2010). The Hofstede model. *International Journal of Advertising*, 29(1), 85-110. <https://doi.org/10.2501/s026504870920104x>
- Di Battista, S., Pivetti, M., & Berti, C. (2018). Moral foundations, political orientation and religiosity in Italy. *The Open Psychology Journal*, 11(1), 46-58. <https://doi.org/10.2174/1874350101811010046>

- Ellis, D.G. (2021). Language and speech. Communication. In M. Burgoon & N. E. Doran (Eds.), *Communication Yearbook 6* (34-63). Routledge.
- Ergashev, I., & Farxodjonova, N. (2020). Integration of national culture in the process of globalization. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(2), 477-479. <https://doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.02.90>
- Farzin, M., Shababi, H., Shirchi Sasi, G., Sadeghi, M., & Makvandi, R. (2023). The determinants of eco-fashion purchase intention and willingness to pay. *Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC*, 27(3), 348-366. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SJME-07-2022-0158>
- Faulkner, S. L., Baldwin, J.R., Lindsley, S.L., & Hecht, M.L. (2006). Layers of meaning: an analysis of definitions of culture. In J. R. Baldwin, S. L. Faulkner, M. L. Hecht & S. L. Lindsley (Eds.), *Redefining culture: Perspectives across the disciplines* (27-52). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Fennis, B. M., & Stroebe, W. (2020). *The Psychology of Advertising*. Routledge.
- Gensler, S., Völckner, F., Liu-Thompkins, Y., & Wiertz, C. (2013). Managing brands in the social media environment. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 242-256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.004>
- Hamzah, Z. L., Abdul Wahab, H., & Waqas, M. (2021). Unveiling drivers and brand relationship implications of consumer engagement with social media brand posts. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 15(2), 336-358. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-05-2020-0113>
- Han, S.P., & Shavitt, S. (1994). Persuasion and culture: Advertising appeals in individualistic and collectivistic societies. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 30, 326-350. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jesp.1994.1016>
- Hills, R. C., & Atkins, P. W. (2013). Cultural identity and convergence on western attitudes and beliefs in the United Arab Emirates. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 13(2), 193-213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595813485380>
- Hofstede, G. (1980). Culture and organizations. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 10(4), 15-41.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations across Nations*. Sage publications.
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, & G. J., Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Holt, D. B. (2004). *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding*. Harvard business press.
- Holt, D. (2016). Branding in the age of social media. *Harvard Business Review*, 94(3), 40-50.
- House, R.J., Hanges, P.J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P.W., & Gupta, V. (Eds.). (2004). *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*. SAGE Publications.
- Iacoviello, V., Valsecchi, G., Berentm J., Borinca, I., & Falomir-Pichastor, J.M. (2021). Is traditional masculinity still valued? Men's perceptions of the masculinity norm as a function of the reference group. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 30(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10608265211018803>
- Ibrahim B., & Aljarah A. (2021). The era of Instagram expansion: Matching social media marketing activities and brand loyalty through customer relationship quality. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 29(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2021.1984279>
- Ilhamsyah, I., & Herlina, H. (2019). Tagline in advertisement digital era case study of #adaaqua advertising campaign. 6th Bandung Creative Movement International Conference in Creative Industries 2019, 483-487.
- Joshi, Y., Lim, W. M., Jagani, K., & Kumar, S. (2023). Social media influencer marketing: foundations, trends, and ways forward. *Electronic Commerce Research*, 25, 1199-1253. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10660-023-09719-z>
- Jurczyk, K., Jentsch, B., Sailer, J., & Schier, M. (2019). Female-breadwinner families in Germany: New gender roles? *Journal of Family Issues*, 40(13), 1731-1754. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X19843149>
- Kakadia, K. (2025). Meta statistics by the numbers: 2025 analysis & trends [online]. <https://sociallyin.com/meta-statistics/> (accessed 14 July 2025).
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
- Karkhanis, S. (2019). The influence of culture on consumer behavior. *Advance and Innovative Research*, 31(1), 31-33.
- Kaynak, E., & Herbig, P. (2014). *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Marketing*. Routledge.
- Keith, K. D. (Ed.). (2019). *Cross-cultural psychology: Contemporary themes and perspectives* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Khan, I., Dongping, H., & Wahab, A. (2016). Does culture matter in effectiveness of social media marketing strategy? An investigation of brand fan pages. *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, 68(6), 694-715. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJIM-03-2016-0035>
- Khan, I. (2022). Do brands' social media marketing activities matter? A moderation analysis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 64, 102794.

- Kim, D. Y., & Kim, H. Y. (2023). Social media influencers as human brands: an interactive marketing perspective. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 17(1), 94-109.
- Kohli, C., Suri, R., & Kapoor, A. (2015). Will social media kill branding? *Business Horizons*, 58(1), 35-44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.08.004>
- Kovács (2024). *Nyelvi kommunikáció a marketingben*. Marketingnyelvészet. Budapest: Akadémiai.
- Landgrebe, J. (2024). The rise of digital influencer marketing. *HERMES-Journal of Language and Communication in Business*, 64, 75-102. <https://doi.org/10.7146/hjlecb.vi64.143879>
- Laor, T. (2022). My social network: Group differences in frequency of use, active use, and interactive use on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. *Technology in Society*, 68, 101922. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2022.101922>
- Laroche, M., Habibi, M. R., Richard, M. O., & Sankaranarayanan, R. (2012). The effects of social media based brand communities on brand community markers, value creation practices, brand trust and brand loyalty. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1755-1767. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.04.016>
- Latura, A., & Weeks, A. C. (2023). Corporate board quotas and gender equality policies in the workplace. *American Journal of Political Science*, 67(3), 606-622.
- Leonardi, V. (2022). Communication challenges and transformations in the Digital Era: emoji language and emoji translation. *Language and Semiotic Studies*, 8(3), 22-44. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lass-2022-2003>
- Leong, C. M., Loi, A. M. W., & Woon, S. (2021). The influence of social media eWOM information on purchase intention. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, 10(2), 145. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-021-00132-9>
- Li, J. (2024). The pictorial turn and visual rhetoric: Analyzing image agency and persuasion in contemporary media. *Advances in Humanities Research*, 9, 31-35. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7080/9/2024105>
- Li, L. (2024). The translation of Chinese and Western business advertising slogans under Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. *Region - Educational Research and Reviews*, 6(7), 25-29. <https://doi.org/10.32629/rerr.v6i7.2301>
- Li, F., Larimo, J., & Leonidou, L. C. (2023). Social media in marketing research: Theoretical bases, methodological aspects, and thematic focus. *Psychology & Marketing*, 40(1), 124-145. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21746>
- Li, Y., & Xie, Y. (2020). Is a picture worth a thousand words? An empirical study of image content and social media engagement. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 57(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243719881113>
- Liadeli, G., Sotgiu, F., & Verlegh, P. W. (2023). A meta-analysis of the effects of brands' owned social media on social media engagement and sales. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(3), 406-427.
- Mahfouz, I. (2020). The linguistic characteristics and functions of hashtags: # Is it a new language? *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on CALL*, 6, 84-101. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/call6.6>
- McSweeney, B. (2002). Hofstede's model of national cultural differences and their consequences: a triumph of faith - a failure of analysis. *Human Relations*, 55(1), 89-118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726702551004>
- McSweeney, B. (2024). Hofstede's imagined cultures. In S. J. Magala, C. Erten, R. M. Bell, M.-T. Claes, S. Yazici & A. Karabag (Eds.), *Hofstede Matters* (135-160). Routledge.
- Meer, D., & Pick, I. (2019). *Einführung in die Angewandte Linguistik*. Metzler.
- Miller, D. (2020). *Car Cultures*. Routledge.
- Minkov, M. (2012). *Cross-Cultural Analysis: The Science and Art of Comparing the World's Modern Societies and Their Cultures*. SAGE publications.
- Minkov, M. (2024). Evolution of the Minkov-Hofstede model: Parallels between objective and subjective culture. In S. J. Magala, C. Erten, R. M. Bell, M.-T. Claes, S. Yazici & A. Karabag (Eds.), *Hofstede Matters* (119-134). Routledge.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (1994). *Picture Theory*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Moriarty, S., Mitchell, N., & Wells, W. (2015). *Advertising and IMC: principles and practice* (3rd ed.). Pearson Australia.
- Moriuchi, E. (2021). *Cross-Cultural Social Media Marketing: Bridging Across Cultural Differences*. Emerald.
- Nakata, C., & Izberk-Bilgin, E. (2009). Culture theories in global marketing: A literature-based assessment. In Nakata, C. (Ed.), *Beyond Hofstede* (61-77). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Neuliep, J.W. (2020). *Intercultural communication: A contextual approach* (8th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Notermans, T., & Piattoni, S. (Eds.). (2022). *Italy and Germany, Incompatible Varieties of Europe?* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Oberlo (2024). Facebook age demographics [online]. <https://www.oberlo.com/statistics/facebook-age-demographics> (accessed 14 July 2025).
- O'Connor, C., & Joffe, H. (2020). Inter-coder reliability in qualitative research: debates and practical guidelines. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919899220>
- Osei-Frimpong, K., McLean, G., Islam, N., & Otoo, B. A. (2022). What drives me there? The interplay of socio-psychological gratification and consumer values in social media brand engagement. *Journal of Business Research*, 146, 288-307.

- Ostuni, A., Sacco, G., Sacco, P., & Zizza, A. (2022). Italian society and gender role stereotypes. How stereotypical beliefs concerning males and females are still present in Italian people at the beginning of the third millennium. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, 18(16), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2022.v18n16p1>
- Parment, A. (2014). *Auto Brand*. Kogan Page.
- Peña-García, N., Gil-Saura, I., Rodríguez-Orejuela, A., & Siqueira-Junior, J. R. (2020). Purchase intention and purchase behavior online: A cross-cultural approach. *Heliyon*, 6(6), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e04284>
- Phan, V. L., & Wiesinger, S. (2022). The usage of emoji in tourism-related Instagram posts: Suggestions from a marketing perspective. In J.L. Steinmetz, B. Ferrer-Rosell & D. Massimo (Eds.), *Information and communication technologies in tourism 2022* (134-145). Springer.
- Pitko, O. (2021). Research of integrated marketing communications in the automotive market. In A. Manakov & A. Edigarian (Eds.), *International Scientific Siberian Transport Forum Vol 2*. (698-706). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-91437-4_72
- Pokrop, J. (2023). Facebook & Instagram users in Germany [online]. <https://napoleoncat.com/blog/facebook-instagram-users-in-germany/> (accessed 10 March 2025).
- Potnis, D., & Tahamtan, I. (2021). Hashtags for gatekeeping of information on social media. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 72(10), 1234-1246. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24467>
- Puchner, M. (2023). *Culture: The surprising connections and influences between civilisations. 'Genius' - William Dalrymple*. Bonnier Books UK.
- Rehman, S. U., Gulzar, R., & Aslam, W. (2022). Developing the integrated marketing communication (IMC) through social media (SM): the modern marketing communication approach. *Sage Open*, 12(2), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221099936>
- Ritzer, G. (2010). *Globalization: A Basic Text*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Rodrigues, D., Prada, M., Gaspar, R., Garrido, M. V., & Lopes, D. (2017). Lisbon emoji and emoticon database (LEED): Norms for emoji and emoticons in seven evaluative dimensions. *Behavior Research Methods*, 50(1), 392-405. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-017-0878-6>
- Saleem, S. & Larimo, J. (2016). Hofstede cultural framework and advertising research: An assessment of the literature. In G. Christodoulides, A. Stathopoulou, M. Eisend (Eds.), *Advances in Advertising Research Bridging the Gap between Advertising Academia and Practice Vol. 7* (247-263). Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler.
- Scarcelli, C. O. S. I. M. O., & Farci, M. (2024). Negotiating gender in the digital age: Young people and the representation of femininity and masculinity on social media. *Italian Sociological Review*, 14(1), 93-113. <https://doi.org/10.13136/isr.v14i1.645>
- Schiffinger, M. (2024). Putting critique into context: An appraisal of four methodological objections to Hofstede. In S. J. Magala, C. Erten, R. M. Bell, M.-T. Claes, S. Yazici & A. Karabag (Eds.), *Hofstede Matters* (190-206). Routledge.
- Schroeder, J. E., & Salzer-Mörling, M. (Eds.). (2006). *Brand Culture*. Routledge.
- Schroeder, J. E. (2009). The cultural codes of branding. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 123-126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593108100067>
- Schühly, A. M. (2022). *Cultural Influences on the Process of Strategic Management*. International Publishing.
- Shastri, A. (2025). Comprehensive marketing mix of Volkswagen - All 4Ps included [online]. <https://iide.co/case-studies/marketing-mix-of-volkswagen/> (accessed 14 July 2025).
- Shi, X., & Wan, W. (2022). A cross-cultural genre Analysis of firm-generated advertisements on Twitter and Sina Weibo. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 36(1), 71-104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10506519211044186>
- Shin, J., Chae, H., & Ko, E. (2018). The power of e-WOM using the hashtag: focusing on SNS advertising of SPA brands. *International Journal of Advertising*, 37(1), 71-85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1401519>
- Signorini, P., Wiesemes, R., & Murphy, R. (2009). Developing alternative frameworks for exploring intercultural learning: a critique of Hofstede's cultural difference model. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 14(3), 253-264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510902898825>
- Singh, S., & Sonnenburg, S. (2012). Brand performances in social media. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(4), 189-197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.04>
- Sohaib, M., & Han, H. (2023). Building value co-creation with social media marketing, brand trust, and brand loyalty. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 74, 103442. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103442>
- Søndergaard, M. (2024). Hofstede's Consequences, 1980-2022. In S. J. Magala, C. Erten, R. M. Bell, M.-T. Claes, S. Yazici & A. Karabag (Eds.), *Hofstede Matters* (209-246). Routledge.
- Sotgiu, I. (2016). Conceptions of happiness and unhappiness among Italian psychology undergraduates. *PLOS ONE*, 11(12), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0167745>
- Spencer-Oatey, H. (2000). *Culturally Speaking: Managing Rapport through Talk across Cultures*. Continuum.
- Spillman, L. (2020). *What is Cultural Sociology?* John Wiley & Sons.

- Statista. (2025a). Facebook users in Germany by age and gender [online]. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1029645/facebook-users-germany-age-gender/> (accessed 25 March 2025).
- Statista. (2025b). Share of Facebook users by age in Italy [online]. https://www.statista.com/statistics/725565/share-of-facebook-users-by-age-in-italy/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed 25 March 2025).
- Ta'amneh, I. M., & Al-Ghazo, A. (2021). The importance of using hashtags on raising awareness about social issues. *International Journal of Learning and Development*, 11(4), 10-24. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v11i4.19139>
- The Culture Factor (2023). Country comparison tool [online]. <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool> (accessed 25 March 2025).
- Tomalin, B. (2021). Germany - Culture Smart! Kuperard.
- Unnava, V., & Aravindakshan, A. (2021). How does consumer engagement evolve when brands post across multiple social media? *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 49(5), 864-881.
- Venkateswaran, R.T., & Ojha, A.K. (2019). Abandon Hofstede-based research? Not yet! A perspective from the philosophy of the social sciences. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 25(3), 413-434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602381.2019.1584487>
- Voorveld, H. A. (2019). Brand communication in social media: A research agenda. *Journal of advertising*, 48(1), 14-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2019.1588808>
- Vrontis, D., Makrides, A., Christofi, M., & Thrassou, A. (2021). Social media influencer marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45(4), 617-644. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12647>
- Zappavigna, M. (2018). *Searchable talk: Hashtags and social media metadiscourse*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Zhang-Wu, Q. (2023). Asian students in American higher education: negotiating multilingual identities in the era of super-diversity and nationalism. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 23(3), 253-267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2023.2175846>

Appendix: Example references

- Example 1: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenDE/posts/pfbid02jiWsA3vvsMVCzmre9s2bLj2nirummV3fk5pfHkkw6SjQesypy1wLhj8h6nWnWopcl>
- Example 2: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenIT/photos/a.241190629236569/5178094832212766/>
- Example 3: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenIT/videos/4995649053823632/>
- Example 4: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenMagyarorszag/photos/a.393280880690620/4974132929272036/>
- Example 5: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenDE/photos/5484759071550799>
- Example 6: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenDE/photos/5455673871125986>
- Example 7: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenIT/photos/a.241190629236569/4837070332981886/>
- Example 8: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenDE/videos/726880968732650/>
- Example 9: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenIT/videos/287133470266716>
- Example 10: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenDE/posts/pfbid0ZTYMQqxw6FtX7cB8U9hufShU4D3CsanfETvJMXcxgJG2q9bY36SbVShJwADRCCl>
- Example 11: <https://fb.watch/id316x7WRy/>
- Example 12: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenIT/photos/a.241190629236569/5178022012220048/>