

**A qualitative analysis of differences between masculine and feminine cultures in  
patterns of persuasion knowledge**

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## **A qualitative analysis of differences between masculine and feminine cultures in patterns of persuasion knowledge**

In and of itself, research on persuasion and advertising is nothing new. This is also true for the notion that an advertising campaign should be tailored to its target audience and the context in which the promoted product or service is to be sold, which has been common knowledge in marketing for years. In recent decades, the processes of globalization and modernization have become increasingly clear in societies. Considering companies have been expanding their operations into new markets, this has also been true for the global economy.

Following from this, it could be argued that research pertaining to culture and the effects of cultural differences have become increasingly relevant has become increasingly relevant for the field of persuasion research. However, this does not mean that all relevant aspects of culture relating to persuasion and marketing have been researched sufficiently. There are still many unanswered questions about what makes an advertisement effective in one culture, but ineffective in another.

Although there has been previous research on the effect of cultural differences on the evaluation of persuasion (Rodrigues et al., 2018), this research has not been as thorough as it could be. This thesis attempt to address this by combining two important models. For persuasion, this includes the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994). For culture, this includes the 6-dimension model by Hofstede (1984, 2011). Using these models, differences and similarities in patterns of persuasion knowledge were analyzed. By doing so, this thesis attempts to achieve an understanding of how culture relates to persuasion knowledge. Furthermore, this thesis aims to explore in what manner the aforementioned research gap regarding persuasion knowledge and culture could be addressed in future research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **The Persuasion Knowledge Model**

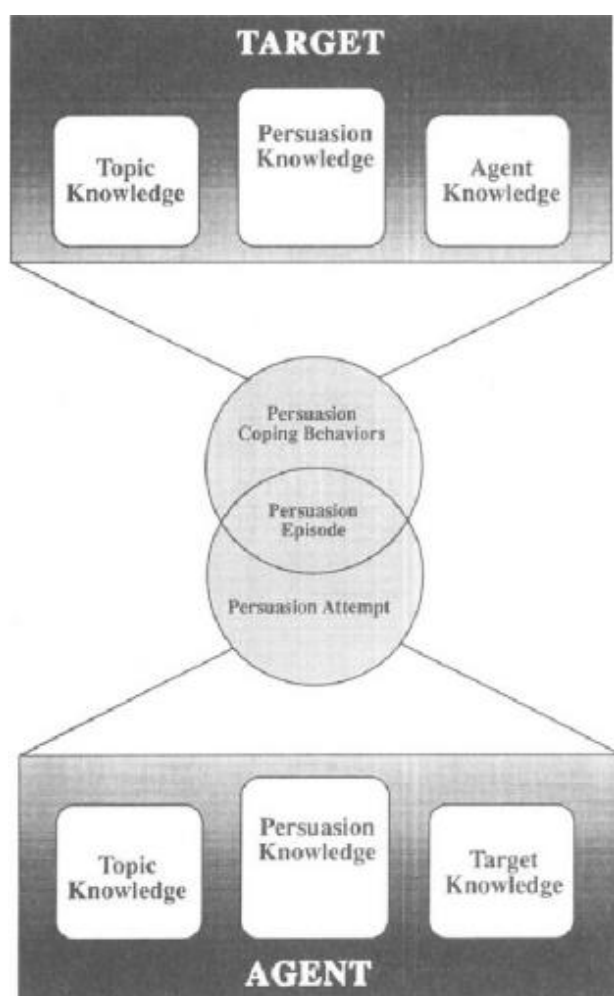
In order to understand how people think of and respond to persuasion attempts, the persuasion knowledge model (Figure 1) was created (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The PKM identifies two actors in persuasion. These actors are the persuasion target, e.g., the consumer, and the persuasion agent, e.g. a marketer. In this thesis, the focus will be on the persuasion target. A persuasion target has three primary sets of knowledge: topic knowledge, agent knowledge, and persuasion knowledge. Topic knowledge includes beliefs about the topic of the message, e.g., a specific product or service. Agent knowledge includes the beliefs about traits, competencies, and goals of the persuasion agent, e.g. an advertiser (Friestad & Wright,

1994). Persuasion knowledge (PK), which is the most relevant set of knowledge, consists of interrelated sets of beliefs and theories about persuasion, which can be divided into seven specific sets of beliefs. The most relevant of these sets of beliefs are beliefs about marketer's persuasion goals, beliefs about marketer's tactics, beliefs about the effectiveness of marketer's tactics, beliefs about the appropriateness of marketer's tactics, and beliefs about psychological mediators. These sets of beliefs are explained in Table 1.

These different types of knowledge together influence the target's persuasion coping behaviors, i.e. the target's response to a persuasion attempt. The persuasion attempt is defined as the target's perception of an agent's strategic behavior designed to influence the target. The persuasion episode is described from the target's perspective as the directly observable behavior of the agent (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

### Figure 1

*The Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994)*



**Table 1**

*Sets of beliefs of PK (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Campbell & Kirmani, 2008; Cotte, Coulter & Moore, 2005)*

Set of beliefs	Description	Examples
Beliefs about marketer's persuasion goals	Beliefs about the possible end goals that marketers can pursue. This goes beyond directly influencing the attitude or purchase intentions about the product or service that is being marketed.	Managing reputation, influencing beliefs about traits of marketer (wanting to be seen as cooperative), influencing beliefs about product or service ('This product is useful'), managing long-term consumer-marketer relationship, managing consumer's self-image.
Beliefs about marketer's tactics	Beliefs about what actions by the persuasion agent, or aspects of an advertisement, are perceived as tactics, as well as what goals those actions have. Those goals primarily consist of psychological mediators those actions are aimed at influencing, directly or indirectly.	Use of family values, music, claiming scarcity, guilt appeals, fear appeals, use of celebrity endorsements.
Beliefs about effectiveness of tactics	Beliefs about how effectively certain tactics can influence psychological mediators. These beliefs can be divided into unconditional (independent of context) and conditional (dependent on context) beliefs.	Unconditional belief about effectiveness: 'use of family values is a strong tactic.'

Set of beliefs	Description	Examples
Beliefs about appropriateness of tactics	Beliefs about whether the use of those tactics is 'fair' or not. These beliefs can be divided into unconditional (independent of context) and conditional (dependent on context) beliefs.	Conditional belief about appropriateness: 'use of fear appeal is not okay when the advertisement is aimed at children.'
Beliefs about psychological mediators	Beliefs about what important psychological activities could be influenced in a persuasion attempt.	attention, attitude, emotion, interest.
Beliefs about own coping goals	Beliefs about the goals a target can have in order to deal with the persuasion attempt and to form a valid attitude towards the discussed product, service, or topic.	managing their long-term relationship with the marketer, managing their image of the marketer, managing their self-image, managing other people's impressions of them, and upgrading their understanding of persuasion.
Beliefs about own coping tactics	Beliefs about ways in which the target can deal with a persuasion attempt, how to use those tactics and what goal they serve; to what extent they can control psychological mediators.	ignoring the agent, asking for more information, and diverting their attention.

Beliefs about the marketer's persuasion goals have been shown to play a role in the activation of a person's persuasion knowledge. If a persuasion target considers an agent to have a motive for persuasion or a clear persuasion goal, they will be much more likely to use

their persuasion knowledge. If the consumer does not see the potential for persuasion, they will be more likely to not use their persuasion knowledge (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; 2008).

Beliefs about tactics are also linked to the activation of PK. When consumers recognize an action or aspect of an advertisement to be a marketing tactic, they are more likely to activate their PK. Tactics that have been proven to raise suspicion about motives, and thus recognition of a persuasion attempt, include flattery (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000), cause-related marketing (Szykman, Bloom & Blazing, 2004), use of rhetorical questions (Ahluwalia & Burnkrant, 2004), comparing two brands, for example by comparing price points or advertisements (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Barone, Manning & Miniard, 2004; Jain & Posavac, 2004), and advocacy advertising (Menon & Kahn, 2003).

### **Culture and Persuasion**

To understand the link between culture and persuasion knowledge, it is crucial to first understand what culture is. Culture can be defined as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or society from those of another.” (Hofstede, 2011, p.3). Culture consists of thinking patterns that people from a certain group or society transfer to other people in their group or society. That transfer of thinking patterns can be between friends, from parents to children and between leaders and followers, and so on. Hofstede (1984) also notes about culture that:

“Culture is reflected in the meanings people attach to various aspects of life; their way of looking at the world and their role in it; in their values, that is, in what they consider as "good" and as "evil"; in their collective beliefs, what they consider as "true" and as "false"; in their artistic expressions, what they consider as "beautiful" and as "ugly".” (pp. 82)

Since culture refers to the manner in which people view life and the values they have, it is omnipresent in society. Culture can be found in the way institutions are set up, in the way people from the same culture interact with each other, and how they interact with outsiders. As is also clear from the description of culture, the thinking patterns that make up culture are transferred from person to person. This means that people can learn what values and thinking patterns belong to a culture.

This is in line with what is known about the development of PK. An individual’s persuasion knowledge is a product of their own experience, and what they have learned from those in their environment (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Kirmani & Campbell, 2004). This is especially clear in the part of persuasion knowledge which Friestad and Wright (1994) call ‘folk knowledge’, which they describe as basic assumptions that are

widespread within a certain culture. This could mean that the specific beliefs that make up persuasion knowledge, such as beliefs about effectiveness and appropriateness of tactics, can differ fundamentally from culture to culture. These differences in thinking patterns have also been shown to influence the way people evaluate advertisements and other persuasive messages.

In a study on persuasion and culture, it was found that a marketing strategy congruent to a country's culture in a smoking cessation game was more effective at achieving participants' identification with the main character of the game than an incongruent marketing strategy. Furthermore, it was found that people from an individualistic or collectivistic culture responded more positively to the game version that was congruent with their cultural background (Khaled et al., 2018). In a quantitative study by Han and Shavitt (1994), it was found that persuasive messages showing individualistic messages are more persuasive in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures. However, it has also been found before that a culturally incongruent persuasive message can be more effective than a culturally congruent persuasive message (Aaker & Williams, 1998). It has been suggested that finding could be due to an incongruent persuasive message being considered innovative and surprising (Rodrigues, Blondé & Girandola, 2018).

### **Comparing cultures**

Hofstede (1984) introduced cultural dimensions as a way of explaining culture and cultural differences, which the aforementioned studies on persuasion and culture have used as a foundation for research on this topic (Khaled et al., 2018; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Aaker & Williams, 1998; Rodrigues, Blondé & Girandola, 2018). In this thesis, these dimensions are also used to conceptualize cultural differences. The dimensions all represent a collection of values and preferences that distinguish countries from each other. Right now, there are six cultural dimensions. Each of these dimensions is measured on a scale from 0 to 100: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, long-term vs short-term orientation, indulgence vs restraint, and masculinity-femininity (Hofstede, 2011).

Power distance concerns the way in which people think about inequality. In a culture with low power distance, there is a lower level of power inequalities, and people strive for a more equal distribution of power. In a culture with a high score on this dimension, power inequality is more apparent and accepted (Hofstede, 2011).

Uncertainty avoidance concerns the extent to which people from a culture are comfortable with ambiguous and unstructured situations. In a culture that scores high on uncertainty avoidance, people tend to be uncomfortable with ambiguity and tend to have more

rigid beliefs about what appropriate behavior is. In a culture that scores low on this dimension, people tend to be more comfortable with ambiguity and unstructured situations (Hofstede, 2011).

Individualism concerns the importance of one's social group, e.g. (extended) family and friends, and living in harmony with others belonging to this group. In this dimension, you have individualism on the one side and collectivism on the other side. In an individualistic culture, people are expected to look after themselves and their immediate relatives, resulting in loose relationships. In a collectivistic society, there is a pronounced focus on belonging to the in-group, usually meaning extended family or clans, which results in tight-knit communities (Hofstede 2011).

Long-term vs short-term orientation concerns how people view links with the past while dealing with the present and the future. In a long-term-oriented culture, people are more focused on the future, and traditions are adaptable. In a short-term-oriented culture, people are more focused on the past and present, this means they are more emotional in how they approach problems, and traditions are not adaptable (Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede Insights, n.d.).

Indulgence vs restraint concerns the extent to which people try to control their impulses and desires. In a culture that scores high on this dimension, people give higher priority to having leisure time. They are also more focused on having fun and are willing to realize their impulses. Whereas in a low-scoring culture, the emphasis is more on restraint and adhering to social norms. Furthermore, little focus is put on leisure time (Hofstede, 2011).

Masculinity – femininity refers to a society's focus on gender values and the importance of success. In a high-scoring culture, meaning a masculine culture, there are more pronounced differences in gender-based values, as well as a focus on competitiveness and success. In a low-scoring society, meaning a feminine culture, the values connected to genders are more equal, and there is a focus on being modest and caring (Hofstede, 2011).

### **Present study**

Although there has been previous research about culture and persuasion, as was discussed in previous paragraphs, these studies merely concerned differences in the effectiveness of persuasive texts between cultures. These studies did not concern differences in specific patterns of persuasion knowledge. This is surprising since significant differences between cultures have been found regarding the effectiveness of advertisements themselves. However, it is unclear whether these differences can be traced back to the specific sets of beliefs that make up PK. Furthermore, it has been explicitly stated in studies concerning PK that the contents of PK are a product of the environment an individual lives in. Meaning that



the culture a person belongs to could have serious implications for the contents of the specific sets of beliefs of PK. However, this has not been proven by any scientific research. It is exactly this research gap that this thesis attempts to address by studying the differences in specific beliefs between cultures.

However, this is not the only research gap that has been identified. Previous research concerning culture and persuasion has primarily considered differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Han & Shavitt, 1994; Khaled et al, 2018). The other cultural dimensions by Hofstede have been underrepresented in this field of research. An especially interesting cultural dimension is that of Femininity - Masculinity.

The masculinity-femininity cultural dimension, as explained by Hofstede, concerns “the distribution of values between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society, to which a range of solutions can be found.” (Hofstede, 2011, p.12). Besides this, in masculine cultures, there is a societal preference for heroism, assertiveness, achievement, and material success. In feminine cultures, society has a preference for social relationships, modesty, caring for the weak, and quality of life (Hofstede, 1984). As explained earlier in this paragraph, this difference in values is to be understood in relation to values regarding gender norms. Where in a masculine culture, men are expected to showcase a focus on achievement and competitiveness, women are not expected to show these values. This still means that they can showcase these values, but are still expected to showcase the more caring values that are also linked to a feminine culture. In a feminine culture, however, both men and women are expected to showcase the aforementioned feminine cultural values. This leads to several specific beliefs that differ for these cultures (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Different beliefs between Masculine and Feminine cultures (Hofstede, 2011).*

Feminine cultures	Masculine cultures
Minimum emotional and social role differentiation between genders	Maximum emotional and social role differentiation between genders
Men and women should be modest and caring	Men should be, and women may be, assertive and ambitious
Balance between family and work	Work prevails over family
Sympathy for the weak	Admiration for the strong
Both fathers and mothers deal with facts and feelings	Fathers deal with facts, mothers with feelings

Feminine cultures	Masculine cultures
Both boys and girls may cry, but neither should fight	Girls may cry, boys may not; boys should fight back, girls should not fight

What makes this dimension especially interesting for persuasion-related research is what makes this dimension the ‘taboo dimension’, which it has been named by Hofstede (1998). It has been shown that in masculine cultures, there is often a taboo around certain characteristics of this dimension.

This means that certain topics around gender roles and other characteristics of this dimension would be considered more sensitive or inappropriate in masculine cultures than they would be in feminine cultures (Hofstede, 2011). This taboo in and of itself could already have major implications for persuasion knowledge and how it is used across cultures. Especially beliefs about appropriateness and effectiveness of strategies might differ across cultures as a result of differences regarding the masculinity-femininity dimension. However, this has not been researched in any notable studies. The potential relevance of cultural differences regarding this dimension, in combination with the glaring research gap regarding this dimension on the topic of persuasion, further narrows the scope of this thesis.

The discussed research gaps lead to the following focus: ‘Differences between masculine and feminine cultures regarding patterns of persuasion knowledge.’

In order to further narrow down the focus of this thesis, two cultures have been identified that have relatively similar scores regarding the cultural dimensions, aside from their score on the femininity-masculinity dimension: The Netherlands and Germany.

The Netherlands represents a feminine culture with a score of 14, and Germany represents a masculine culture in this study with a score of 66 (Figure 2).

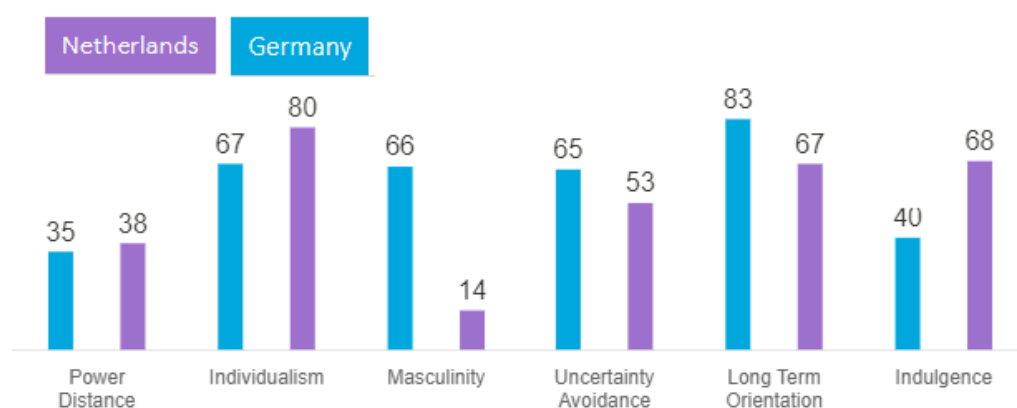
Scores on the indulgence vs restraint dimensions also differ significantly, although not as much as the scores on the masculinity-femininity dimension. Therefore, this dimension will also be considered in the analysis in this thesis, although not to the same extent as the masculinity-femininity dimension.

Besides having somewhat similar scores on the cultural dimensions, these two countries have fairly similar cultures. These countries are both western European countries, with a somewhat similar political system. Geographically, these countries are neighbors. And their languages belong to the same linguistic family. This means that these two countries share many similarities both regarding the cultural dimensions and other characteristics.

However, they do differ substantially regarding the femininity-masculinity dimension, meaning that there are a limited number of cultural differences that could influence differences in patterns of persuasion knowledge. Therefore, these two countries are appropriate for the purpose of this study.

### Figure 2

*Scores of the Netherlands and Germany on Hofstede's cultural dimensions ("Country Comparison - Hofstede Insights", n.d.)*



Based on the identified research gap regarding persuasion knowledge research and the cultural knowledge of the Netherlands and Germany, the following research question was identified:

*RQ1: What differences and similarities in patterns of persuasion knowledge can be found between individuals from the Netherlands and individuals from Germany, when observing the same persuasive text?*

By answering this research question, this thesis attempts to address the identified research gap. Furthermore, in this thesis, the link between specific differences in patterns of persuasion knowledge and the cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1984, 2011) will be explored. This leads us to RQ2.

*RQ2: To what extent can differences and similarities in patterns of persuasion knowledge be linked to cultural norms regarding the Hofstede cultural dimensions?*

By answering these research questions, this thesis attempts to explore how future research could address this research gap more thoroughly. This means that this study is highly explorative in nature and is purely aimed at setting a first step towards creating a body of research on the topic of PK and culture.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A total of 22 respondents took part in the selection process for this study, 7 of which were Dutch natives, and 15 of which were German natives. All but one respondent were male. The age of these respondents ranged from 19 to 36, with the average age being 23.5. The German respondents had an average age of 23.3, and the Dutch respondents had an average age of 23.9. These respondents have all been approached through online media, using convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Of these 22 participants, 10 were selected to participate in the semi-structured interview, 5 of which were German natives, and 5 of which were Dutch natives. All data was collected and used according to the EACH guideline by Radboud University Nijmegen.

The selection process consisted of a questionnaire containing questions about characteristics of the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension, shown in appendix A. This was done to ensure that the personal values of the participants that took part in the interview at least somewhat agreed with the cultural values of their native country on the masculinity-femininity dimension. This was necessary because it is known that the cultural dimensions cannot predict an individual's view on topics relating to those cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1984.) This means that scores on these cultural dimensions can differ from individual to individual. By selecting individuals that have similar scores to the average scores of their countries, this will be prevented. The questions used in this thesis regarding the cultural dimension of masculinity-femininity were based on the specific characteristics of feminine and masculine cultures as specified by Hofstede (2011). These questions were also based on questionnaires used in previous studies (Tai, 2004; Yoo, Donthu & Lenartowicz, 2011).

### **Materials**

In order to activate participants' PK, a commercial by Gillette was used during the interview. The commercial was the primary promotional material for the "The Best Men Can Be" campaign by Gillette. This advertisement was released in January 2019 and aimed to

address behavior such as bullying, sexual harassment, and toxic masculinity. It was released two years after the #MeToo Movement, which is a social movement against sexual harassment that went viral in 2017. This social movement was also addressed in the advertisement.

The advertisement contains scenes that discuss values that are highly relevant for the Femininity – Masculinity cultural dimension. Most scenes in this advertisement, as well as the overall message, promote values that are typical for feminine cultures. These scenes that contain behavior typical for feminine cultures showed fathers dealing with feelings and emotions, men standing up for vulnerable people, men breaking up fights, and men crying. These scenes relate to feminine cultures through the characteristics of emotional role differentiation between genders, sympathy for the weak, fathers dealing with feelings, and the belief that nobody should fight.

However, some scenes show behavior that could indicate values typical of masculine cultures. The scenes that contain behavior suggesting values typical for masculine cultures showed boys fighting, fathers not dealing with feelings, and men being assertive romantically. Also the saying ‘boys will be boys’ was used during the scene of two kids fighting.

These scenes are linked to masculine cultures through the characteristics explained in the theoretical framework. The characteristics of masculine cultures relevant in this advertisement are: Men should be assertive, boys should fight back, and fathers do not deal with feelings.

The advertisement is primarily focused on men and male behavior. Showing these values in relation to men is highly relevant for the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension. This is because values and assumptions towards gender that are a product of differences regarding the cultural dimension of masculinity differ more extremely in relation to men than they do in relation to women.

The overall message of the advertisement is incongruent with German culture and congruent with Dutch culture. However, since the advertisement contains scenes that show congruence with both cultures, it is not necessary to use another advertisement. Besides this, the focus of this study is on the underlying beliefs that make up persuasion knowledge, and not on the effect of cultural congruence on advertisement evaluation. Therefore, the cultural congruence of an advertisement with a specific culture is not as relevant in this study.

This advertisement was selected for this study because of the aforementioned characteristics. As this advertisement directly addresses topics that are considered taboo in a

masculine country, this advertisement could be effective at eliciting explicit beliefs in the participants.

### **Procedure**

After the selection process participants were contacted by the researcher via email or other online channels in order to make an appointment for a semi-structured interview. During the semi-structured interview, an interview guide was used (Appendix B). This interview guide was based on the characteristics of PK (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The questions are all designed to explore different aspects of persuasion knowledge in relation to the cultural dimension of masculinity-femininity and the aspects of this dimension relevant in the commercial.

The semi-structured interviews were held online using a licensed version of the online meeting program Zoom. This was done to ensure privacy, as well as to ensure consistency among all participants. The commercial by Gillette was shown at the start of the interview before the questions were asked. Participants were given the option to watch the commercial again during the interview, in order for them to be able to form comprehensive beliefs about the content of the advertisement. Each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes.

The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed using the automatic transcription function of Microsoft Word. After this, the automatic transcripts were then manually checked and improved using Atlas.Ti. During the transcription process, all participants were given a codename, corresponding with their country. Participant 1 from the Netherlands was called P1D (Participant 1 Dutch) and participant 1 from Germany was called P1G (Participant 1 German). First, three transcripts from each culture were coded, after which it was decided enough data was collected to find patterns during analysis. The transcripts were coded for the individual beliefs that make up the different parts of persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994). For beliefs about marketer tactics, this includes, but is not limited to, beliefs about tactics such as the use of celebrities or appeal to family values. For beliefs about the marketer's persuasion goals, this includes, but is not limited to, beliefs about a marketer managing their self-image, managing consumer's self-image, or achieving social change (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This was also done for beliefs about psychological mediators, beliefs about effectiveness, and appropriateness.

These coded utterances were analyzed for patterns of persuasion knowledge using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). During this analysis, coded utterances were categorized into recurring themes. In order to be considered a theme, there were two primary requirements. Firstly, the meaning of utterances regarding a specific topic had to be similar

for the majority of participants belonging to one culture. Secondly, a pattern regarding the same topic had to be present in the utterances of the participants belonging to the other culture. Thematic analysis has been chosen over other analyses, such as content analysis, due to its focus on more implicit meaning of utterances and its consideration of context.

### **Reliability**

During the pilot study and eventual study, all data were coded by the researcher using the method explained in the previous section. After the final round of coding, several codes were discussed during a data session with two second coders for reliability. After these data sessions, all coded data was checked and recoded where necessary. After this recoding, the codes were discussed again until all coders agreed on how the data was coded. During the analysis process, all themes were discussed with these second coders, until all coders agreed on what should be considered a theme.

### ***Pilot Study***

As part of this study, a pilot study was conducted in order to test the materials and allow the researcher to become more familiar with the method. During this pilot study, one participant was interviewed. This participant was a 23-year-old German male. This interview was then transcribed and coded for individual beliefs about tactics, psychological mediators, persuasion goals, and the beliefs about appropriateness and effectiveness of those beliefs. Based on this pilot study, several interview questions were altered to ensure that the participants would explain their beliefs more in-depth. Besides this, the pilot study served to streamline the transcription and coding process.

## **Results**

During thematic analysis, three themes containing differences in patterns of persuasion knowledge were found. These themes are discussed in the following section.

### **Themes**

#### ***Theme A. Use of stereotypes as a tactic***

It was found that two of the three German participants evaluated the use of stereotypes negatively as a tactic in the advertisement by Gillette. In the data for this study, this was mostly found in the way of beliefs about appropriateness. Those negative beliefs about appropriateness were primarily conditional. The parts of the commercial that showed scenes containing negative stereotypes showed men behaving in an inappropriate manner. One of the scenes that was explicitly described as showing inappropriate behavior was that of a man talking for a woman during a business meeting. These German participants interpreted these scenes as Gillette claiming that all men show this type of behavior, which they found to be

untruthful. They considered this claim to be untruthful in the sense that they found reality to be a lot more nuanced. The use of negative stereotypical behavior in this advertisement was therefore considered inappropriate, because of potential negative implications for people depicted in them, in this case, men. However, one German participant did not evaluate those same scenes as containing stereotypes. Consequently, this participant did not evaluate these scenes as inappropriate. Those scenes were instead evaluated as containing examples of inappropriate behavior, which was evaluated as an appropriate tactic. However, when asked about stereotypes, he did state that he found the use of stereotypes inappropriate when those stereotypes were about neighboring countries or when the advertisement is meant to reach a global audience.

Two of the three German participants also stated that the appropriateness of the use of stereotypes depends on the stereotype itself. If they found a stereotype to be harmless or positive, then the use of a stereotype in advertising would not be considered inappropriate. This is described by participant P3G.

P3G: If you want to address a specific nation, even a specific region, you maybe especially want to have a specific stereotype in it (referring to an advertisement). For example, if you look for my city in the northern part of Germany, Hamburg. It's always like, oh, you have fish. And uh, maybe even some sports activities like soccer, but it's always: 'let's eat fish.' So I think pointing that out for like a regional campaign to advertise fish, it's fine to use northern stereotypes.

It was found that Dutch participants evaluated the use of stereotypes as a tactic predominantly positively or neutrally. Those beliefs about the appropriateness of that tactic were primarily conditional. This positive evaluation was mostly due to Dutch participants considering those scenes as showing behavior that is close to what happens in reality. It was also found that Dutch participants did not evaluate those previously mentioned scenes as containing harmful stereotypes. Dutch participants also noted that the goal of the advertisement was very important for their evaluation of tactics. In this case, the goal of the advertisement was considered to be positive social change. It is important to note that these beliefs were conditional. The conditions that were noted were that the used stereotypes are not necessarily harmful and that the behavior in those scenes showed situations that closely relate to real-world situations. Under those conditions, Dutch participants found the use of stereotypes to be appropriate for that goal.



When asked about the general use of stereotypes in advertising, Dutch participants noted that they found the use of stereotypes to be effective. This was due to people being able to relate easily to the stereotypes.

***Theme B. Use of a societal issue related to the masculinity-femininity dimension***

All three Dutch participants were found to evaluate addressing a societal issue as a tactic in this advertisement positively. These positive beliefs about the appropriateness of this tactic were primarily conditional. Those beliefs were also mostly specific to the advertisement of Gillette, and its use of the societal issue around toxic masculinity and the #MeToo social movement. These participants stated that they found the use of this societal issue to be appropriate, because in their opinion it is an important issue that needs addressing.

These Dutch participants still noted some conditions under which the use of a societal issue would be inappropriate. One participant noted that addressing this societal issue in this advertisement was appropriate because he interpreted the advertisement to be purely for the purpose of social change, rather than for selling products. Besides this, he stated that he considered the advertisement to focus on the positive behavior change, rather than focusing exclusively on negative behavior, making the use of the societal issue appropriate in this advertisement. Another Dutch participant noted that he found the use of this specific societal issue by Gillette somewhat questionable, since he did not see a link between that specific company and that specific societal issue. Due to the absence of that link, he questioned the relevance of Gillette in regard to that specific topic. However, this evaluation was overshadowed by the ascribed importance to the social change that Gillette promoted, which made the overall evaluation of the use of this tactic positive.

The German participants primarily showed beliefs about appropriateness when evaluating the use of a societal issue as an advertising tactic. However, no clear pattern was found regarding the contents of the specific beliefs about appropriateness of this tactic. Two of the three German participants did have primarily negative beliefs about the appropriateness of the use of a societal issue. One participant evaluated the use of this tactic negatively due to the lack of relevance of the company to the topic. That participant also noted that the societal issue around toxic masculinity and the #MeToo social movement is complex and controversial, which can lead to a backlash. This makes the use of this societal issue inappropriate in this advertisement. Another participant showed negative beliefs about the appropriateness of the use of a societal issue as a tactic as well. The reasoning behind this negative evaluation was that he considered the use of this tactic to be for commercial gain. However, he noted that his first reaction to seeing the advertisement was positive due to the

call for positive change. It was after reconsidering that he found the use of this societal issue to be inappropriate, since he interpreted the goal of this advertisement to be commercial gain. The third German participant evaluated the use of this societal issue positively. He considered the goal of the advertisement to be positive change, rather than commercial gain, hence the positive beliefs about appropriateness.

***Theme C. The general use of advertisements.***

A pattern relating to beliefs about the effectiveness of the use of advertisements in general was found for the German participants. Out of their utterances, it can be understood that they considered the use of more traditional advertisements to be a tactic in and of itself, of which they evaluated the effectiveness. These beliefs about effectiveness surfaced when these participants were asked whether the advertisement had influenced their purchase intention in any way. Even when asked to elaborate, no specific reason was given for this belief by any of the participants. However, the use of advertisements was compared to other ways of promoting a brand or product by all three German participants. Two of the participants noted that they considered personal recommendations to be much more effective at influencing purchase intentions. The third German participant noted that he found the use of giving samples to consumers, or allowing consumers to test a product, to be more effective at influencing purchase intentions.

No pattern regarding this theme was found among the Dutch participants. This was primarily due to Dutch participants not talking about why they found this advertisement ineffective. If they elaborated on the question about purchase intentions, they stated that they did not need the product. Therefore, no pattern on this topic was found among Dutch participants.

**Relating Themes to RQ1.**

Using the patterns found in these themes, RQ1 could be answered by comparing those patterns in individuals from both cultures. RQ1 is:

*RQ1: What differences and similarities in patterns of persuasion knowledge can be found between individuals from The Netherlands and individuals from Germany, when observing the same persuasive text?*

One way in which patterns of persuasion knowledge differed between individuals from the Netherlands and individuals from Germany, was in their beliefs about the appropriateness of the use of a societal issue as a tactic. Dutch participants evaluated the use of the societal

issue around toxic masculinity and the #MeToo movement predominantly positively or neutrally. This positive evaluation was due to the fact they thought the societal issue needs addressing. A big company discussing this issue was therefore appropriate. German participants, however, were not as positive in their beliefs about appropriateness of the use of a social issue as a tactic. Although for different reasons, two of the three German participants stated they found the use of this tactic to be inappropriate in advertising.

The importance of this social issue was also apparent in the manner in which German and Dutch participants evaluated the use of stereotypes. German participants evaluated the use of stereotypes as more negative regarding appropriateness than Dutch participants did. This negative evaluation regarding the appropriateness of the use of this tactic was due to the stereotype being negative, and potentially offensive to men. Dutch participants evaluated this tactic in this advertisement as showing examples of inappropriate behavior. This difference led to a more positive evaluation of this tactic. Another important factor in these positive beliefs about appropriateness was the importance of addressing a societal issue.

All German participants evaluated the effectiveness of ‘advertisements’ negatively when asked whether the advertisement had influenced their purchase intention. Those German participants stated that they found advertisements in general to be ineffective at influencing purchase intention. Dutch participants only noted they did not need the product when asked the same question, if they elaborated on the question. However, those answers by the Dutch participants did not contain any specific beliefs about the use of advertisements. This means that, for this theme, a pattern of persuasion knowledge was found in the answers of the German participants. But no pattern was found for the Dutch participants.

Dutch and German participants were similar in their evaluations of the use of stereotypes in the sense that they noted similar conditions for appropriateness. Both German and Dutch participants named the extent to which a stereotype is offensive as a crucial condition for the extent to which the use of stereotypes would be appropriate. However, what specifically they considered to be offensive seemed to differ between cultures.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

By relating the findings discussed in the result section to the cultural dimensions by Hofstede(1984; 2011), RQ2 could be answered. RQ2 is:

*RQ2: To what extent can differences or similarities in patterns of persuasion knowledge be linked to cultural norms regarding the cultural dimensions of Hofstede?*

Germany represents a masculine culture and the Netherlands represents a feminine culture in this Thesis. It was found that German participants considered the use of the societal issue around toxic masculinity to be more inappropriate than the Dutch participants did. This difference can be linked to the characteristic of a masculine culture that there is a taboo around characteristics of the masculinity-femininity dimension. This means that, in masculine cultures, discussing certain topics around gender roles and other characteristics of this dimension would be considered inappropriate in masculine cultures. In the advertisement by Gillette, it is exactly these types of topics that are discussed. However, no pattern was found regarding the specific beliefs why the use of this societal issue was inappropriate. For Dutch participants, the use of this societal issue was not considered to be inappropriate.

The manner in which the majority of German participants evaluated the use of stereotypes in this advertisement could also be linked to this taboo. Those German participants considered certain scenes to be containing negative stereotypes about men, which they found to be inappropriately used. It should be noted that the Dutch participants considered those scenes to be containing examples of inappropriate behavior, rather than containing stereotypes. The use of examples as an advertising tactic was in turn considered to be appropriate by the Dutch participants. These scenes were evaluated in a similar manner by one German participant. Although not all German participants considered these scenes to contain stereotypes, there is still a clear difference between the participants from those cultures. This difference could imply that what is considered a stereotype and what is considered to be an example of behavior differs across cultures. However, in order to make any sort of claim regarding this topic, further research is needed.

This difference in how a tactic is defined by Dutch and German participants could perhaps also be present in the beliefs about other specific tactics. In order to understand this implication, it is necessary to revisit what beliefs about marketer's tactics entail. Beliefs about tactics have been defined in this thesis as follows: "Beliefs about what actions by the persuasion agent, or aspects of an advertisement, are perceived as tactics, as well as what goals those actions have." (Friestad & Wright, 1994). As these beliefs are product of an individual's own experience and what they have learned from those around them, it is not unlikely that the contents of that set of beliefs differ for individuals from different cultures.

Besides evaluating the appropriateness of the use of a societal issue, the Dutch participants also stressed the importance of addressing this societal issue. This can be linked to the cultural aspects of the masculinity-femininity dimension regarding gender roles. In feminine cultures, gender roles are less pronounced, and both men and women are expected to

be caring, rather than competitive and ambitious. These values were explicitly represented in the advertisement. In previous research, it has been found that culturally congruent persuasive messages are more effective than culturally incongruent messages (Khaled et al., 2018; Han & Shavitt, 1994). Considering the patterns that were found in the present thesis, it could be argued that this effect can also be found in specific patterns of persuasion knowledge. However, in order to definitively answer RQ2, further research is needed.

The finding that German participants found advertisements in general to be ineffective at influencing purchase intention might be linked to the cultural dimension of indulgence vs restraint. Germany is a culture that scores relatively low on this dimension, meaning it is a culture of restraint (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). A characteristic of a culture of restraint is that people in such a culture put importance on self-control and social norms (Hofstede, 2011). This self-control and influence of social norms might also be present in the consumer behavior of people from those cultures. Two German participants noted that they found personal recommendations to be more effective at influencing purchase intention than an advertisement. This might be linked to the importance of social norms in a culture of restraint. This could mean that German people would be more inclined to adhere to the social norms of what is considered to be a good purchase, and what is not. Another German participant considered the tactic of giving consumers samples of products to be more effective at influencing purchase intention than an advertisement. This participant noted this is because he considers the quality of a product to be the biggest influence on his purchase intention. When a sample is given, the product quality can be tested by the consumer, which would lead to a positive effect on their purchase intention. The belief that giving samples is more effective at influencing purchase intention than more traditional advertising, could be linked to the characteristic of self-control on the indulgence vs restraint cultural dimension. In this case, it could mean that this German participant would regulate the impulse to purchase a product by attempting to get more information on the product. However, this would require extensive research before this can be proven.

### **Limitations, implications, and future research**

Since this thesis has followed a qualitative approach, the number of participants that took part in the interview is severely limited. The participants that took part in this study were approached using convenience and snowball sampling. This type of sampling has the limitation that the participants risk being part of the same social groups. This could have also led to all participants being male. This is especially relevant since the topic of the advertisement was on social norms regarding male and female role differentiation. However,

the relevance of gender for differences in patterns of persuasion knowledge needs to be studied in order to make any claims regarding this limitation. Another possible result of this sampling type was that all participants were young adults. As has been stated, persuasion knowledge is a product of experiences and vicarious learning. This implies that people will expand their persuasion knowledge, and even certain beliefs might even change over the course of an individual's life (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Campbell & Kirmani, 2008).

Therefore, for future studies concerning differences in patterns of persuasion knowledge between individuals from different cultures, it would be necessary to also regard age as a variable. Due to these limitations, any patterns that were found in this thesis cannot be generalized to a wider population. In order to generalize any patterns, further research is necessary.

As has been stated before, this thesis was highly explorative in nature. Therefore, some of the methodological choices in this thesis should be subject to change in any future studies on this topic. Firstly, the advertisement that was used by Gillette directly addressed a societal issue relating to the masculinity-femininity dimension. Although it is an advertisement, it did not directly aim to influence any opinions about the brand itself. This was also underlined by some participants, who noted they did not see the link between the topic of this advertisement and the marketer. Additionally, or even altogether divergent, differences in patterns of persuasion knowledge between individuals from a masculine culture and individuals from a feminine culture might be found when a different type of advertisement is used. This, however, would require further research in order to be proven. Secondly, the focus on five sets of beliefs of persuasion knowledge proved to be too broad a scope for the purpose of finding cultural differences in patterns of persuasion knowledge. No patterns regarding psychological mediators were found, and a pattern regarding a persuasion goal was only found within the context of beliefs about tactics. Therefore, it is critical to narrow the scope of future research sufficiently, to find any differences.

Lastly, these differences in patterns of persuasion knowledge were related to the Hofstede cultural dimensions. These dimensions were mostly found approximately 50 years ago, at the time of writing this thesis. Besides this, the Hofstede dimensions have been subject to criticism.

However, regardless of these limitations, the findings of this thesis do invite further research on the topic of cultural differences in patterns of persuasion knowledge in relation to the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension. Further research might be able to find significant patterns on this topic.

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## **Appendix A**

### Questionnaire participation selection

#### **Demographic questions**

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Country of origin
4. Educational level
5. Languages spoken

#### **Questions about culture**

6. I feel German/Dutch. (Strongly disagree – strongly agree. 10 point)
7. I take pride in doing my job well. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
8. I take pride in getting high grades. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
9. It is okay for men to cry. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
10. Family and friends are more important than my job. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
11. Men need to be strong. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
12. There are some jobs that a man can always do better than a woman. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
13. Solving difficult problems usually requires an active, forcible approach, which is typical of men. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
14. Men usually solve problems with logical analysis; women usually solve problems with intuition. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
15. It is more important for men to have a professional career than it is for women. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
16. I like to buy products which can identify status. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
17. I think status is important in showing power. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
18. I like to work in a competitive environment. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)
19. I pursue winning, success and achievement. (Str. disagree – str. agree. 10 point)

#### **Contact information for possible interview.**

20. I can be contacted through the following email address for an interview:

## **Appendix B**

### Semi-structured interview introduction and questions

#### **Interview introduction**

In this interview you're going to watch an advertisement by Gillette. After this I will ask you some questions about persuasion, and your opinion about different parts of it. I am mostly looking for the 'why'. There are no wrong answers and feel free to say whatever comes to mind.

#### **Questions on culture and persuasion knowledge**

1. What do you think the advertiser is trying to achieve with this advertisement?

Probe: What opinion about the brand is the advertiser trying to influence?

Probe: What motives do you think the advertiser has for making this advertisement?

2. How does the advertiser try to achieve this goal?

Clarification: what type of strategies (= ways in which advertisers try to persuade) do you think the advertiser uses?

Probe: Are there any specific persuasion/marketing strategies that you recognize that the advertiser uses?

3. In your experience, is it common for advertisers to use these type of strategies?

Probe: do you think these strategies are common in your country?

4. Do you think these strategies are appropriate for this type of advertisement?

Probe: why do you think so?

Probe: Which strategies specifically do you think are appropriate or inappropriate?

5. Do you think the advertisement would be effective in your country of origin?

Probe: do you think this advertisement could more or less effective in your culture than in another culture? Why so? Can you give some specific examples why it would be (in)effective?

Probe: If yes, why do you think so? If not, what should be changed, and why?

6. Would this advertisement have any effect (positive or negative) on your purchase intentions of products of this brand?

Probe: why?

7. Do you think the values this advertisement promotes agree with the values of your culture?

Probe: what values promoted in specific scenes do you think agree or disagree with your culture?

**Appendix C**

The Advertisement by Gillette

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYaY2Kb\\_PKI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYaY2Kb_PKI)

## Appendix D

### Codebook for Thematic Analysis

#### Participant

- Participant number

#### Country

- Germany
- Netherlands

#### Line

- xx

(number of line in which utterance occurs)

#### Text

- xx

(utterance that is to be coded)

#### Type of knowledge

- persuasion knowledge
- persuasion knowledge / topic knowledge
- persuasion knowledge / agent knowledge

#### Contents of Persuasion knowledge

- beliefs about psychological mediators
- beliefs about marketer tactics
- beliefs about coping tactics
- beliefs about marketer persuasion goals
- beliefs about own coping goals
- beliefs about effectiveness of tactics
- beliefs about appropriateness of tactics

#### beliefs about psychological mediators

- Emotion
- Feelings
- Attention

#### beliefs about marketer tactics

- Asking audience a question
- Bullying imagery
- Using Shock effect
- Diversity

- Emotional appeal
- Evoking emotion
- Focus on attention
- Focus on feeling
- Personally addressing
- Positive message
- Repetition
- Giving samples
- Music
- Showing American fragments
- Showing crying boy
- Showing examples
- Showing negative behavior
- Showing people a website
- Relatable scenes
- Stereotypes
- Use of social movement
- Use of feminine values
- Traditional advertisement
- Use of negativity

#### beliefs about coping tactics

-

#### beliefs about marketer persuasion goals

- Behavior change
- managing consumer self-image
- influencing feelings
- reaching many people
- Positive behavior change
- beliefs marketer traits
- social change
- reputation management

#### beliefs about effectiveness of tactics

- conditional
- unconditional

beliefs about appropriateness of tactics

- conditional
- unconditional

Summary

- summary of the content of coded utterance

Theme

- A
- B
- C