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**Cultural Values, Digital Engagement, and Socio-Political
Ideologies in Global Brand Reinterpretation**

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Master Thesis

presented as partial requirement for obtaining a Master's Degree in Data-Driven Marketing

NOVA Information Management School
Instituto Superior de Estatística e Gestão de Informação

Universidade Nova de Lisboa

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Reinterpretation**

by

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Master Thesis presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Data-Driven Marketing, with a specialization in Data Science for Marketing

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STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism, any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Rules of Conduct and Code of Honor from the NOVA Information Management School.

[Lisbon, Portugal, 15 July 2025]

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ABSTRACT

In today's global fashion landscape, consumers actively reinterpret brand meaning through local values, digital practices, and socio-political perspectives, rather than passively receiving brand messages. This thesis explores how these dynamics manifest across European markets by focusing on Vans as a case study of cultural brand evolution. Drawing on both computational sentiment analysis of 685 multilingual consumer reviews and internal secondary data from Vans' European operations, the research investigates how regional variations influence consumer-brand relationships. The findings reveal that while Continental European consumers prioritize cultural values and symbolic meaning, British consumers focus more on functionality and digital experience. In markets like Germany and the Netherlands, high digital engagement is coupled with critical sentiment, signaling elevated expectations. Spanish and Italian consumers show highly positive engagement, blending cultural and ideological considerations. The analysis identifies three interrelated forces which are cultural frameworks, digital engagement, and socio-political ideologies, that shape regional brand reinterpretation. This study advances understanding of how digital platforms act as cultural intermediaries, enabling diverse forms of brand meaning construction. It also highlights the importance for global fashion brands to adapt strategies based on regional priorities, balancing cultural resonance, technological fluency, and social relevance.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Brand Reinterpretation, Digital Consumer Behavior, Cross-Cultural Marketing, Consumer Culture Theory, European Markets, Computational Analysis.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)



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1. INTRODUCTION

Global fashion brands operate in an increasingly interconnected and digitized marketplace, where consumer perceptions are shaped by cultural values, digital engagement, and socio-political ideologies (Hofstede, 2001; de Mooij, 2019). As brands expand across multiple markets, the cultural contexts in which they exist confer unique meanings to their global identity. This shift in meaning is particularly pronounced in digital spaces, where consumers engage with brands through social media, online communities, and e-commerce platforms. (Torelli, C. J., & Stoner, J. L. (2019).

While globalization has facilitated the expansion of global fashion brands, the way consumers engage with them remains deeply rooted in local cultural narratives and regional ideologies (Holt, 2016). For instance, a luxury fashion brand may be viewed as a status symbol in Western markets, while in other regions, it may be criticized for cultural appropriation or unethical production practices (Cayla & Arnould, 2008). These localized meanings are further augmented by online media, as not only do consumers receive brand communications but also reinterpret brand meaning through user-generated content, online chatter, and web-based word-of-mouth promotion (Labrecque et al., 2013).

Despite extensive study of consumer culture and branding, how digital encounters enable the reinterpretation of global fashion brands remains relatively under-researched (Askegaard & Linnet, 2018; Riefler et al., 2012). Existing studies have addressed the cultural dimension within branding strategies (Hofstede, 2001; de Mooij, 2019), as well as digital branding (Iglesias et al., 2020), yet little is documented about how global brands are actually reinterpreted by consumers through digitally consuming different cultural settings (Jansen, N., & Hinz, O. (2022). Filling this gap is important for academic studies as well as real-world applications in international brand strategy (Cova & Parmentier, 2010; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012).

While global brands like Vans have achieved considerable momentum in international markets, much of the brand engagement research relies on projecting consumer sentiment in a way that does not sufficiently account for regional and cultural differences. Most of their strategies center on cultural branding or e-commerce independently, but little research has looked at how the two intersect, especially in a time when consumers increasingly recontextualize brand meaning on social and platform-native media.

For instance, socio-political factors such as privacy, activism, and resistance to commercialization shape consumers' reinterpretation of global brands in different regions. These aspects are often omitted from macro-digital marketing models, creating a gap in recognizing how cultural values, digital consumption patterns, and socio-political ideologies collectively redefine consumer-brand relationships today.

This research addresses this shortcoming by making Vans the case study. It explores how customers in different regions re-articulate the brand in digital contexts and how such reinterpretations are framed through their platform usage, cultural settings, and broader social worlds. Through that, the study seeks to further advance our nuanced knowledge of global branding within an evolving digital context. As one of the global brands with prominent cultural roots among skateboard and streetwear cultures, Vans offers a compelling lens through which to examine cross-cultural consumer behaviour in the digital age.

1.1 Research Problem

As global fashion brands grow their presence in culturally diverse markets, striking a balance between maintaining a consistent brand identity and adapting to local consumer expectations has become increasingly complex. Digital platforms have made this challenge even more pressing by giving consumers the power to engage with brands in real time, shape conversations around them, and even redefine what these brands mean through user-generated content. While previous research has explored how cultural values influence consumer behavior and brand perception, there's still limited understanding of how global fashion brands are reinterpreted across different cultural contexts through digital media.

No brand message is passively received by consumers; rather, they all get reinterpreted through the cultural background, regional identity, and socio-political ideologies of the audience. For example, a brand's sustainability campaign will be celebrated in one region as an ethical way of doing fashion, while in another it will be criticized for 'greenwashing'. These differences in the consumer-brand relationship highlight the need for brands to strategically approach cultural adaptation in digital spaces. This study uses Vans as an example to explore and support the proposed research. This company has a global lifestyle brand rooted in creativity and counterculture, now operates in a landscape where consumers are not just passive recipients of brand messaging but active participants in reshaping brand meaning.

Despite the brand's long-standing cultural associations, there is limited research into how Vans is perceived differently by consumers in different regions through digital interactions, and how local cultural, digital, and political factors shape these perceptions. Furthermore, the shift toward social commerce adds another layer of complexity, as purchasing behaviours become deeply intertwined with entertainment, identity, and community participation.

The problem this research seeks to address is the lack of a detailed understanding of how regional variations in cultural values, digital engagement practices, and socio-political attitudes influence the way consumers reinterpret a global brand in the digital age. Without this understanding, brands risk losing cultural relevance, missing growth opportunities, and failing to authentically connect with diverse audiences across global markets.

To address this gap, the study is guided by the following research question: **How do cultural values, digital engagement, and socio-political ideologies influence global brand reinterpretation in digital contexts?**

1.2 Research Objectives

This research aims to examine how regional variations in cultural values, digital engagement patterns, and socio-political ideologies influence consumer reinterpretation of global brands in digital environments.

The specific objectives are first, to analyze cross-cultural differences in consumer brand discourse and sentiment patterns across European markets. Second, to identify the mechanisms through which cultural frameworks, digital interactions, and ideological considerations interact to shape brand meaning transformation in contemporary consumer culture.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cultural, Digital, and Ideological Foundations

Understanding how consumers reinterpret global fashion brands across different European contexts requires a careful look at how cultural values, digital engagement, and socio-political ideologies intersect. These dimensions are deeply interconnected and help explain the regional variations in consumer-brand relationships.

Cultural values serve as the foundational lens through which people perceive and engage with brands. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (2001), frequently used in cross-cultural research, provides valuable insight into how identity, authority, risk tolerance, and time orientation influence consumer attitudes. For example, in individualistic societies like the UK and Germany, brands such as Vans may be interpreted as tools for self-expression and personal style. In contrast, in more collectivistic regions like Spain or Italy, the brand may be more closely associated with group belonging or shared identity. Other dimensions, such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance, also shape how much consumers value authenticity, consistency, and ethical practices in fashion brands (Sharma, R. 2022). While Germany and the Netherlands may prioritize transparency and accessible messaging, regions with higher uncertainty avoidance may favor legacy brands that communicate trust and familiarity.

However, these culturally rooted interpretations don't occur in isolation. They are amplified and reshaped in digital environments. Social media platforms, e-commerce reviews, and online communities allow consumers to interact with brands far beyond transactional relationships. As research demonstrates, the power dynamic between consumers and brands has fundamentally shifted (Guo, F., & Zhang, X. (2020)). Consumers now actively co-create meaning through digital brand communities and algorithmic interactions. Today, consumers actively co-create meaning, challenge narratives, and even redefine what a brand represents. In this sense, digital spaces function not merely as marketing channels but as arenas of cultural negotiation.

Finally, socio-political ideologies, which are often overlooked in branding research, play a growing role in shaping brand perceptions. Issues such as sustainability, inclusivity, ethical labor, or data privacy increasingly factor into how consumers evaluate brands (Schmitt, B. H. (2012)). In markets like Germany or the Netherlands, these values can become central to brand trust. In others, they may provoke resistance, skepticism, or even calls for boycotts.

Taken together, these three dimensions: culture, digital interaction, and political context, we will understand that they do not simply coexist; they actively shape each other. Understanding Vans' brand reinterpretation, therefore, demands a multi-layered approach, one that sees the consumer not just as a buyer but as a culturally embedded, digitally empowered, and politically influenced meaning-maker.

2.1.1 Cultural Values and Consumer Behaviour

Cultural values represent the underlying psychological and social patterns that guide consumer preferences, behaviors, and interpretations. They are not static; rather, they evolve through time, influenced by national history, family structures, education systems, and collective narratives (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995). Recent research continues to support this view, emphasizing how globalization and digital media constantly reshape these value systems, especially among younger

consumers (Torelli & Stoner, 2019; Schmitt, B. H. (2012). When applied to brand engagement, these values shape the lens through which consumers perceive authenticity, quality, and symbolic value.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions offer a compelling entry point for exploring these variations. His seminal work on individualism versus collectivism has been particularly influential in understanding cross-cultural consumer behavior (Hofstede, 2001; de Mooij, 2019). In high individualism contexts such as the UK and Germany, consumers often frame brand engagement in terms of personal expression and identity construction (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Zhang, X. (2020). Vans, with its associations to creativity and independence, aligns well with such cultural orientations. These consumers may use Vans products as tools for communicating their lifestyle, artistic sensibility, or personal values, turning the brand into a canvas for self-representation.

In more collectivist societies like Spain or Italy, however, brand meaning is often negotiated through social relationships (Triandis, 1995). Brand preferences may reflect family traditions, peer group affiliations, or a sense of cultural belonging. New studies further confirm that in collectivist environments, consumers tend to co-construct brand meaning within communities or subcultural groups, especially on digital platforms (Cleveland, M., Laroche, M., & Papadopoulos, N. (2009). In these contexts, Vans might gain value not through its expression of individualism but through its resonance with local street cultures, shared fashion codes, or generational identity.

Cultural differences become even more delicate when we consider how consumers relate to ideas of authority and uncertainty. In societies where hierarchical structures are more accepted, brands that convey a sense of prestige, tradition, or exclusivity may be more appealing, even if the brand's original image is more egalitarian or countercultural (Steenkamp et al., 1999). Similarly, in countries where people tend to avoid uncertainty, brands with consistent messaging and a stable identity are often preferred (Yaveroglu & Donthu, 2002). In such cases, Vans' more established and classic products may have more impact than its riskier or trend-driven collaborations.

These cross-cultural nuances are critical when analyzing regional reinterpretations of a global brand. Cultural values do not merely shape preference; they inform the frameworks within which brands are read, discussed, and adopted (Torelli 2019; Wong & Ng, 2022). For Vans, a brand deeply embedded in subcultural roots and global visibility, this means its meaning is never fixed but constantly rearticulated through the cultural filters of different audiences.

2.1.2 Digital Interactions and Branding

In today's digital world, brand meaning is no longer solely shaped by corporate messaging. Instead, it emerges through constant interaction between brands and consumers across various online platforms (Gensler et al., 2013; Labrecque et al., 2013). Social media, online reviews, and e-commerce environments serve not just as communication channels but as participatory arenas where consumers actively negotiate and reshape brand narratives. More recent research highlights how algorithmic visibility, influencer mediation, and platform-specific aesthetics influence this dynamic, amplifying consumer voices in unprecedented ways (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

Digital engagement has fundamentally transformed the nature of consumer-brand relationships (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and e-commerce sites have enabled users to express their identities, share experiences, and co-create content that often blurs the line between personal storytelling and brand representation (Schau et al., 2009). As a result, consumers have taken on a dual role, they are both the audience and the authors of brand meaning. This dynamic is especially

pronounced in younger demographics, where digital fluency enables more fluid reinterpretations (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Pentina et al., 2018).

Digital platforms act as extensions of cultural space where user-generated content such as style photos, videos, or reviews not only reinforce or challenge brand authenticity but also localize it within specific cultural contexts (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Recent studies have emphasized that these digital spaces are governed by their own symbolic economies and social logics, which affect how brand meanings are collaboratively reconstructed across different consumer communities (Zhang, X. (2020). Digital communities may emphasize different aspects of brand identity depending on regional values and platform-specific discourses.

However, digital interactions often reveal tensions between global brand positioning and local expectations (Cayla & Arnould, 2008). Campaigns launched with universal messages can be reinterpreted, or even criticized, when filtered through regional values or platform-specific discourses. Algorithms, platform cultures, and language also mediate how brand content circulates and resonates (Kozinets et al., 2010; Wang, 2021). These layers of mediation suggest that digital branding is not merely about message transmission, but about meaning negotiation.

This shift in communicative power challenges the traditional top-down branding model (Holt, 2016). Instead of shaping perception from above, brands must now listen, respond, and adapt to consumers' interpretations as they emerge in real time. Digital environments are not merely supportive tools for branding; they are cultural ecosystems in which brands live, evolve, and are contested (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). As such, branding becomes an ongoing, dialogical process, one that is increasingly shaped by digital participation, cultural remixing, and the emergent logics of online communities.

2.1.3 Socio-Political Ideologies and Regional Identities

Beyond culture and digital participation, socio-political ideologies significantly influence how consumers engage with global brands (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012). These ideologies include beliefs and attitudes toward sustainability, labor rights, inclusivity, environmental impact, and broader social justice concerns. In the case of Vans, which operates at the intersection of fashion, youth identity, and countercultural heritage, these ideological positions can either strengthen brand attachment or provoke critical responses (Sandlin & Milam, 2008)

In some European markets, especially in countries such as Germany or the Netherlands, consumers demonstrate strong alignment with progressive values. Here, brand engagement often involves expectations around environmental responsibility, ethical supply chains, and inclusive representation (Holt, 2012; White et al., 2019). Consumers may reward Vans when it communicates transparent sustainability efforts or collaborates with marginalized communities. In contrast, if the brand is perceived to fall short on these issues, criticism may arise, often publicly, via digital platforms.

The implications of these ideological filters become evident when analyzing how consumers express resistance or opposition in public forums (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Online reviews and social media discussions often reveal not only product assessments but also ideological tensions that can mobilize consumers against brands perceived as misaligned with local values or social expectations. Recent studies show that digital platforms act as both amplifiers and catalysts for this resistance, transforming individual discontent into collective action (Nayak & Hegde, 2021). Research on consumer resistance demonstrates how ideological differences can trigger boycotts, negative word-of-

mouth, or broader campaigns challenging brand practices (Varman & Belk, 2009; Johnstone & Tan, 2015). These dynamics reveal that socio-political considerations do not merely influence positive brand evaluation, but can fundamentally disrupt consumer–brand relationships when brands are perceived as ideologically problematic or culturally inappropriate.

Contemporary research has shown that consumers increasingly expect brands to take positions on social issues, but this expectation varies significantly across cultural and political contexts (Edelman, 2018). This creates what we might call "ideological consumption," where brand choices become vehicles for expressing and reinforcing social and political identity.

2.2 Brand Reinterpretation in Digital Contexts

This research builds upon the understanding that brand meaning is not fixed but emerges through dynamic interactions between global brand identity and local consumer interpretation Thompson, C. J., & Haytko, D. L. (1997). Brand reinterpretation refers to the process through which consumers actively reconstruct brand meaning by filtering global brand messages through their cultural values, digital experiences, and ideological frameworks.

Traditional branding theory assumed relatively stable brand meanings transmitted from companies to consumers. However, contemporary consumer culture theory demonstrates that consumers are active participants in a dynamic co-creation process that negotiates brand significance within specific cultural, technological, and ideological frameworks (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014). This process becomes particularly complex in digital environments, where the three dimensions identified in this study: cultural values, digital interactions, and socio-political ideologies operate simultaneously to shape brand interpretation.

Digital platforms function as cultural intermediaries that both enable and constrain brand reinterpretation processes (Kozinets et al., 2010). Rather than homogenizing brand meanings across cultures, digital environments often amplify cultural differences by providing spaces for localized interpretation and community formation around shared values and experiences. This creates what can be termed "glocalized brand meanings" interpretations that reference global brand identity but derive significance from local cultural frameworks.

The theoretical framework for this study integrates three interconnected dimensions that shape brand reinterpretation: cultural values that provide interpretive frameworks, digital interactions that mediate brand experiences, and socio-political ideologies that inform consumer evaluation criteria. These dimensions operate simultaneously and interact dynamically to produce regionally distinct patterns of brand meaning construction.

2.2.2 The Three Pillars of Brand Reinterpretation

The first pillar of this framework is cultural dimensions, drawing on Hofstede's cultural framework. This dimension considers how values such as individualism versus collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance shape consumer–brand relationships (Hofstede, 2001; De Mooij, 2019). However, our framework extends beyond traditional cultural dimensions by recognizing that cultural expression itself is mediated by digital technologies and platforms, as demonstrated in cross-cultural research on globalization's impact on consumer behavior (Zhang, X. (2020).

Cultural values inform how consumers interpret brand meaning, authenticity, and relevance within their local social contexts (Torelli; 2019). But importantly, these interpretations are not fixed or predetermined. Instead, they emerge through what Appadurai (1996) calls "cultural flows" : the dynamic circulation of meanings across global and local contexts. Contemporary research further demonstrates how cultural self-construal influences brand value co-creation processes, with consumers actively shaping brand meaning through culturally-embedded engagement behaviors (Zhang, X; 2020)

Building on this, the second pillar focuses on digital interactions. Digital platforms, especially e-commerce reviews, social media, and user-generated content, serve as what we term "cultural negotiation spaces", where consumers express, contest, and reshape brand meanings (Schau et al., 2009). These online environments allow cultural and ideological interpretations to be made visible, shared, and amplified in ways that fundamentally alter the brand–consumer relationship.

The digital dimension recognizes that contemporary brand meaning emerges through what Jenkins (2006) calls "participatory culture", where consumers become active collaborators in brand narrative construction. Digital tools enable what we conceptualize as "distributed brand authorship", where meaning creation is shared between brands and consumers across multiple platforms and contexts. This collaborative meaning-making manifests particularly in social media brand communities, where symbolic consumption practices reinforce identity construction processes (Zhang, X; 2020).

The final pillar considers socio-political ideologies. Consumers are not only cultural but also ideological beings whose political values, national identity, social justice concerns, and resistance to globalization influence how they evaluate and reinterpret brand narratives (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Thompson, C. J., & Haytko, D. L. (1997). These ideological layers add complexity to brand perception, especially when global campaigns interact with local sensitivities.

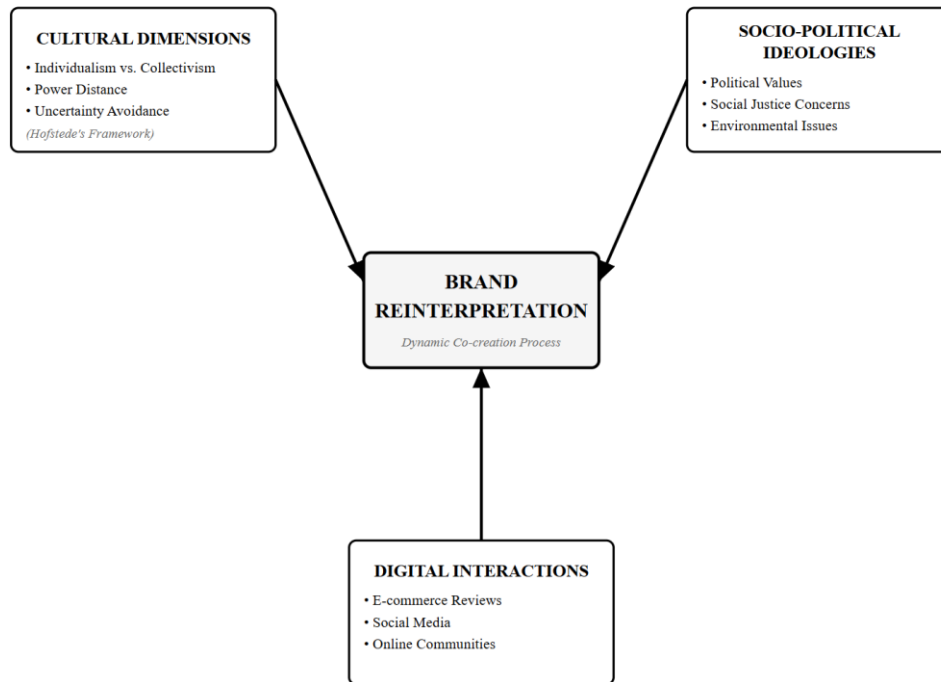
This dimension acknowledges what Sandlin and Milam (2008) describe as "ideological consumption," where brand choices become vehicles for expressing and reinforcing political and social identity. The framework recognizes that in contemporary consumer culture, brands increasingly serve as platforms for ideological expression rather than simple product providers.

2.2.3 Dynamic Interaction and Brand Reinterpretation

At the intersection of these three forces lies the phenomenon of **brand reinterpretation** : the central focus of this study. Rather than viewing brand meaning as a fixed output, the framework conceptualizes it as a fluid, dynamic construct co-created by consumers across different regions and digital contexts. This reinterpretation can involve shifts in sentiment, value alignment, and even brand rejection or transformation.

Within this, we suggest that brand reinterpretation operates through what we call "cultural amplification cycles", where digital platforms amplify cultural differences rather than homogenizing them. This explains the concept "glocalized brand meanings" we mentioned before , interpretations that are simultaneously global in reference but local in significance.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Cultural Brand Reinterpretation



Source: Author's conceptualization

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Theoretical Framework

This study used a mixed-methods approach to understand how consumers in different European countries interpret the Vans brand differently. The research combined existing company data with analysis of customer reviews to explore how cultural values, digital experiences, and social attitudes influence how people see global brands.

The research was conducted in two main phases. First, existing data from Vans' internal studies, market research, and website analytics were collected and analyzed. This helped establish what was already known about how consumers behave differently across European markets and how the brand performs in each region. This background information was essential for understanding the patterns found in the customer review analysis.

Secondly, customer reviews written in different languages were analyzed using natural language processing techniques to understand both the emotions expressed and the main themes discussed. Reviews from six European countries were processed to identify sentiment patterns and classify the content into three key areas: cultural values, digital engagement, and socio-political views.

3.2 Secondary Data Collection and Analysis

The collection of secondary data was based on Vans' internal research files between 2017 and 2025. Access to Vans' internal research data was obtained through a structured internship program with the company's European digital marketing team. All secondary data analysis was conducted under strict confidentiality agreements, with no individual consumer data or proprietary strategic information accessed. The research methodology and data usage were approved by both Vans' internal research ethics protocols and Nova IMS Ethics Committee.

Internal consumer research provided a basic understanding of regional differences in brand perception and cultural values across European markets. Digital analytics data enabled analysis of actual consumer patterns and behaviours, revealing how digital interactions vary by country. Search trend data captured broader patterns of consumer interest over time, while e-commerce performance metrics provided insights into conversion behaviours and platform effectiveness. Together, these data sets established the contextual foundation necessary to interpret primary data from consumer opinions and understand regional variations in brand reinterpretation.

The analysis incorporated findings from several key internal studies conducted by Vans in partnership with external research agencies. The primary source was the UK-FR-DE Market and Audience Analysis (2017), conducted with Kantar Millward Brown. This study surveyed 1,200 consumers aged 16-44 across three markets (400 per country) using online interviews. Participants were segmented into two key consumer groups relevant to Vans: "Expressive Creators" and "Skaters". The research measured brand awareness, purchase consideration, loyalty metrics, and emotional brand dimensions including authenticity, creativity, and heritage strength (see Appendix 6.2, Table A1: Regional Differences in Brand Perception and Purchase Behaviour).

Additional qualitative research included the Photography Research Debrief (2021), which involved in-depth interviews with consumers aged 18-35. The qualitative research involved 60 participants across three markets (UK, Spain, Germany), with 20 participants per country (10 male, 10 female, ages 18-35). All participants belonged to the BC1C2 socioeconomic category, representing middle to lower-middle class individuals who are style-conscious and value-driven. Participants were required to have made a purchase directly from the Vans e-commerce website within the last 12 months and aligned with the 'Expressive Creators' consumer segment profile, characterized by values centered on creativity, individuality, and community. (see Appendix 6.2, Table A4: Qualitative Research Participant Demographics).

Website analytics data were retrieved from Vans' internal Power BI dashboards, covering fiscal years 2024-2025. These dashboards aggregated key metrics reflecting user interactions within the e-commerce environment across different European markets, including bounce rates, cart abandonment rates, average session durations, mobile versus desktop traffic distributions, and conversion rates. This dataset offered a quantitative perspective on how users navigate and engage with Vans' digital platforms in region-specific contexts (see Appendix 6.2, Table A2: Digital Behavior and Consumer Journey Insights).

Consumer Search Interest Reports, based on Google Trends data, showed how often people searched for the brand in different countries over time, providing a broader sense of awareness and interest across markets (see Appendix 6.2, Table A3: Vans YoY Search Trends). E-commerce performance analysis revealed how consumers moved through the online shopping journey, from landing on the website to exploring products and making purchases. The analysis covered key metrics

such as product page views, add-to-cart rates, checkout initiation, and final conversion rates, highlighting differences in performance by country and identifying where users were most likely to drop off in the purchase funnel and which markets showed stronger engagement or higher conversion efficiency.

This secondary data foundation was essential for triangulating findings from the primary consumer review analysis, enabling validation of patterns identified in consumer discourse and providing quantitative context for qualitative insights about cultural brand reinterpretation.

3.3 Primary Data Collection and Preprocessing

Primary data collection focused on consumer reviews from Vans' official e-commerce platform to directly capture how consumers reinterpret brand meaning across different cultural contexts. Consumer reviews provide authentic, unfiltered expressions of how individuals process brand experiences through their cultural values, digital interactions, and socio-political perspectives. Unlike structured surveys or interviews, reviews represent spontaneous consumer discourse where cultural reinterpretation occurs naturally, making them ideal for examining how global brand meaning varies regionally.

The dataset consisted of consumer reviews collected from the official Vans Off the Wall Europe e-commerce platform covering the period from January 1, 2022, to May 31, 2025. The initial dataset contained 40,493 multilingual consumer reviews from six European countries: Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, and France. The raw dataset originally contained 14 columns, including administrative fields, customer identification data, and review content.

A systematic data preprocessing pipeline was implemented to ensure analytical quality and consistency. The first step involved removing non-essential administrative columns such as "Brand Name," "Page ID," "Reviewer Type," and "Review Email" to streamline the dataset and focus on relevant consumer feedback. Reviews containing fewer than three words in the comment field were excluded as they provided insufficient content for meaningful sentiment and thematic analysis. This filtering process resulted in a refined dataset of 685 reviews suitable for detailed computational analysis.

Geographic standardization was achieved through a country mapping system that converted technical locale codes (such as 'fr_FR', 'de_DE') into readable country names, enabling clear cross-cultural comparison and ensuring consistent country-level analysis across the dataset. This standardization was essential for the comparative analytical framework employed in the study.

One of the primary methodological challenges involved analyzing content written in different European languages. To address this, the DeepL translation API was employed to convert all non-English reviews into English while preserving cultural nuances and context-specific expressions. DeepL was selected for its superior handling of colloquial language and cultural references compared to other translation tools. All reviews from France, Spain, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands were translated to English, while UK reviews remained in their original form. This created a standardized English corpus that enabled direct cross-cultural comparison while maintaining the authentic meaning of the original customer feedback.

The final prepared dataset consisted of 10 structured columns: Created Date, Product Name, Review Rating, Review Headline, Review Comments (original), Review Location, Locale, Country, Comments_trans (translated), and Sentiment. This structure provided the foundation for both automated sentiment classification and thematic analysis in the subsequent computational analysis phase.

This multilingual review dataset was essential for answering the research question as it enabled direct comparison of how the same global brand is interpreted differently across cultures. The reviews captured spontaneous consumer expressions about cultural relevance, digital experiences, and ideological alignment, providing the primary evidence needed to understand regional variations in brand reinterpretation. By analyzing both the content and sentiment across the three theoretical dimensions, this dataset formed the core empirical foundation for examining cultural brand reinterpretation in digital contexts.

3.4 Computational Analysis Framework

The computational analysis employed a dual-notebook approach to systematically examine consumer sentiment and thematic patterns across European markets, integrating automated sentiment classification with thematic analysis to identify regional variations in brand interpretation. This analytical framework was designed to address the research question by quantifying both emotional responses “sentiment” and content priorities “themes” in consumer discourse about cultural values, digital engagement, and socio-political ideologies.

Sentiment analysis was conducted using the multilingual transformer model from Hugging Face (tabularisai/multilingual-sentiment-analysis), selected for its effectiveness across multiple European languages and ability to capture nuanced emotional expressions in consumer reviews. The sentiment analysis classified each review on a five-point scale: Very Negative, Negative, Neutral, Positive, and Very Positive. This granular approach provided more detailed emotional assessment than binary positive/negative classification, enabling detection of subtle cross-cultural differences in emotional expression patterns. The analysis was applied to the standardized English corpus created during the data preparation phase, with each translated review processed through the sentiment model to assign both a sentiment category and numerical confidence score. Reviews were then aggregated by country and thematic pillar to identify regional sentiment patterns.

The technical implementation utilized Python libraries including transformers for model implementation and pandas for data manipulation. The process involved loading the pre-trained multilingual model, processing reviews in batches to manage computational efficiency, and storing results in structured format for subsequent cross-cultural analysis. This approach ensured consistent sentiment classification across the multilingual dataset while maintaining analytical rigor.

Thematic analysis employed a dual methodology framework combining unsupervised topic discovery with theoretically-grounded classification to ensure comprehensive coverage of consumer perspectives. The first approach used Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling (Blei et al., 2003) to identify naturally emerging themes without imposing predetermined categories. The LDA model was configured with document frequency filtering, excluding terms appearing in more than 90% of documents or fewer than 5 documents to focus on meaningful content patterns. Country-specific stopword lists were created for each European market to remove common but non-informative words, while domain-specific terms related to basic footwear features were filtered to focus analysis on brand perception rather than product functionality.

The second approach employed supervised classification using the DeepSeek Chat large language model (DeepSeek-AI, 2025) to categorize reviews according to the three theoretical pillars established in the literature review. The classification process employed structured prompt engineering with explicit keyword inclusion to ensure consistent categorization.

The model was instructed using the following standardized prompt structure: 'Classify this review into one or more of these categories based on keyword presence: (1) Cultural Values if it contains words like identity, belonging, style, tradition, comfort, heritage, authenticity, expression, community, or craftsmanship; (2) Digital Engagement if it mentions online, shopping, user experience, accessibility, technology, digital, feedback, customer service, website, delivery, return, or mobile; (3) Socio-Political Ideologies if it discusses equality, inclusion, accessible, sustainability, sustainable, justice, responsibility, ethics, ethical, representation, empowerment, or diversity.'

This approach defined three categories: Cultural Values (content discussing traditions, cultural preferences, lifestyle choices, heritage, style, comfort, belonging, community, authenticity), Digital Engagement (content covering online shopping experiences, website functionality, digital content, social media presence, customer service, delivery, technology, user experience), and Socio-Political Ideologies (content mentioning social issues, sustainability practices, ethical concerns, corporate responsibility, inclusivity, diversity, environmental impact, equality, justice).

The large language model was configured with a temperature setting of 0.1 to prioritize consistency and reduce variability in classification decisions, ensuring that similar reviews received consistent classification across the dataset. Specific keywords and conceptual definitions for each category were explicitly embedded in every prompt to establish clear classification criteria and transparent boundaries. This approach enabled the identification of reviews addressing multiple themes simultaneously while maintaining theoretical coherence with the established framework. Nonetheless, certain limitations persist. As a generalised model trained on broad, non-domain-specific data, the LLM may lack sensitivity to the nuanced language and contextual depth characteristic of consumer reviews. Furthermore, in the absence of ground truth labels for this classification task, a manual review of outputs was conducted to assess the model's consistency and alignment with the theoretical categories. Finally, as with many pre-trained models, there is a potential for temporal bias, as the language model reflects cultural and linguistic patterns only up to the point of its training cut-off.

Classification results were validated through comparison with unsupervised LDA topic modeling results to identify systematic discrepancies or patterns requiring further investigation. This dual approach balanced empirical discovery with theoretical rigor, enabling researchers to identify emergent themes while maintaining connection to established cultural theory. The computational framework provided both quantitative measures of sentiment and thematic distribution and qualitative insights into how consumers prioritize different aspects of brand experience across cultural contexts, directly supporting the analysis of regional variations in cultural brand reinterpretation.

3.5 Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis framework integrated findings from secondary data analysis with results from the computational analysis to examine regional variations in brand interpretation across European markets. This approach enabled systematic comparison of consumer sentiment patterns and thematic priorities across different cultural contexts, directly addressing the research question by revealing how cultural values, digital engagement patterns, and socio-political ideologies influence brand reinterpretation in each market.

The analytical integration methodology combined three distinct data streams to build comprehensive regional profiles of consumer behavior and brand perception. Secondary data provided baseline understanding of market characteristics, digital behavior metrics, and brand performance indicators established through Vans' internal research. Primary sentiment analysis revealed emotional

responses and satisfaction patterns by country and thematic pillar, quantifying how consumers feel about different aspects of brand experience. Thematic classification identified which aspects of the brand consumers prioritized in different markets, revealing cultural preferences and value systems that shape brand interpretation.

The analysis employed specialized computational notebooks to address different research questions systematically. The first notebook focused on thematic patterns and relationships, examining which cultural, digital, or ideological themes consumers discussed most frequently in each country. This analysis also explored cross-pillar relationships to understand how themes intersect in consumer expressions, such as when sustainability concerns connect with cultural authenticity expectations or when digital functionality relates to broader lifestyle preferences. The second notebook concentrated specifically on sentiment analysis, revealing the emotional tone associated with each thematic pillar across different markets. This separation allowed for detailed examination of both content patterns (what consumers discuss) and emotional patterns (how they feel about what they discuss), ensuring that sentiment findings could be properly contextualized within thematic findings.

Multiple visualization techniques were employed to identify regional clusters and outliers, including grouped bar charts, heatmaps, bubble charts, and scatter plots. These visualizations revealed patterns such as the Continental European emphasis on cultural values versus the UK's more balanced approach across all three theoretical pillars. Cross-pillar correlation analysis examined relationships between the three theoretical dimensions to understand how cultural values, digital engagement, and socio-political ideologies interact in different markets. This involved analyzing both mention frequency correlations and sentiment correlations to identify whether positive perceptions in one area typically corresponded with positive perceptions in other areas.

Triangulation with secondary data strengthened the reliability of findings by systematically comparing sentiment and thematic analysis results with existing market intelligence. For example, digital behavior metrics from website analytics were compared with sentiment scores for digital engagement themes to understand whether poor digital experiences corresponded with negative sentiment in reviews. This triangulation approach provided multiple perspectives on regional differences in consumer behavior and brand interpretation patterns, validating findings through convergent evidence from different data sources.

The comparative framework ultimately enabled identification of distinct regional patterns in brand reinterpretation, revealing how the same global brand acquires different meanings across European markets through the interaction of local cultural frameworks, digital behaviors, and ideological orientations. This systematic comparison provided the empirical foundation for understanding cultural brand reinterpretation as a dynamic process that varies significantly across cultural contexts while maintaining connection to global brand identity.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Overview of Key Findings

The analysis of consumer review data from across Europe shows differences in how consumers talk about the Vans brand from country to country. The analysis demonstrates significant regional variations in cultural brand reinterpretation, where the same skateboarding brand means completely different things to consumers in the UK versus Spain or Germany. The findings show that European audiences don't just passively receive Vans' global messaging, but indeed they actively reshape it through their own cultural lenses, digital habits, and social values.

The core findings emerge from computational sentiment analysis of 685 multilingual consumer reviews collected from Vans' official e-commerce platform between January 2022 and May 2025. This primary dataset enables direct examination of authentic consumer expressions across six European markets (UK, Germany, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, and France), revealing how consumers spontaneously interpret brand meaning through their cultural values, digital experiences, and socio-political perspectives. The sentiment analysis employs both automated classification and thematic analysis to identify regional patterns in brand discourse and emotional responses.

Supporting insights derive from Vans' internal market research portfolio spanning 2017-2025, including consumer segmentation studies, website analytics, and market intelligence reports. This secondary data serves to contextualize and validate the sentiment analysis patterns, providing market intelligence that confirms whether the review-based findings reflect broader consumer behavior trends. Rather than generating separate conclusions, the secondary analysis demonstrates how existing market research aligns with the spontaneous consumer expressions captured in the review dataset.

4.2 Sentiment Analysis

4.2.1 Cultural Values in European Brand Interpretation

The first clear pattern from the data shows how important cultural values are in shaping European consumers' understanding of Vans. Looking at Table 1 of Notebook 1: Percentage of Consumer Reviews Mentioning Each Theoretical Dimension by Country, cultural considerations dominate the conversation, appearing in 76.8% of all consumer discourse. This confirms what Hofstede (2001) has shown for decades, that cultural values are fundamental in shaping how people see brands.

Table 1 of Notebook 1. Percentage of Consumer Reviews Mentioning Each Theoretical Dimension by Country

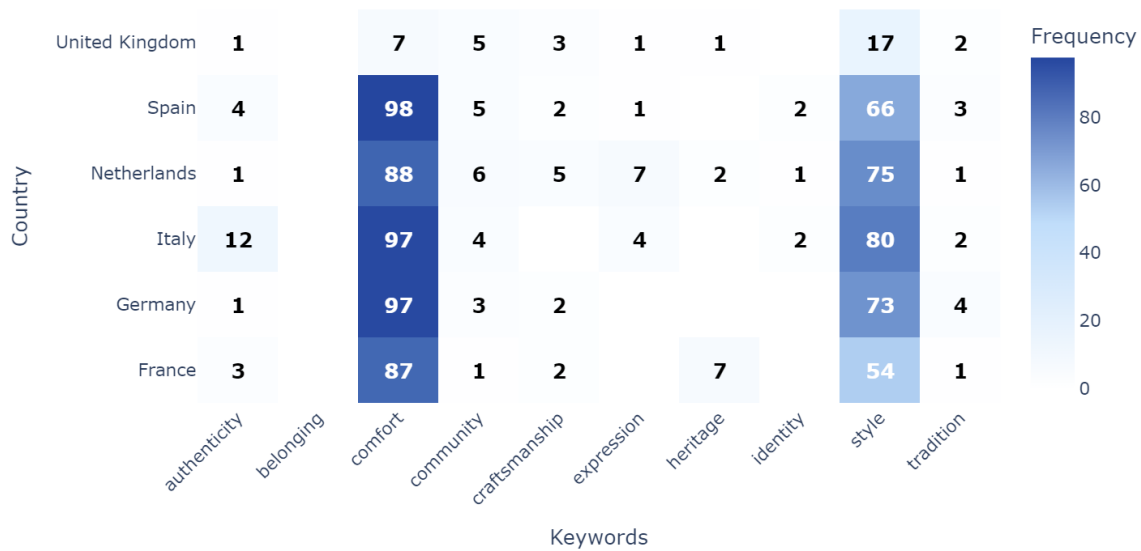
| Country | Cultural Values (%) | Digital Engagement (%) | Socio-Political Ideologies (%) |
|----------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| France | 82 | 18 | 15 |
| Germany | 85 | 25 | 22 |
| Italy | 83 | 19 | 16 |
| Netherlands | 81 | 20 | 20 |
| Spain | 84 | 17 | 21 |
| United Kingdom | 28 | 26 | 12 |

However, while cultural values are important across Europe, there is a significant difference in how this manifests. The Continental European markets, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Spain, all show very similar patterns, with cultural value mentions appearing in over 80% of consumer reviews. There appears to be a distinct divide across the English Channel that separates two fundamentally different approaches to brand evaluation.

The United Kingdom stands out clearly in this analysis. British consumers only mention cultural values in about 28% of their reviews, which represents not just a small difference but a fundamental change that challenges any assumption that European consumers think alike. British consumers approach global brands through a completely different mindset than their Continental neighbors, focusing much more on practical considerations rather than cultural meaning. This matches what De Mooij (2020) describes as fundamental differences in how cultures relate to brands.

When the analysis looked deeper into the specific words people use when talking about cultural aspects, interesting patterns emerged. Looking at Table 2: Cultural Values - Keyword Frequency by Country, "comfort" clearly dominates the conversation across Continental Europe. Spanish consumers mentioned it 98 times, Germans 97 times, and Italians 97 times. This shows something important about how Europeans are reinterpreting Vans' rebellious skateboarding heritage, they're basically transforming it into something that fits their values around quality, practicality, and everyday functionality.

Table 2. Cultural Values - Keyword Frequency by Country



"Style" emerges as the second most important cultural concept, particularly strong among Italian consumers who mentioned it 80 times, followed by the Netherlands with 75 mentions and Germany with 73. This shows how Europeans are weaving Vans into their fashion consciousness in ways that probably go well beyond what the brand originally intended. Meanwhile, the UK's much lower frequencies : just 7 mentions for "comfort" and 17 for "style", confirms this pattern of British consumers thinking about brands in fundamentally different ways.

4.2.2 Digital Engagement Patterns and Regional Variation

Digital interactions represent about 23.2% of consumer discourse, but their influence on brand reinterpretation goes far beyond this number. Digital platforms serve as what Gensler et al. (2013) call "arenas of cultural negotiation", spaces where consumers don't just interact with brands, but actively reshape their meaning through reviews, comments, and shared experiences.

Germany shows the highest frequency of digital engagement mentions, appearing in 25% of German reviews, closely followed by the UK at 26%. This aligns with the fact that both markets typically demonstrate higher expectations for digital sophistication and transparency. Supporting this, secondary data from Vans' internal analytics reflects a similar trend: German users spend the most time browsing the website (205 seconds on average) and exhibit the lowest cart abandonment rate (65.2%), indicating a strong level of engagement with the brand's digital interface.

Sentiment analysis reveals a counterintuitive pattern in German consumer responses. Despite exhibiting the highest digital engagement metrics (25% mention rate, 205-second average session duration, Table A2), German consumers express the most negative digital sentiment (-0.10, Figure 2: Average Sentiment Score by Country and Pillar). This contradiction suggests that high engagement

reflects elevated expectations rather than satisfaction, indicating a digitally sophisticated consumer base with demanding standards for online brand experiences.

Figure 2 of Notebook 2. Sentiment Distribution for Cultural Values by Country

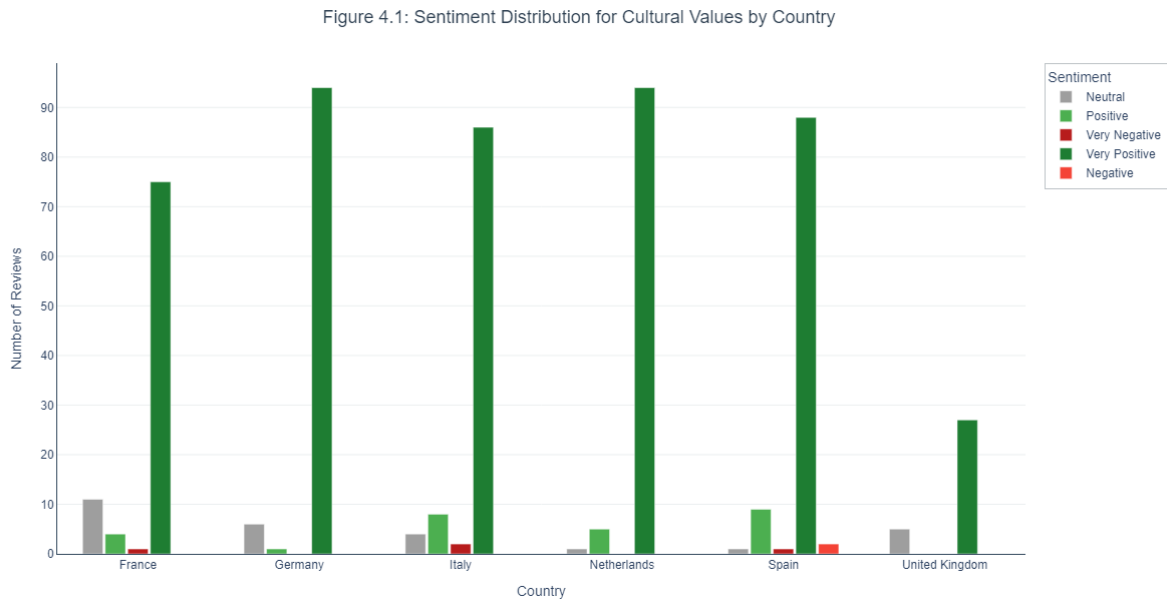


Figure 3 of Notebook 2. Sentiment Distribution for Digital Engagement by Country

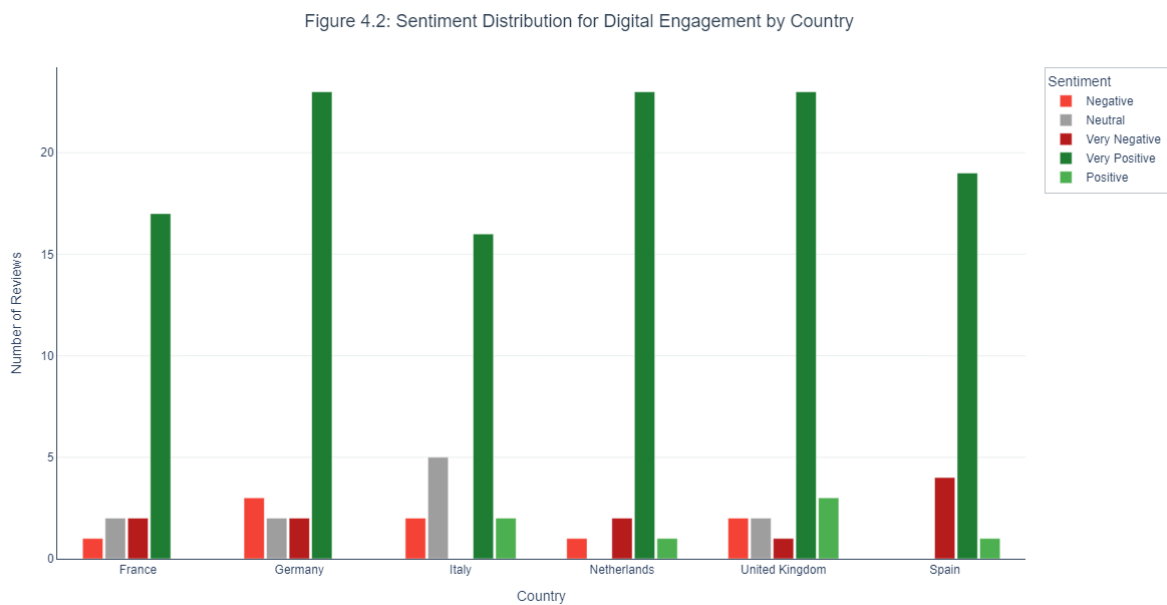


Figure 4 of Notebook 2. Sentiment Distribution for Social-Political Ideologies by Country

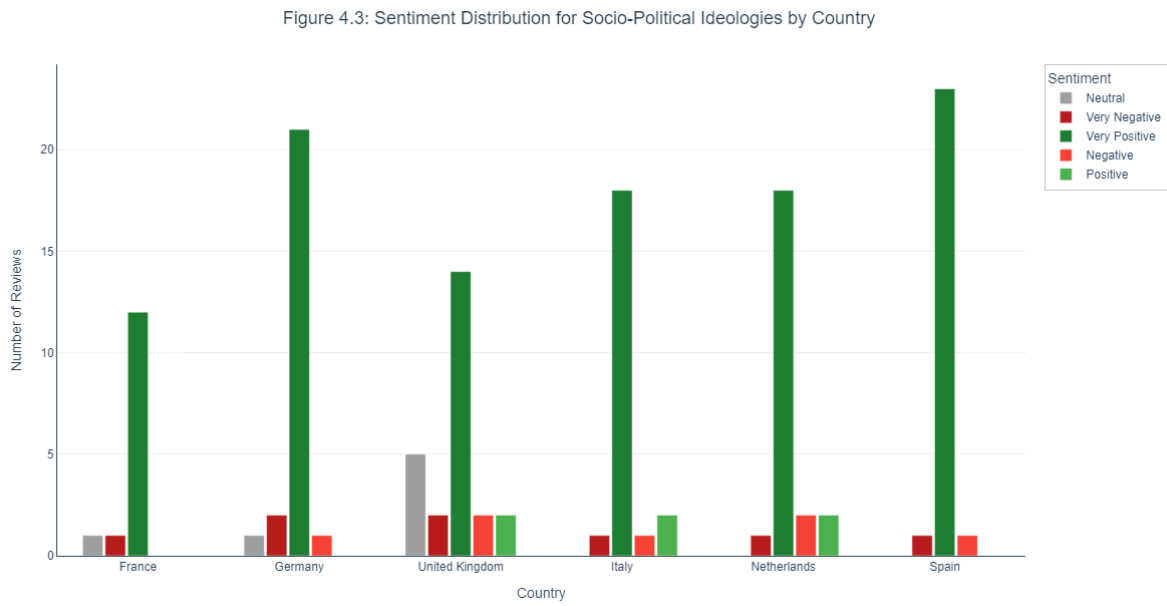
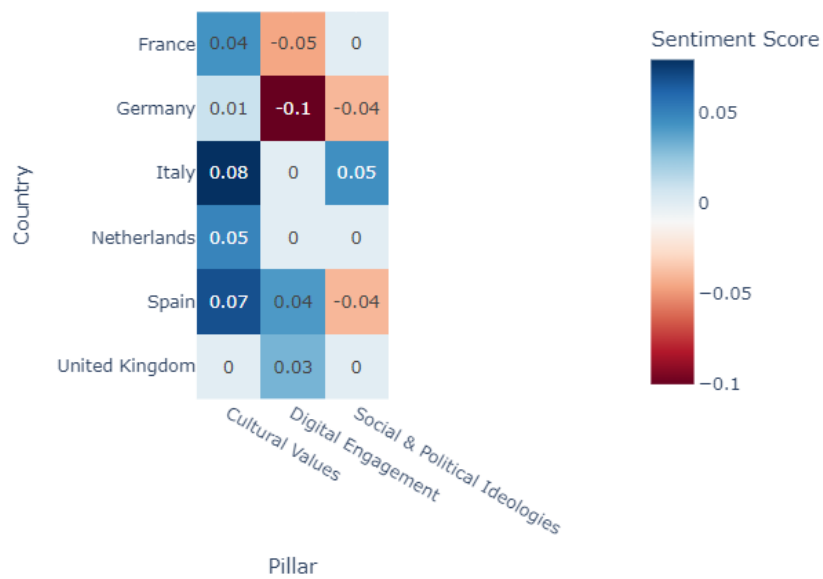


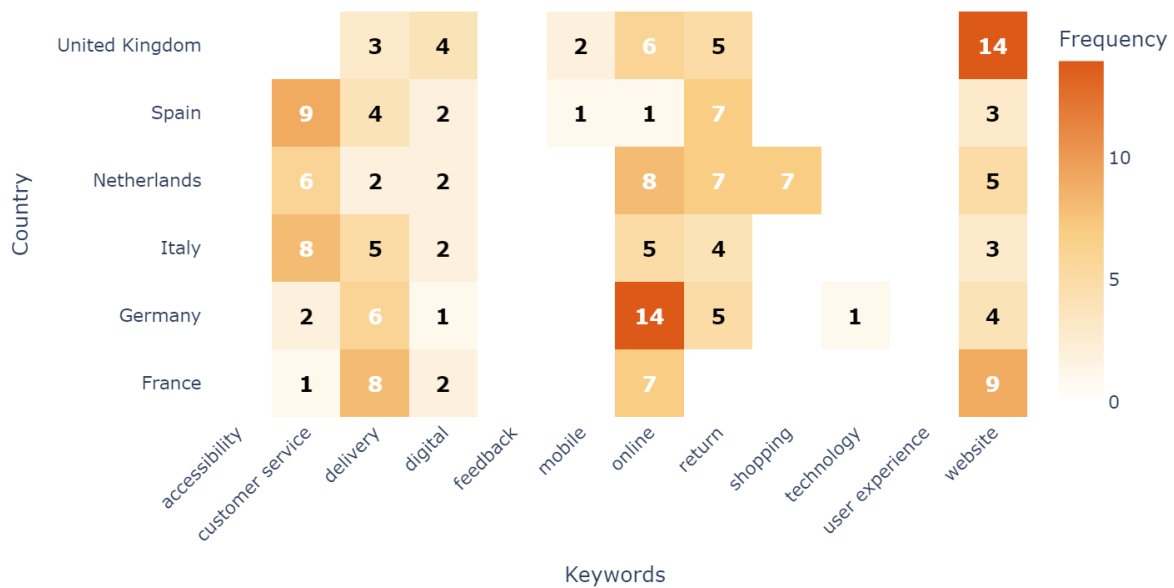
Figure 5. Average Sentiment Score by Country and Pillar



The UK shows a different pattern. British consumers place relatively high emphasis on digital engagement (26% mention rate) with moderate sentiment scores. This fits with their overall approach to brand evaluation, they're treating digital touchpoints as functional necessities rather than cultural experiences. It's pragmatic rather than emotional, which matches their broader transactional orientation toward brand relationships.

One revealing finding came from analyzing what consumers actually say about digital interactions. Looking at Table 3 : Digital Engagement - Keyword Frequency by Country, German consumers focus heavily on "online" experiences (14 mentions), while British consumers emphasize "website" functionality (14 mentions). Spanish and Italian consumers talk more about "customer service" (9 and 8 mentions respectively) and "delivery" concerns (most frequently mentioned in France with 8 mentions and Italy with 8 mentions).

Table 3. Digital Engagement - Keyword Frequency by Country



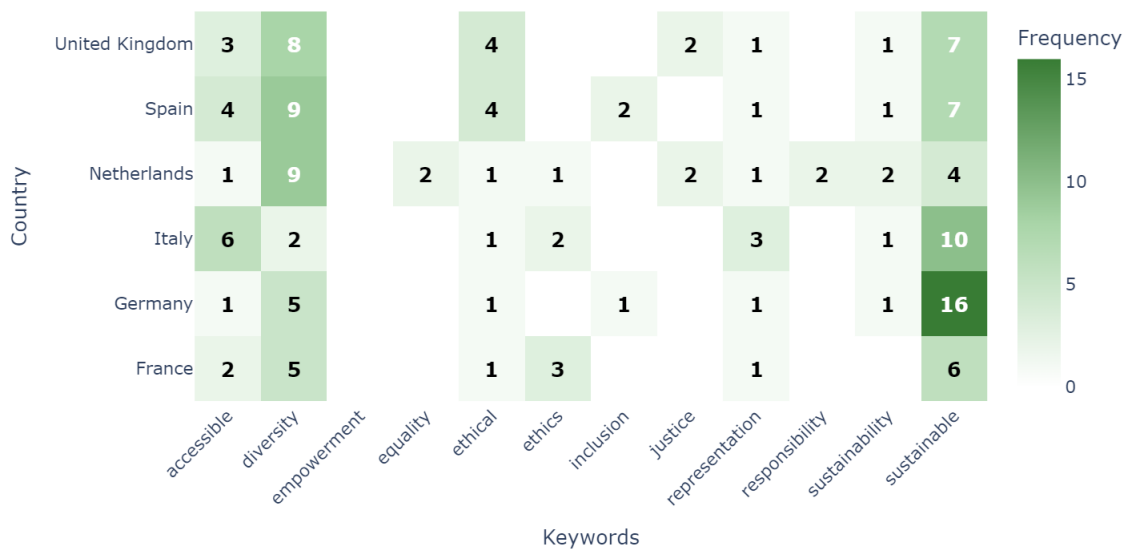
What stands out is that despite mobile traffic representing 68-75% of website visits across all European markets, consumers barely mention mobile experiences in their reviews. Spain had just one mention of mobile engagement across the entire dataset. This disconnect between behavior and conscious evaluation reveals a significant gap, people are primarily using mobile devices to interact with Vans, but they're not thinking about it as a distinct experience worth commenting on. This suggests big opportunities for mobile optimization, especially considering that mobile conversion rates (1.1-1.9%) perform much worse than desktop rates (2.2-3.4%) across all markets.

4.2.3 Socio-Political Dimensions of Consumer Brand Evaluation

The socio-political dimension proved to be the most unpredictable aspect of brand interpretation, representing 19.6% of consumer discourse but showing big variations in both how often it's discussed and how people feel about it. This dimension highlights what Izberk-Bilgin (2012) has argued about how modern consumers expect brands to take positions on social issues, but the European data shows this expectation is far from uniform.

Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands are most likely to bring up socio-political themes when talking about Vans, with mention rates between 20-22%. When Table 4 : Social & Political ideologies - Keyword Frequency by Country was examined, clear patterns emerged. German consumers are particularly focused on "sustainable" practices ; mentioning this 16 times, which makes sense given Germany's leadership in environmental consciousness. Spanish consumers emphasize "diversity" (9 mentions), reflecting their progressive social policies and showing how national political climates directly influence what consumers expect from global brands.

Table 4. Social & Political ideologies - Keyword Frequency by Country



The sentiment analysis presents a more complex picture. As shown in Figure 4 of Notebook 2: Sentiment Distribution for Social-Political Ideologies by Country, Italy and Spain show mostly positive sentiment toward Vans' socio-political positioning, while Germany and France lean more toward neutral or negative responses. This is somewhat surprising, given that German consumers mention sustainability most often, we might expect a more positive view. However, the data suggests that their critical stance extends to social responsibility as well, indicating higher standards and less willingness to be easily satisfied.

The UK continues to take a different approach in this context as well. British consumers show the lowest engagement with socio-political themes, and when they do engage, they express the least

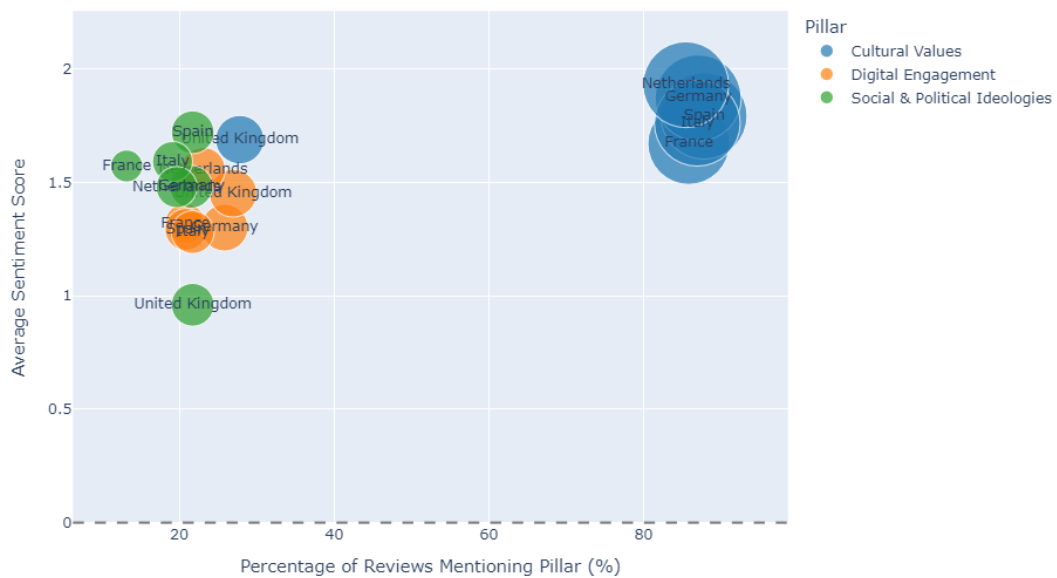
positive sentiment. This confirms what we see across all dimensions : British consumers maintain a more individualistic, functionally-focused approach to brand relationships. They seem less interested in what the brand stands for socially and more concerned with what it does for them personally.

What's particularly appealing is how these ideological considerations interact with cultural values. Spanish consumers, who show high positive sentiment for both cultural values and socio-political ideologies, seem to look for brands that align with both their lifestyle preferences and their social values. This represents integrated thinking rather than separate evaluation.

4.2.4 Cross-Dimensional Analysis and Regional Clustering

One of the most interesting aspects of this analysis came from examining how the three dimensions interact with each other. Looking at Figure 6: Pillar Mention Rate vs. Sentiment by Country, clear patterns emerge that show just how sophisticated modern brand evaluation has become.

Figure 6. Pillar Mention Rate vs. Sentiment by Country



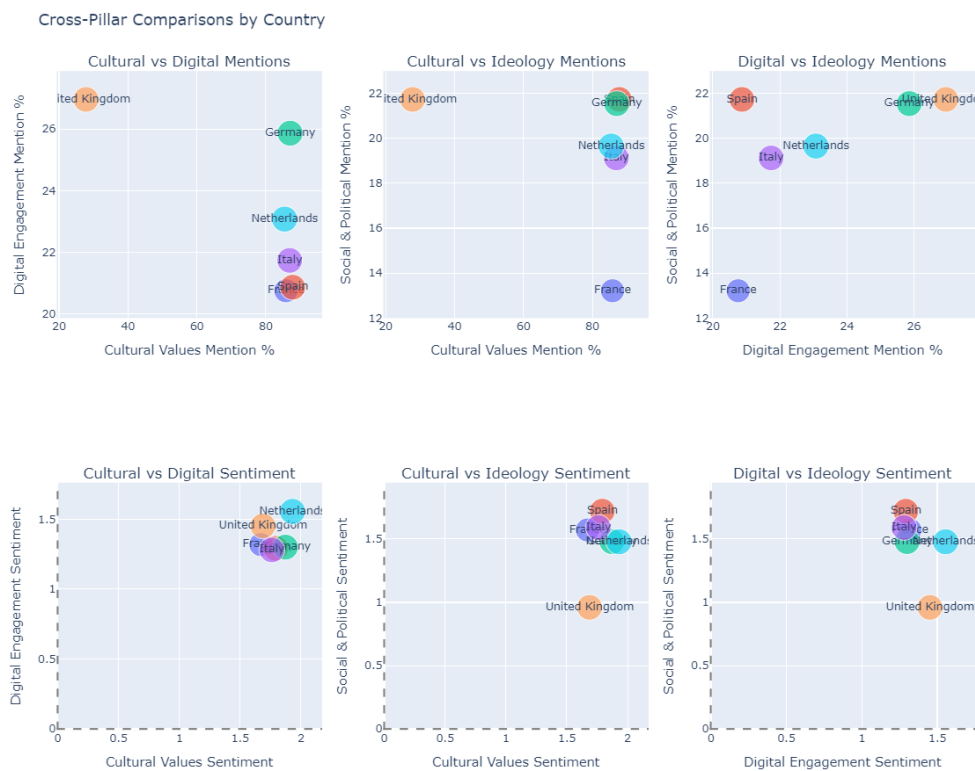
A clear positive correlation emerges between digital engagement and socio-political mentions across countries, indicating that consumers who are more digitally active are also more likely to evaluate brands through ideological perspectives. This finding aligns with Labrecque et al. (2013), who argue that digital empowerment enhances consumers' ability to form more nuanced and critical relationships with brands. In this context, digital fluency appears to enable greater awareness and engagement with social values in brand narratives.

Among continental European markets, sentiment scores across cultural and digital dimensions tend to be aligned. When consumers respond positively to Vans' cultural presence, they often show similar approval of its digital experience, suggesting a more integrated approach to brand perception.

The United Kingdom, however, breaks this trend. British consumers express lower sentiment toward cultural aspects and only moderate sentiment toward digital engagement, highlighting the distinctive nature of the UK's consumer culture in relation to broader European patterns.

As illustrated in Figure 7: Sentiment Comparison Across Dimensions and Countries, these cross-dimensional patterns become even clearer. Spanish consumers demonstrate high sentiment across all three pillars, cultural values, socio-political ideologies, and digital engagement, reflecting a preference for brands that align holistically with their values, lifestyle, and digital expectations. Italian consumers follow a similar pattern, though the sentiment is somewhat less pronounced.

Figure 7. Sentiment Comparison Across Dimensions and Countries



The UK's cross-dimensional profile remains consistently different. British consumers show relatively lower cultural sentiment compared to their digital sentiment, and much lower scores for socio-political ideologies compared to their digital experiences. This indicates a consumer culture that separates brand evaluation, they judge digital functionality separately from cultural meaning, and they're less interested in ideological alignment altogether.

4.3 Supporting Insights from Secondary Data

4.3.1 Cultural Values Context

The market research confirms cultural dimension variations identified in sentiment analysis. Looking at Table A1 (Regional Differences in Brand Perception and Purchase Behaviour), German consumers show highest scores for "Self-expression" (25.3%) versus UK (21.2%), supporting the review finding that Germans mentioned cultural concepts in 85% of reviews compared to UK's 28%. French consumers lead in "Creativity" associations (18.8%), aligning with Continental European markets prioritizing cultural meaning over functional benefits.

4.3.2 Digital Engagement Validation

The behavioral data validates sentiment analysis digital patterns. As shown in Table A2 (Digital Behavior and Consumer Journey Insights), German users show highest engagement (205-second average session, 65.2% cart abandonment) supporting the finding that 25% of German reviews mention digital aspects. However, despite having the best engagement with the website, German consumers express negative feelings about digital experiences (-0.10). This suggests they have high standards as they engage heavily but are more critical when things don't meet their expectations.

The mobile-desktop disconnect appears across all markets: 68-75% mobile traffic but mobile conversion rates (1.1-1.9%) underperform desktop (2.2-3.4%), validating the sentiment finding that mobile experiences rarely appear in consumer discourse despite dominating actual usage.

4.3.3 Socio-Political Search Patterns

Search patterns validate ideological variations from sentiment analysis. Table A3 (Vans YoY Search Trends) shows that German searches frequently pair sustainability terms with Vans, supporting the finding of 16 sustainability mentions. Markets with higher socio-political engagement in reviews (Germany, Spain, Netherlands at 20-22%) show different search behaviors than low-engagement markets (UK at 12%).

4.3.4 Market Intelligence Triangulation

The triangulation of multiple secondary data sources confirms the three-cluster European model identified in sentiment analysis. Consumer segmentation studies identify distinct archetypes that align perfectly with sentiment analysis findings: "Cultural Integrators" representing Continental European markets, "Functional Evaluators" representing the British market, and "Critical Sophisticates" representing Germanic markets within the Continental cluster.

E-commerce performance metrics validate the sentiment-behavior relationships identified in review analysis. Markets showing positive cultural sentiment in reviews (Spain, Italy) demonstrate higher average order values and customer lifetime value metrics in sales data. Markets with critical digital sentiment but high engagement (Germany) show high browse-to-purchase conversion rates, supporting the interpretation that negative sentiment reflects elevated expectations rather than dissatisfaction.

5. CONCLUSION

This research addressed the fundamental question of how cultural values, digital engagement, and socio-political ideologies influence global brand reinterpretation in digital contexts. Through computational sentiment analysis of 685 consumer reviews across six European markets, the study reveals systematic regional variations in brand interpretation that challenge traditional models of uniform global branding. The findings demonstrate that consumers actively reconstruct brand meaning through the dynamic interaction of cultural frameworks, digital experiences, and ideological orientations, fundamentally altering how global brands acquire meaning in local contexts.

The analysis reveals three distinct consumer clusters across European markets, each employing fundamentally different approaches to brand evaluation. Continental European markets demonstrate cultural integration patterns where brand meaning emerges through lifestyle authenticity and community belonging. British consumers exhibit functional pragmatism, prioritizing digital efficiency and practical benefits over cultural symbolism. Germanic markets within Continental Europe display sophisticated critical engagement, combining high behavioral interaction with elevated expectation standards. These patterns persist across multiple data sources and analytical approaches, indicating structural rather than superficial differences in consumer-brand relationships.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to Consumer Culture Theory by demonstrating how digital platforms function as cultural intermediaries that enable rather than homogenize consumer meaning-making processes. The study extends Thompson, C. J., & Haytko, D. L. (1997). conceptualization of consumers as active meaning-makers by revealing that cultural amplification occurs in digital environments, where technological mediation intensifies rather than diminishes cultural differences in brand interpretation. This finding aligns with Kozinets' (2010) recent work on digital consumer culture, which emphasizes the persistence of cultural heterogeneity in globalized markets, and supports Gensler (2013) observations about cultural distinctiveness in digital environments.

The investigation advances cultural dimensions theory by confirming Hofstede's (2001) framework relevance in digital contexts while identifying important limitations. The study introduces the concept of digitally-mediated cultural expression, where traditional cultural orientations manifest through technology-enabled behaviors, which builds on De Mooij (2020) and Hofstede's (2010) later work on cultural adaptation in digital marketing. However, the identification of three distinct European consumer clusters suggests that cultural convergence theory requires revision, as digital environments appear to amplify rather than reduce cultural distinctions. This challenges Steenkamp's (2019) assumptions about digital globalization creating uniform consumer behavior and supports Cleveland (2018) findings on persistent cultural differences in global markets.

Building on Izberk-Bilgin's (2012) work on consumer resistance and Thompson, C. J., & Haytko, D. L. (1997) research on ideological recruitment, this study demonstrates how ideological consumption extends beyond opposition movements to shape routine consumer-brand relationships. The research reveals that cross-dimensional integration, where Cultural Values, Digital Engagement, and Socio-Political Ideologies interact simultaneously, produces regionally distinct patterns of brand meaning construction.

Evidence from this study indicates that platform-mediated interactions generate "cultural amplification cycles" instead of producing homogenizing effects, a finding that advances digital brand engagement theory beyond Hollebeek (2014) seminal contributions while contesting traditional theoretical assumptions regarding digital convergence. This empirical evidence supports Arvidsson and Caliandro's (2016) theoretical work on culturally-embedded digital behaviors and demonstrates that consumers employ digital touchpoints as instruments of cultural expression rather than conforming to uniform global standards.

Finally, the research extends brand reinterpretation theory by demonstrating that global brand meaning emerges through localized meaning construction, interpretations that reference global brand identity but derive significance from local cultural frameworks. This process operates through dynamic cultural negotiation in digital spaces, challenging traditional models of uniform global branding as outlined by Cayla and Arnould (2008). The concept of "glocalized brand meanings" contributes to Torelli (2019) understanding of how global brands acquire culturally-specific significance while maintaining coherent international identity.

5.2 Managerial Implications

The findings necessitate fundamental revision of European market strategies, moving away from uniform approaches toward culturally-differentiated digital positioning. The research identifies three distinct consumer archetypes requiring tailored strategic responses that acknowledge regional differences in brand evaluation priorities and digital behavior patterns.

Germanic markets demand technological excellence combined with substantive sustainability messaging. German consumers demonstrate the highest digital engagement metrics yet express critical sentiment, indicating elevated expectations rather than dissatisfaction. Brands must prioritize digital sophistication and transparent environmental practices to meet these demanding standards. Marketing messages emphasizing efficiency, innovation, and measurable sustainability outcomes resonate more effectively than aspirational or lifestyle-focused communications in these markets.

Spanish and Italian consumers present different challenges, requiring integrated strategies that link cultural authenticity with clear social positioning. These markets evaluate brands holistically, expecting alignment between lifestyle messaging and socio-political values. Brands cannot separate cultural positioning from social responsibility in Latin markets, as consumers expect coherent narratives connecting heritage authenticity with contemporary social consciousness. Marketing strategies should emphasize community belonging, cultural heritage, and progressive social values as interconnected brand attributes rather than separate messaging pillars.

British consumers prioritize functional benefits and digital efficiency over cultural storytelling, representing a fundamentally different approach to brand evaluation. Marketing messages should emphasize practical value, technological functionality, and straightforward benefits rather than cultural heritage narratives. Digital experiences must prioritize usability and efficiency, as British consumers evaluate digital touchpoints as functional necessities rather than cultural expressions.

The mobile-desktop disconnect affects all markets equally, presenting standardized optimization opportunities across European markets. Despite 68-75% mobile traffic across all regions, consumers rarely acknowledge mobile experiences in conscious evaluation. Improving mobile

functionality could enhance satisfaction universally without requiring cultural customization, representing efficient resource allocation for digital enhancement initiatives.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations constrain how broadly these findings can be applied. The study only captures consumers who write reviews after purchasing, which likely overrepresents both very satisfied and very dissatisfied customers while missing moderate opinions. Most consumers don't write reviews, so we cannot know if silent customers share these patterns.

The research period (2022-2025) includes unique circumstances meaning post-pandemic digital adoption and economic uncertainty. Consumer attitudes during this time may not represent normal patterns, particularly regarding digital engagement and cultural priorities. Economic stress or health concerns might have influenced how people evaluated brands in ways that won't persist.

Using automated classification to sort reviews into cultural, digital, and political categories inevitably oversimplifies complex expressions. When German consumers mention "sustainable" 16 times, we can count frequency but cannot understand what sustainability means to them culturally or why it matters in their specific context. Computational analysis captures patterns but misses nuance.

Translation presents another limitation. Converting Spanish, German, Italian, French, and Dutch reviews to English for analysis likely obscures culturally-specific ways of expressing emotions and values that would be apparent to native speakers. Some cultural meaning gets lost in translation, no matter how sophisticated the translation technology.

Focusing on Vans limits generalizability across product categories. The brand's associations with youth culture and skateboarding may produce cultural interpretations different from luxury goods, technology products, or everyday items. Whether these three consumer clusters apply to other brands remains unclear.

Future research should combine computational analysis with ethnographic studies conducted by researchers who understand local cultural contexts. Following the same consumers over multiple economic cycles could distinguish permanent patterns from temporary effects. Comparing multiple brands across different categories would test whether the three-cluster model represents general European consumer behavior or category-specific responses.

Extending this framework to non-European markets represents an important opportunity. Asian, African, or Latin American consumers might show entirely different patterns, revealing whether these findings reflect specifically European cultural configurations or broader global consumer behavior.

Finally, studying pre-purchase decision-making could illuminate how cultural meaning-making influences initial brand selection, not just post-purchase evaluation. Understanding the complete consumer journey would provide deeper insights into how cultural amplification operates throughout the decision process.

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6. APPENDIX

6.1 Primary Data Results

Figure 1 of Notebook 1: Percentage of opinions mentioning each pillar per country

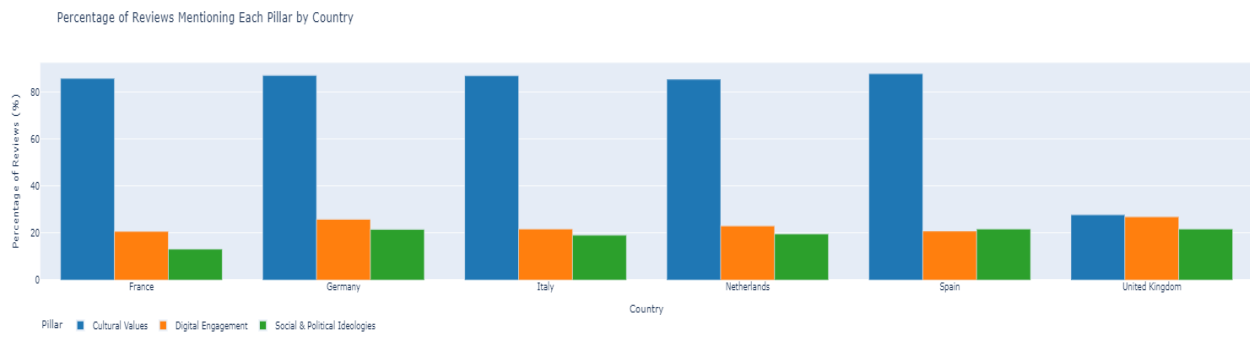


Figure 2 of Notebook 2: Sentiment Distribution for Cultural Values by Country

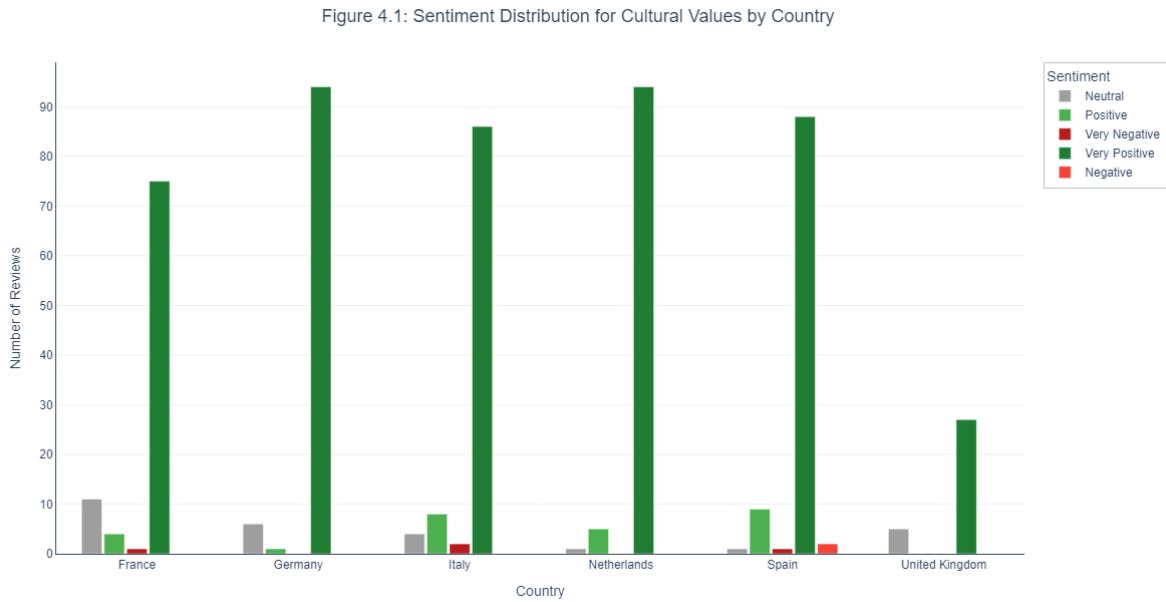


Figure 3 of Notebook 2: Sentiment Distribution for Digital Engagement by Country

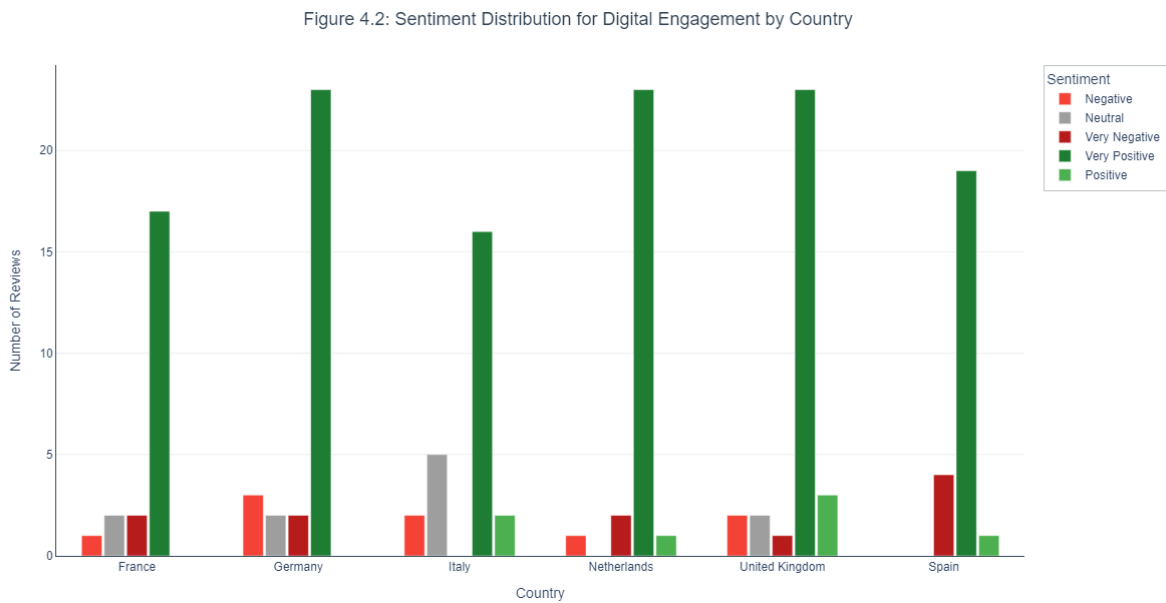


Figure 4 of Notebook 2: Sentiment Distribution for Social-Political Ideologies by Country

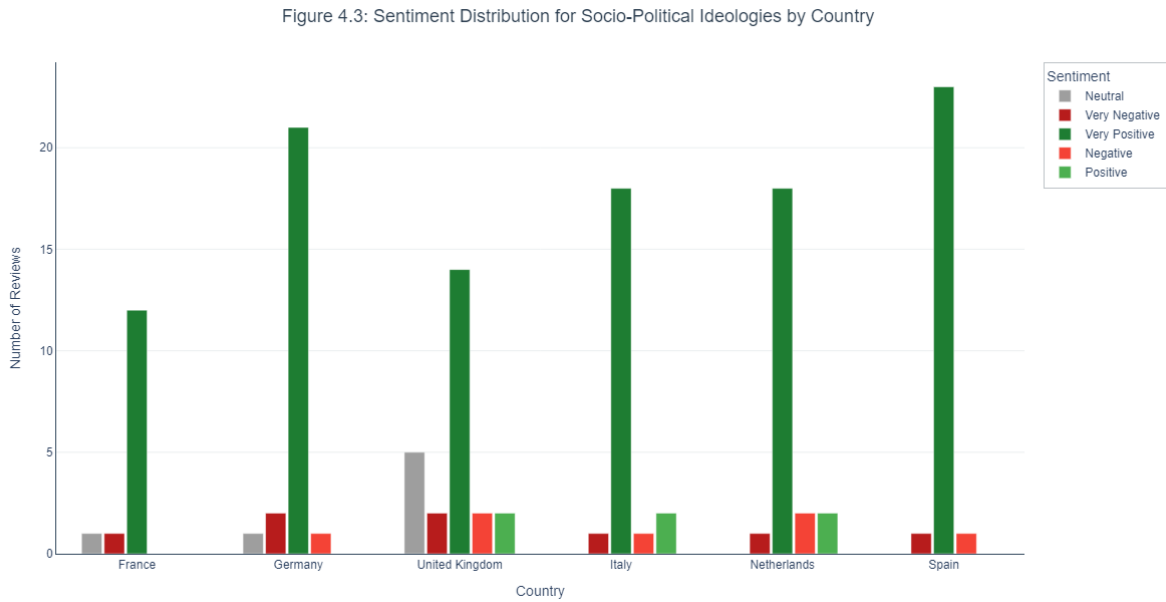


Figure 5: Average Sentiment Score by Country and Pillar

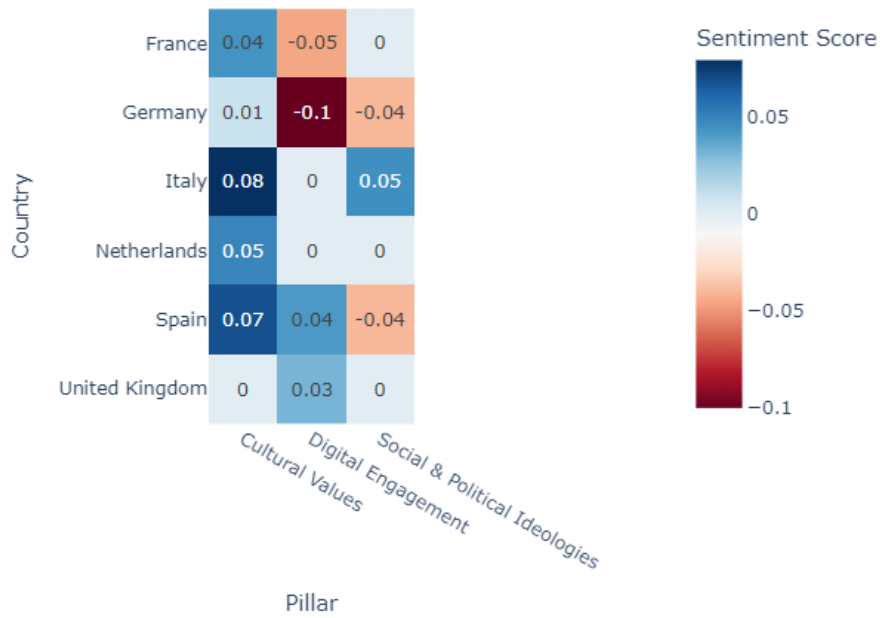


Figure 6: Pillar Mention Rate vs. Sentiment by Country

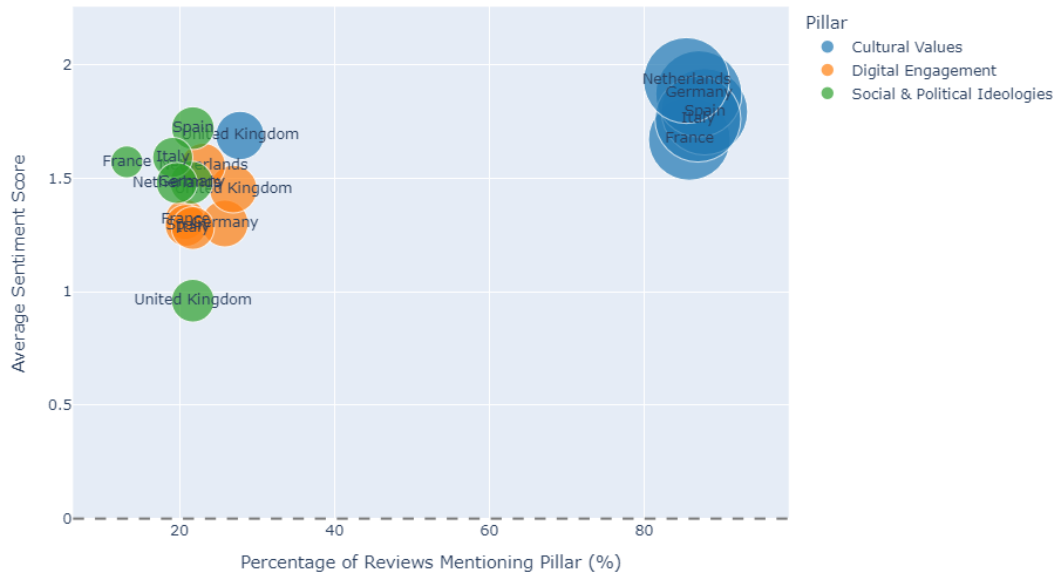


Figure 7: Sentiment Comparison Across Dimension and Countries

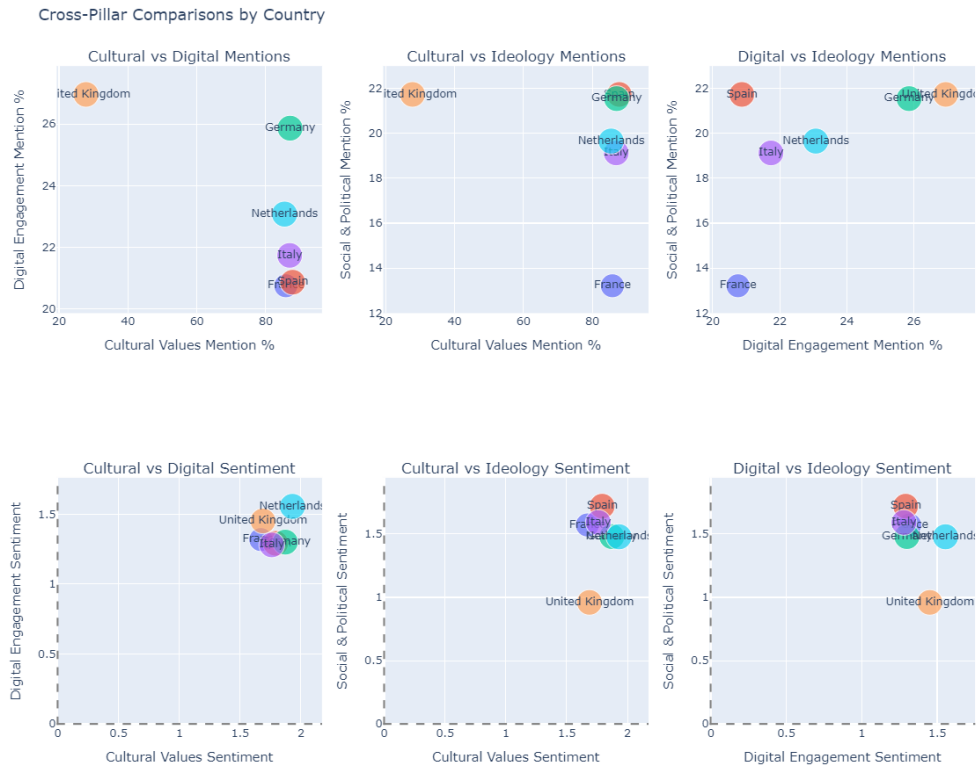


Table 2: Keyword Frequency Heatmap for Cultural Values by Country

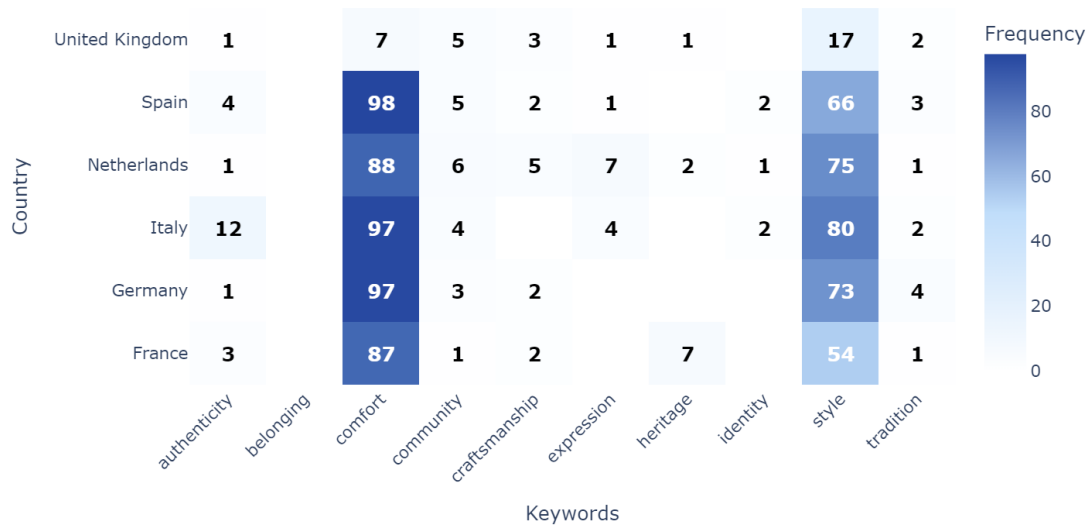


Table 3: Keyword Frequency Heatmap for Digital Engagement by Country

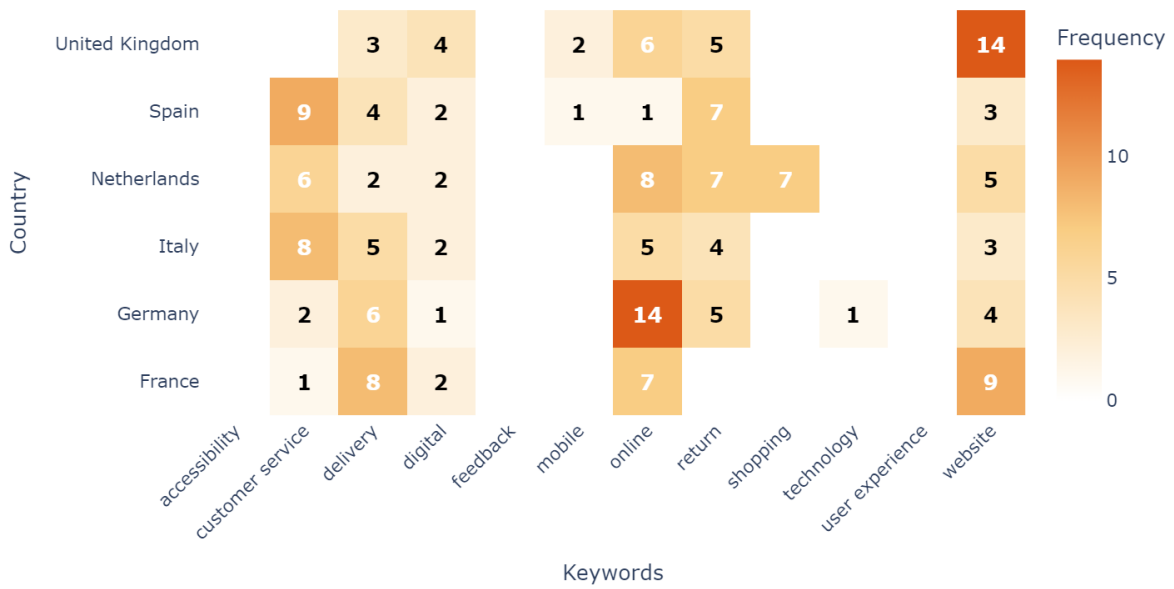
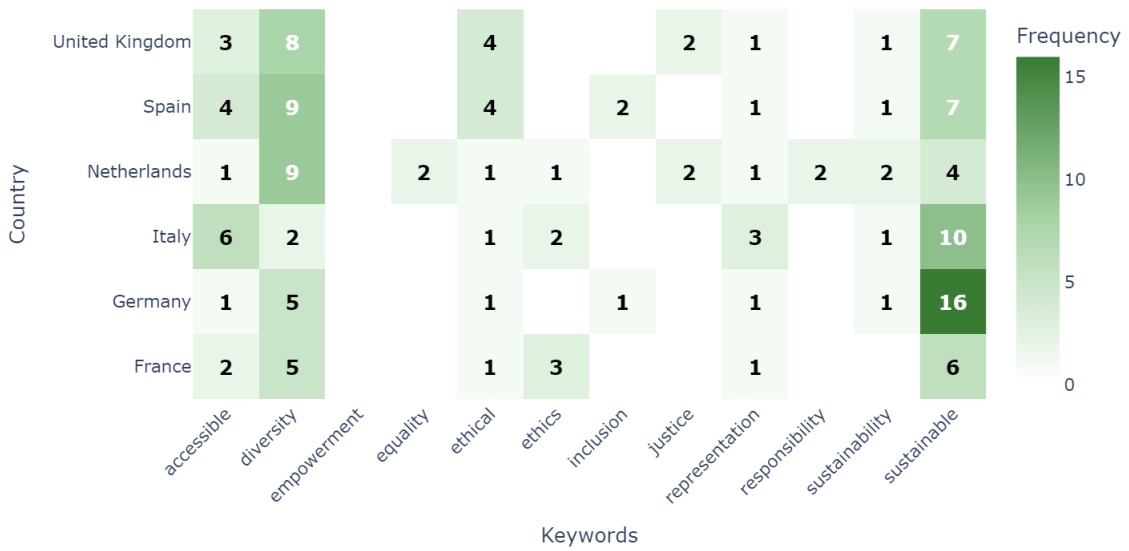


Table 4: Keyword Frequency Heatmap for Social & Political Ideologies by Country



6.2 Secondary Data Results

Table A1: Regional Differences in Brand Perception and Purchase Behaviour

Findings from an internal study by Vans and Kantar Millward Brown, focused on consumer perceptions in the UK, France, and Germany. Conducted between September and December 2017, the research involved online interviews with 400 people per country (ages 16–44), all decision-makers in clothing and footwear purchases.

| Brand Attribute | UK (%) | France (%) | Germany (%) |
|----------------------|--------|------------|-------------|
| Self-expression | 21.2 | 24.8 | 25.3 |
| Connection to Sports | 18.6 | 17.4 | 20.7 |
| Creativity | 16.6 | 18.8 | 18 |
| Timeless Identity | 13.7 | 13.9 | 13.4 |
| Style/Design | 11.9 | 10.3 | 11.6 |
| No Overpromising | 9.1 | | 5.3 |

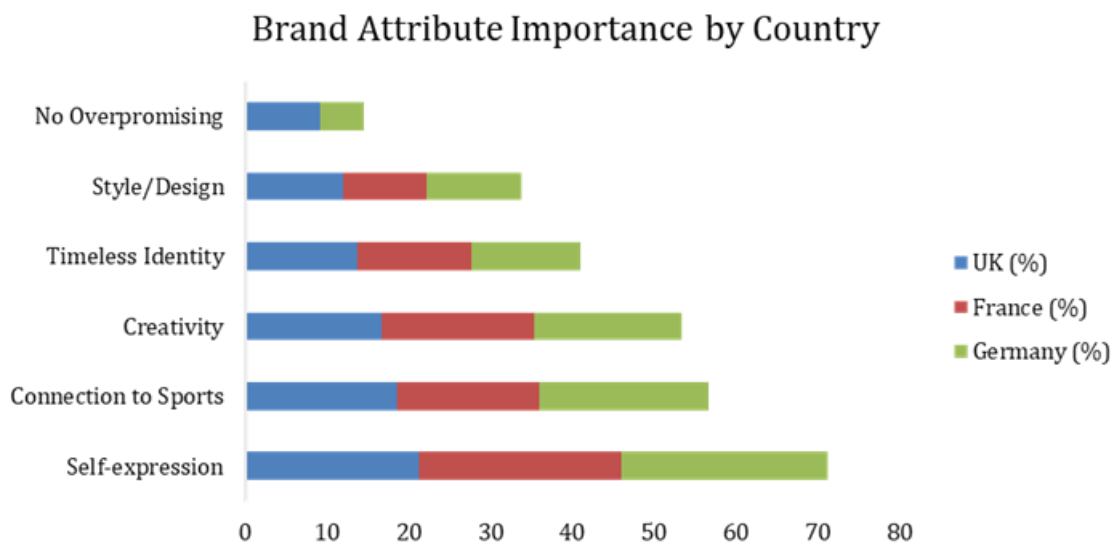
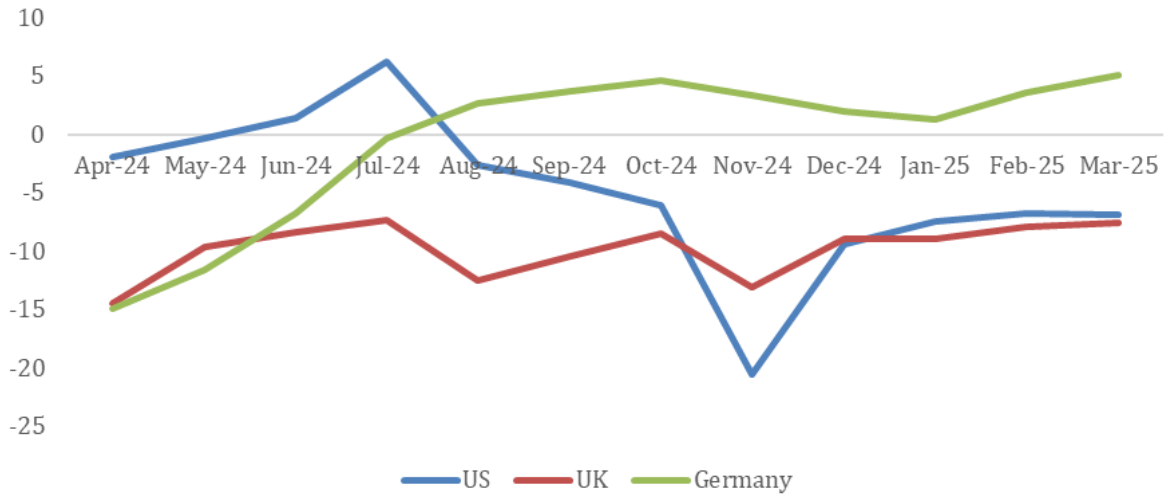


Table A3: Vans YoY Search Trends

Vans YoY Search Trends



[Platform-Specific Performance and Market Dynamics]

This presents search visibility trends and competitive performance metrics that provide additional context for understanding how consumers engage with the brand in digital spaces.

| Region | Search Visibility Trend | Q4 FY25 YoY Growth | Competitive Performance | Key Insight |
|----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| United States | Persistent, slightly improving | -8.0% | Underperforming | Stabilization efforts may be working |
| United Kingdom | Multi-quarter decline | -10.8% | Underperforming | Disconnect with brand expectations |
| Germany | Positive growth | 0.20% | Closely aligned | Stabilized brand interest |
| China (Taobao) | Decline slowing | -8.8% | Underperforming | Partial rebound in attention |

Table A2: Digital Behavior and Consumer Journey Insights

| Market | Avg. Bounce Rate (%) | Cart Abandonment Rate (%) | Avg. Session Duration (sec) | Mobile Share of Traffic (%) | Desktop Conversion Rate (%) | Mobile Conversion Rate (%) |
|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| UK | 42.1 | 68.5 | 189 | 72 | 3.1 | 1.6 |
| Germany | 39.7 | 65.2 | 205 | 68 | 3.4 | 1.9 |
| Spain | 56.3 | 79.4 | 143 | 75 | 2.2 | 1.1 |
| Italy | 54.8 | 77.6 | 151 | 73 | 2.4 | 1.2 |

Table A4: Qualitative Research Participant Demographics

| Country | Group | Age Range | Gender | Specialization | Location |
|----------------|-------|-----------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| UK | 1-10 | 18-25 | 6 Female 4 Male | Expressive Creators | Manchester & Birmingham |
| UK | 11-20 | 26-35 | 4 Female 6 Male | Expressive Creators | Manchester & Birmingham |
| Spain | 1-10 | 18-25 | 4 Female 6 Male | Expressive Creators | Madrid, Seville & Barcelona |
| Spain | 11-20 | 26-35 | 6 Female 4 Male | Expressive Creators | Madrid, Seville & Barcelona |
| Germany | 1-10 | 18-25 | 6 Female 4 Male | Expressive Creators | Berlin & Munich |
| Germany | 11-20 | 26-35 | 4 Female 6 Male | Expressive Creators | Berlin & Munich |

