



ADAPT FOR AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

# CULTURE & MARKETING

# Overview

When you first think of international expansion, you probably think of getting your translations and marketing sorted first. But what if we told you it wasn't as clear-cut as that? And that culture plays a much more significant role in marketing success than most people like to think.

To find out more, let's explore culture in more detail and how you can use cultural understanding to better your marketing campaigns.

# What is culture?



We've all heard of culture, but what does it mean?

**"Culture** is an umbrella term that encompasses the social behavior, institutions, and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups. Culture is often originated from or attributed to a specific region or location."

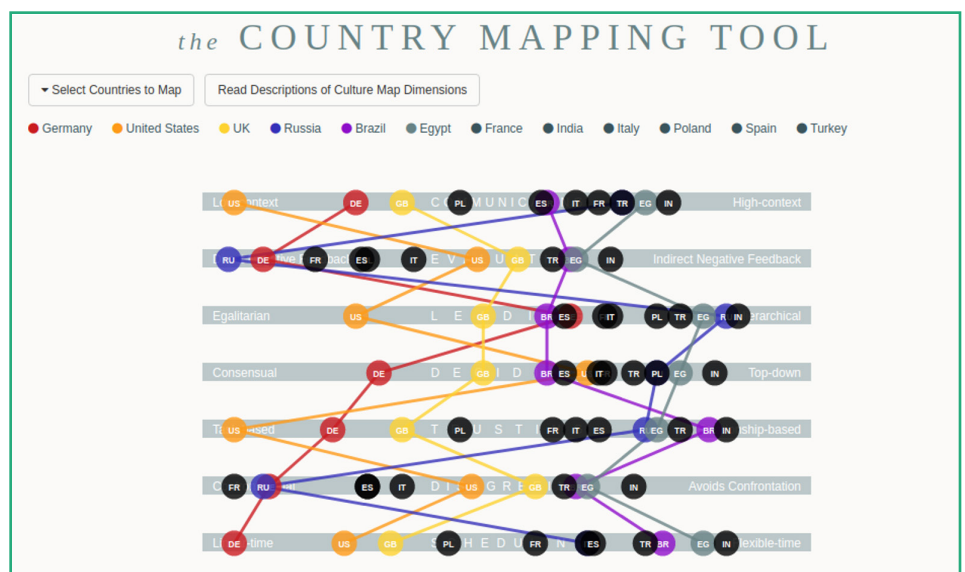
As marketing is all about understanding how people think and what motivates them, it's clear how culture can play a part in influencing how someone perceives your brand and your products. This is why it's vital to research culture and not just translate from one language to another when launching your international campaigns.



# The Culture Map

Those from the language industry have probably heard of Erin Meyer's book *The Culture Map*. It looks at how people from different countries tend to behave, giving you the understanding to interact with people on a level they really understand.

Look at the first line of this picture, where Erin has mapped communication styles. People from some countries tend to prefer low-context communication, and others high-context. If you're marketing a product to the US, feel free to go out with low-context information, but if you're targeting India, you need to reword those messages to make them more high-context to succeed.



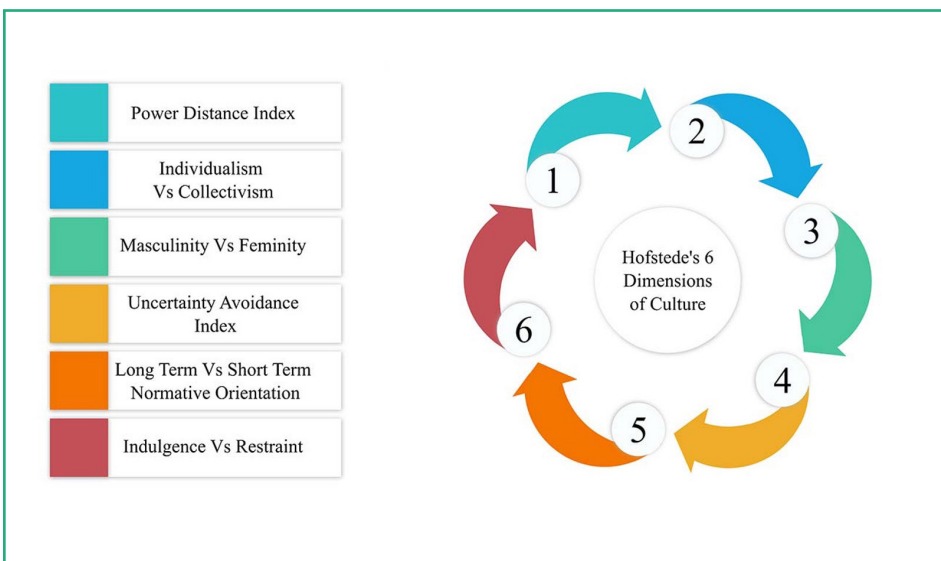
Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map*





# Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede is a sociologist who developed six cultural dimensions to better understand how people behave and where differences come from. Countries are given six scores based on each dimension of culture, which helps people better understand these particular countries' cultures and behavioural patterns.



## Power Distance

This measures if people accept that power is distributed unequally or not. In real-life terms, this looks at if people accept hierarchies. People from low-power index countries will have managers who ask for input from their team, for example, versus high-power index country managers who are very hierarchical.

## Collectivism vs. Individualism

This measures if people come from a more individualistic “I” society or a collective “We” society. Collectivists emphasize relationships and loyalty, while individualistic societies care more about themselves and their immediate family.

## Masculinity vs. Femininity

Masculine societies value courage, strength, and assertiveness, while feminine societies see gender roles as more important. This is important to know because countries with a low femininity score, for example, have more women in leadership positions. It helps you understand how business in different countries works and what motivates people.

## Uncertainty Avoidance Index

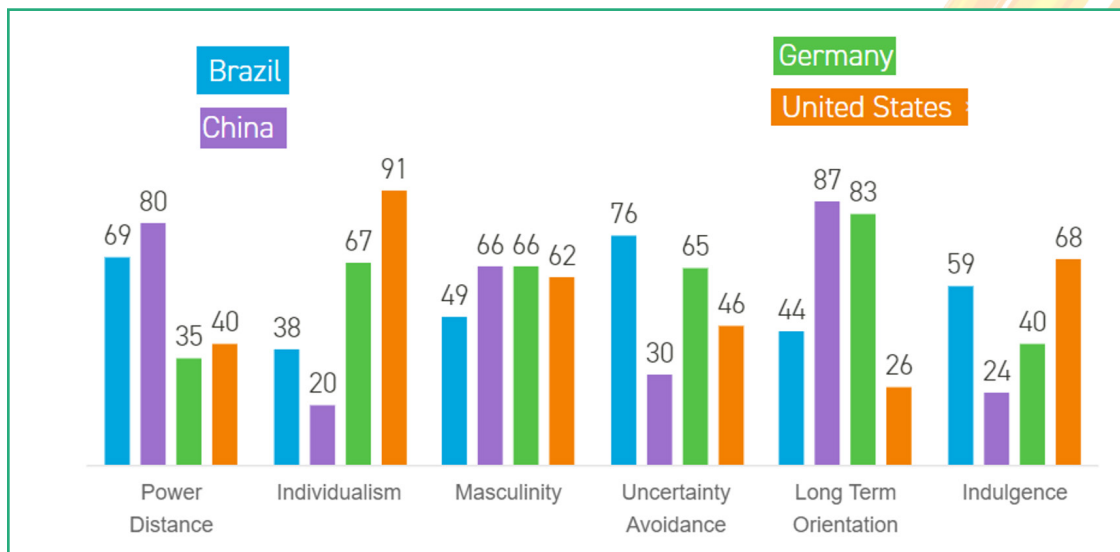
This one is self-explanatory, but a high uncertainty score means people have a low tolerance for risk-taking. If you’re selling a high-risk product, like investments, it’s not as likely to be successful in countries with low-risk tolerance.

## Short-term vs. Long-term Orientation

Long-term orientation means that people favour long-term success over the here and now vs. the short term, which means people prefer the present instead of looking ahead. This means that people are more likely to care about tradition and social norms if they come from a short-term-oriented country, which impacts how they buy and interact with marketing messages.

## Restraint and Indulgence

Finally, we have restraint and indulgence scores. High indulgence means that people are more likely to spend more money on luxuries, for example, than people who prefer to base their needs on social norms.





# What this means in real life

Although we've given you a few examples above, we can take a deeper dive into what this means in real life, as culture has a massive impact on things like international communication, international negotiations, international management, and international marketing.

For international communication, it's essential to remember that what you think is polite in your country might be rude somewhere else, and vice versa. And this doesn't just include the words you use; it includes non-verbal communication and customs like gift giving and dining. Take business cards as an example. In Europe, if we're at a conference, it's acceptable to write notes on someone's business card, so you know what interests them when you get home. However, if you did this in Japan, it would be highly offensive and likened to vandalism.

International negotiation is also important because we're all here to do business and make sales at the end of the day. But how people negotiate varies from one country to another. In Europe, we shake hands when we've made a deal and negotiations are ending, but in the Middle East, this same gesture means that negotiations are just beginning. In America, business people sign contracts straight away, while Chinese business people want to spend time together having dinner and socializing first.

In international management, you must understand your team's communication styles because cultural differences can cause workplace tensions and disagreements.



Take feedback style as an example. In the Czech Republic, it's normal to be direct and say it as it is, whereas, in Ireland, this would be considered rude. However, the Irish way of sugar-coating things would be seen as two-faced in the Czech Republic.

And finally, for international marketing, you need to understand how people think to market efficiently. For example, Slavs like getting good deals, and UK consumers are patriotic and love buying British. Using mobile phones as an example, in China, you'd sell their collective benefits, while in America, you'd market how they benefit individuals.

## There's more to language than just words

When dealing with language, you need to understand that it's more than just words to people. As sociologist Basil Bernstein claimed, language is a code and unlocks opportunities (e.g., middle-class speech patterns unlocking middle-class opportunities).

Language is also used to show group membership and express your identity. This can be seen with Kurds in Northern Iraq who speak Kurdish, or the Irish language act in Northern Ireland. Using Northern Ireland as an example, the Northern Irish Language Act has caused tensions between communities after becoming politicized. People who identify as British (unionist) feel that the Irish language undermines the union. In contrast, people who identify as Irish (nationalist) feel it's their right to speak Irish on the island of Ireland.

This shows just how important languages are and that cultural understanding is necessary – it's not just a case of translation, and off you go. In today's digital world, things can go viral extremely fast, so if you have a bad campaign, people will know about it, and it can damage your brand. The food delivery company 'Just Eat' even had issues when they launched orange branding in Northern Ireland because it's a divisive colour (Orange vs. Green). Hence, they had to backtrack and use red branding up North.



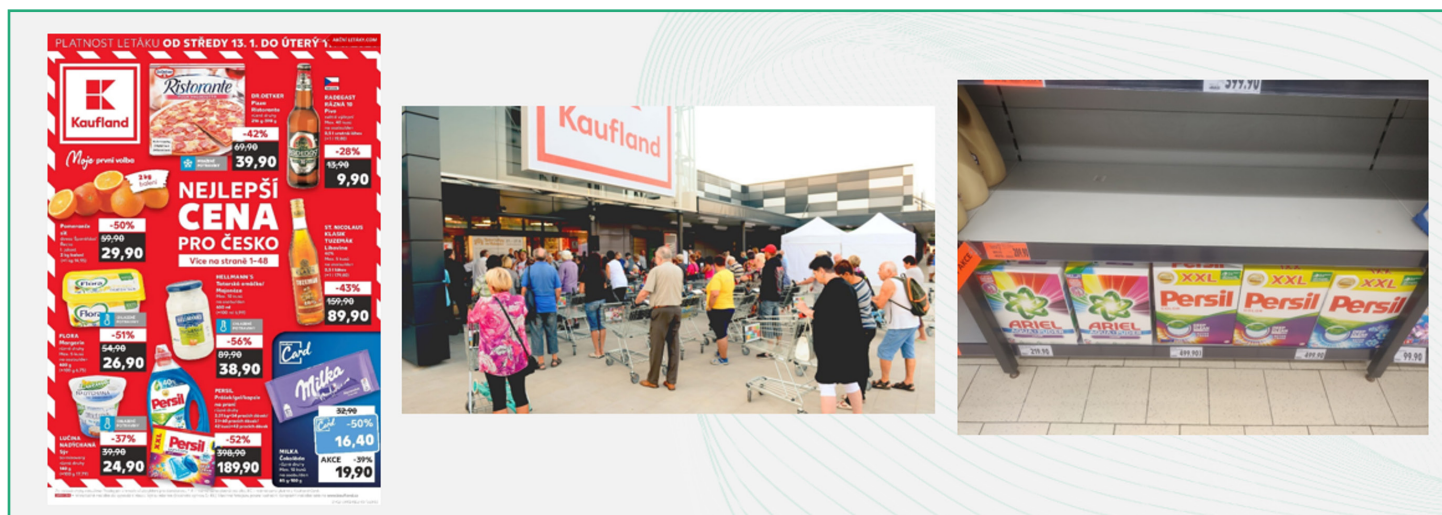
# Culture and buyer behaviour

You can also use cultural insights to understand buyer behaviour and the buyer's journey. Take a look at the Czech Republic as an example and how their communist past has shaped today's buyer behaviour.

- During communism, goods were hard to come by. Czechs are now very resourceful and don't throw things away lightly.
- Due to political censorship and the fact that neighbors could (and did) report each other, trust is a big issue.
- "Jsi normální?" (are you normal) is quite a common phrase used by older people and shows that people prefer to follow social norms.
- People like to look successful and will go all out on their hobbies and them very seriously.
- As Western European brands weren't allowed during communist times, Czechs see German/British/American/French brands as better quality than Slavic brands.

**And you can see this in action by looking at the buyer's journey.**

Here you have a magazine from one of the leading supermarkets, Kaufland. Each week people get this delivered to their door, so they know what will be on sale next week. People will study this (and the ones from other local stores too) and then buy their products wherever is the cheapest. People will go as far as to queue outside the shop to ensure they get their deals. You can see this in practice with people only buying the washing powder on sale.



You can also see how this sale mentality impacts keyword research. There are over 218,000 keywords that include the word cheap, vs. 36,000 for the word quality.

All keywords: 218,604 Total volume: 1,162,690 Average KD: 21%									
Keyword	Intent	Volume	Trend	KD %	CPC (U...	Com.	SF	Results	
levné iphoney >>	C	5,400		27	0.53	1.00	+4	61	
levné pneu >>	C	4,400		48	0.47				
iphone levné >>	C	3,600		29	0.34				
levné pneu >>	C	3,600		48	0.54				
levné iphoney >>	C	3,600		26	0.40				
levné povlečení >>	I T	3,600		34	0.65				
levné ubytování praha >>	C	3,600		39	0.39				
komody levné >>	C	2,900		22	0.23				
levné boty >>	C	2,900		33	0.22				
levné notebooky >>	C	2,900		40	0.35				
levné pc >>	C	2,900		35	0.35				
levné potraviny >>	C	2,900		22	0.26				
levné skříně >>	C	2,900		34	0.67				
levné telefony >>	C	2,900		34	0.17				
levný nábytek >>	C	2,900		39	0.43				

All keywords: 36,946 Total volume: 83,460 Average KD: 23%									
Keyword	Intent	Volume	Trend	KD %	CPC (U...	Com.	SF	Results	
zbraně kvalitně >>	I T	2,900		28	0.00	0.01	+2		
kvalitní rum >>	C	1,600		35	0.16	1.00	+5		
kvalitní fotky >>	N	1,000		24	0.21	0.97	+5		
kvalitní matrace >>	C	880		48	0.79	1.00	+5		
kvalitní povlečení >>	C	880		40	0.53	1.00	+5		
kvalitní překladač >>	I	880		29	0.11	0.07	+3		
kvalitní kávovar >>	I	720		41	0.85	1.00	+6		
zbraně kvalitně >>	N T	720		29	0.00	0.00	+4		
kvalitní granule pro psy >>	I	590		24	0.61	1.00	+2		
kvalitní postele >>	C	590		24	0.57	1.00	+7		
kvalitní sedací soupravy >>	C	590		25	0.49	1.00	+6		
kvalitní české povlečení >>	C	480		29	0.43	1.00	+5		
kvalitní žehlička na vlasy >>	C	480		35	0.25	1.00	+6		



# Diversity & Inclusion



When we look at cultural understanding, we also need to look at Diversity & Inclusion. Marketers often have unconscious biases, e.g., thinking that a particular country might be too poor to buy certain goods when it's simply untrue, so you must research this kind of thing rather than going off your own hunch.

Societies are also more diverse than ever, and people want to feel seen, so it's crucial to represent disabled people, LGBT+ communities, and ethnic minorities in your campaigns. But be careful – one country's makeup isn't the same as another, so be cautious to research what it's like in the country you're working on. An example could be featuring an African American family in your American ad but using a Vietnamese family in your Czech ad as that better reflects the country's demographics.

When it comes to communication, you also can't just assume that people in the US are low-context communicators, for example. Autistic people love high-context communication, even if they're American, so if you're doing a campaign to help get more autistic people into work, you have to communicate in a way suitable for them.



# Real-life Examples

Here you can see a bedding company that didn't do their research. Pillows are much bigger in the Czech Republic compared to the UK, and most people use two single duvets instead of a double. People aren't going to throw away their pillows and buy new ones just because they like the duvet cover; therefore, their products always end up severely reduced because no one buys them.





This company wanted to write content about pests and decided to translate their English content, which focused on helping deal with urban foxes. However, foxes aren't urban yet in Central and Eastern Europe, so people aren't searching for how to stop foxes from entering their gardens. They are, however, looking for tips on preventing moles from digging up their lovely fresh grass, so changing the content strategy would have worked much better here.



Another example is a lawnmower company that wanted to market ride-on lawnmowers to the average Czech. They didn't realise that the average Czech lives in high-rise flats and doesn't need a lawnmower. This meant that they put loads of money and resources into something that gave them no returns.





Pringles also got themselves in hot water because they decided to market smokey bacon-flavoured pringles for Ramadan. What they thought was an excellent way to celebrate with their Muslim customers turned out to be offensive, as Muslims can't eat pork.



Let's finish with something a bit more optimistic. Here you can see how Pixar did a fantastic job adapting their films for international audiences, so they relate to everyone watching.





# Final thoughts...

As you can see, there's so much more to international success than just translating some English ads. So, if you're a marketing department that deals with everything centrally, don't hesitate to reach out for help. You can't be expected to know every market, but we can!



## About the writer

Sarah Presch is Argos Multilingual's Director of International SEO and an international marketing fanatic.

## About Argos Multilingual

Argos Multilingual is a full-service agency providing international and multilingual SEO, PPC, and social media services to some of the world's biggest brands. If you're inspired by what you've read today, feel free to reach out and see what we can do for you.

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