

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

**CROSS BORDER SHOPPING OF DUTCH CUSTOMERS
IN GERMANY – A TARGET GROUP ANALYSIS**

Master Thesis

Business Administration: International Management and Consultancy

Tim Lippers (M.Sc. Psychology)

1st Supervisor: Dr. Raymond Loohuis

2nd Supervisor: Dr. Arnold H. Enklaar

Abstract

This research examined the driving forces behind Dutch consumers' cross-border shopping trips in Germany, with an emphasis on both utilitarian economic and underlying cultural factors. Based on the literature about cultural and utilitarian factors and their effect on cross-border shopping, a semi-structured interviewing technique was used to interview participants. The findings reveal that price advantages and product availability are primary motivations for cross-border trips. Dutch customers were found to be very solution-orientated, always seeking immediate and effective solutions to their needs. Cultural factors such as valuing the quality of life played a more subtle but still important role. None of the interviewees perceived any advertising efforts from German retailers, disclosing the potential of marketing unused.

Thus, Dutch consumers primarily engage in cross-border shopping in Germany due to practical, price-driven motivations. However, cultural nuances still shape their overall shopping experience, offering German retailers valuable opportunities to increase visits, spending, and loyalty through marketing retail strategies tailored to the investigated needs and preferences of Dutch customers in Germany. This research filled a gap in understanding how cultural and utilitarian economic reasons influence Dutch consumer behaviour in cross-border shopping and provides actionable insights for retailers.

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1. Introduction

Topic and its relevance

Cross-border shopping is the phenomenon where consumers purchase goods in neighbouring countries, often driven by price differences and product availability (Studzińska et al., 2018; Burstein et al., 2023). Those living closer to borders tend to engage more in cross-border shopping, resulting in reduced domestic spending (Agarwal et al., 2017).

However, this phenomenon also seems to be influenced by tourism because people actively choose to shop abroad for the trip itself (Makkonen et al., 2016; Studzińska et al., 2018). Since there is a high number of Dutch customers in the German city of Gronau (Westf.), an area that has not yet been researched, this location will be the focus of the investigation. It is not entirely clear if Dutch customers come only because of price differences or if there is more than that. Especially for retailers, it is interesting to understand what these Dutch customers aim to get in Germany besides saving money. Next to the economic factors this research will investigate if and how the behaviour of Dutch border shoppers may also be driven by their cultural characteristics as well as the possible desire of experiencing aspects of German culture.

Research gap

There is a gap in research that goes beyond analyzing only the more visible reasons for cross-border shopping like price differences or travelled distance. Thus, some articles have shown that people in other countries cross the border to save money, for the quality of products, and because of the short distance to be travelled and more reasons other than based on their cultural characteristics (Makkonen, 2016; Szytniewski et al., 2017; Leick et al., 2021; Batyk et al., 2023; Pileliné et al., 2023). Till today, it has not been investigated how and if cross-border shopping is driven by cultural factors and differences between two neighboring countries.

Based on Hofstede (2001), there may be culturally based tendencies of Dutch customers that drive them to explore different aspects of German compared to Dutch culture when shopping and because it may attract them more than shopping at home. These cultural factors may also influence the frequency of cross-border shopping. Additionally, there is a research gap in scientific research on cross-border shopping at the area of interest (Gronau (Westf., Germany)) and a high interest on insights for German retailers.

Theoretical positioning

Deeper insights are needed to understand why so many Dutch customers shop in Germany to be able to advise retailers to adapt their marketing strategies towards this specific target group. Thus, the information that the following research will provide is twofold. On the one hand, there are **utilitarian reasons** like the price differences, the distance travelled, the product ranges and availability (Makkonen, 2016; Szytniewski et al., 2017; Leick et al., 2021; Batyk et al., 2023; Pileliné et al., 2023; Arnold, 2024; Titulaer, 2024; Oversteegen, 2023) which hypothesizes that Dutch customers come regularly for special shops or orders.

On the other hand, based on a cultural analysis outlined in the theoretical framework, there may as well be **underlying reasons** like general customer preferences which are subject to cultural characteristics of Dutch culture (Gelbrich et al., 2023; Hofstede, 2001; Meyer, 2014; Meyer 2024; Pandey, & Devasagayam, 2015); Schlizio, 2009; Schwartz, 2009; Zimu, 2023) which may be enhanced by the differences between the Dutch and German shops (BNNVARA, 2024; Quinders, 2024) as well as the different cultural profiles of these two cultures (Hofstede, 2001) that the Dutch customers may like to experience.

To give a glance, Dutch people are said to be more indulgent (Hofstede, 2001), meaning that they are out for enjoyment and value quality time more than money (Pandey, & Devasagayam, 2015). Thus, these cultural characteristics do not really align with the argument that Dutchmen only shop in Germany because of the price differences. Taken together, the analysis of these utilitarian and underlying reasons will provide a deeper understanding of why Dutch customers shop in Germany.

Purpose of the study

As there is good reason to assume that there may be more than just the utilitarian economic reasons causing Dutchmen to cross borders, it is crucial to investigate them as retailers may use the insights to increase their attractiveness to the Dutch target group. The following research questions will be investigated:

1. How do cultural factors drive consumer behaviour of Dutchmen in cross border shopping?
 - 1.1 To what extent do these differences vary among various target groups?
2. What are the implications for German retail strategies?

Research strategy and data

This study explores the factors influencing Dutch consumers' motivation to engage in cross-border shopping in Germany by investigating the independent variable of utilitarian reasons as well as underlying reasons which are assumed to affect the dependent variable: willingness to shop across the border (in Germany). A semi-structured interview approach is applied to investigate the target group. The sampling took place physically in the German border town, Gronau (Westf., Germany) and through online interviews via Microsoft Teams. The sample size will be guided by the principle of saturation to ensure data completeness (Saunders et al., 2018).

Expected contribution (value) of the study

Through the qualitative interviews among the target group and the thematic coding of interview data, accompanied by an analysis of selected secondary data from customer movement and differences, this research will enable a better understanding of the cross-border shopping motivations of Dutch customers.

Outline of the paper

In the theory chapter, the underlying, cultural aspects of the Dutch culture will be explored. Next, insights into the existing literature on the utilitarian will be explored. After that, a theoretical conceptual framework will be drafted. In the method chapter, the research design will be elaborated including data collection and analysis techniques. The result chapter is followed by the discussion and the conclusion. These findings lead to a deeper understanding of Dutch customers' cross-border shopping visits in Germany – especially from the cultural side which has not been investigated for this area yet. Lastly, the insights are translated into practical implications for retail strategies to reach Dutch customers and increase their visits and spending in Germany.

2. Theory background

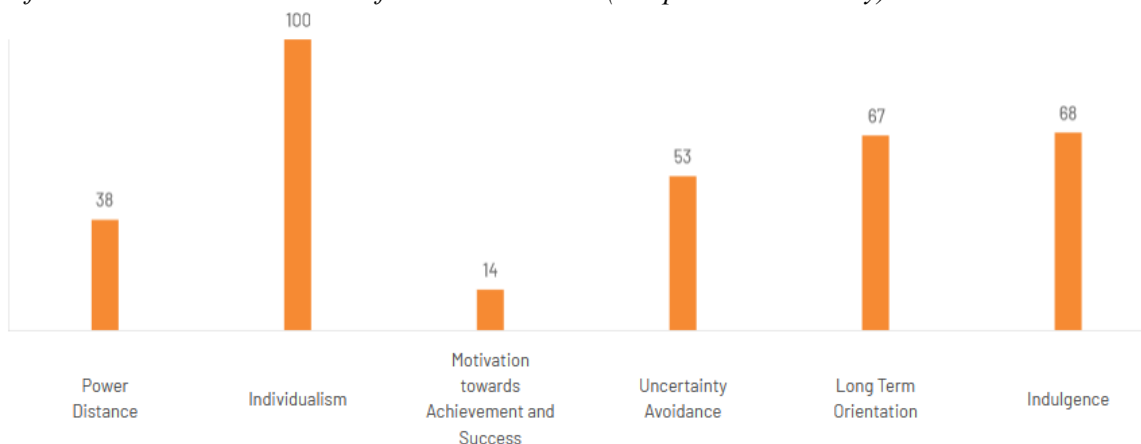
2.1 Underlying reasons – Cultural influences

To understand the behaviour of Dutch customers and what motivates them to cross borders for shopping, it is essential to first understand their culture and their preferences in general. Gelbrich et al. (2023) found that culture influences consumer behaviour in terms of which products people search for, how they judge them and if they choose to buy them. Furthermore, Zimu (2023) found that the cultural factors of Hofstede influence consumer behaviour in e-commerce. He argues that businesses must understand the effect that cultural aspects can have on consumer behaviour. Furthermore, characteristics of different cultures were argued to be so different from each other that more research is needed for each culture. As mentioned already, there are many Dutch customers living near the border, visiting Germany, and scientific insights and practical implications for German retailers on how to address this specific target group are missing. The Dutch culture will now be explained based on different theories.

First, some of Hofstede's dimensions need to be analysed. They will shortly be described while some get more emphasis in the following as they are more interesting as others for this research. Hofstede's model is a framework designed to help understand and interact effectively with people from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds by analysing six cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2001) and for the sake of this research, only the Dutch values are analysed. Hofstede's dimensions are used as the guideline while more sources about cultural insights will be used to support the assumptions made to be tested in the interview. It is a country comparison tool but for the sake of this research, only the Dutch values are selected.

Figure 1

Hofstede's dimensions – scores of the Dutch culture (compared to Germany).



As seen in Figure 1, Dutch people score 38 on the power distance scale which means this culture values flat hierarchies, equality, decentralized authority and open communication between all parts of society. The highest possible score (100) on individualism indicated that this culture is characterized by personal freedom, self-reliance, independence and a high value on personal achievement. Thus, the decision to shop in Germany may, in the first place, be influenced by the focus on personal satisfaction and freedom of choice. The rather low score on “Motivation towards Achievement and Success” means that people in the Netherlands value the quality of life and caring for others more than reaching for achievements at all costs. It also suggests that they may value a work-life balance more than climbing the ladder towards success (Rosemann & Enklaar, forthcoming). The rather high score on the dimension of long-term orientation indicates that this culture is quite forward-thinking and willing to break traditions in case it is needed and better for their future. Thus, in case they see some advantage of shopping in Germany on the long run (as a price advantage), they may be willing to go there systematically.

Lastly, the high score on indulgence means that this culture is about enjoying life and not about saving money when it comes to leisure activities or activities for self-expression (Hofstede, 2001). The different dimensions will be analysed throughout the following text. Throughout reviewing the literature for this research and based on the findings from Schlizio et al. (2009), Schwartz (2009) and Szytniewski et al. (2017), the dimensions “Indulgence” and “Motivation towards Achievement and Success” of Hofstede were found to be most interesting to focus on when investigating cross-border shopping among Dutch customers.

Starting with Indulgence, Hofstede regards the high score of Indulgence also as an indication that Dutchmen act in a way that satisfies them the most and spend their money as they want to which is not in line with the assumption that they only cross borders for the savings. Additionally, Pandey and Devasagayam (2015) pointed out that the score on this dimension can have a significant influence on consumer behaviour and asked for future research on individual cultures other than American and Indian which was used in his research. Pandey and Devasagayam (2015) connect indulgent cultures with less price sensitivity compared to the opposite of these dimensions – restraint cultures. He found that the American culture (the same score as the Netherlands – 68 (Hofstede, 2001) that he researched was lower in price-sensitivity than the restraint culture (India with a score of 26, (Hofstede, 2001)). This is not in line with the assumption that Dutch customers only come over to save money.

As the score of indulgence also stresses that the Dutch culture values a qualitative life, it may also be interesting to know if they buy specific products in Germany that they value more than those in their home country. Dutch consumers’ shopping decisions may be influenced by their cultural orientation toward satisfaction, experience, and quality over pure cost savings. Translating the score on Indulgence to the cross-border-shopping phenomenon may suggest that Dutch consumers are driven by a desire to enjoy life and seek experiences that add value to their personal well-being. There is the possibility that Dutch consumer behaviour is also led by cross-border shopping not merely being a practical choice but also an activity to gain leisure and novel experiences (like aspects of German culture) from. Based on this reasoning, it would not make sense that Dutch customers come to Germany in case they do not enjoy it. Shopping trips to Germany may align with their cultural emphasis on self-expression and quality of life, as they explore different products and enjoy different store atmospheres (compared to the Netherlands). Exploring how these dimensions influence their shopping behaviours will provide critical insights for retailers.

In addition to valuing Indulgence and the quality of life, Schlizio et al. (2009) added another interesting point which is relationship orientation. This study was done in the business world, and it will be investigated if their findings can also partly explain the shopping behaviour of Dutch customers. Schlizio et al. (2009) found that Dutch people strive for a good atmosphere in most situations in their daily lives. Thus, another argument for the already mentioned point is that it would make no sense that cross-border shoppers come over to shop in Gronau regularly, in case they do not enjoy being there. Next to find out what Dutch customers value in Germany, it will be investigated what they miss or don’t like. This focus on relationships again suggests that Dutch consumers may value not only the transactional aspect of shopping but also the atmospheric and experiential components. Exploring if and how these factors influence their decision-making will shed light on whether returning to Germany is driven by positive emotional associations and personal satisfaction, in whatever form that is, or if it is only based on practical reasons.

The low score on “Motivation towards achievement and success” emphasizes that Dutch people highly value equality, work-life balance, and consensus, emphasizing a supportive, inclusive environment (Hofstede, 2001). In a recent works by Rosemann and Enklaar (forthcoming), this characteristic was proven once again. Their results showed that Dutchmen see their private life at least as much as important as their job. For example, one interviewee mentioned that Dutch employees do not work overtime and that they leave work as soon as soon as the official time is over. Interviewees also reported that it seems to be way more common to work only part-time to have more time for friends,

family or leisure time compared to the German society for example. It might be that they visit Germany also for the good shopping experience and the surrounding cafés, restaurants or other leisure-activity promoting opportunities that attract them. A study in the German border town Kleve pointed out that the Dutch interviewees indicated that they also come for the cultural aspects of Germany like the typical “Kaffee und Kuchen” and to enjoy the atmosphere in the city (Szytniewski et al., 2017) which supports the former argument. Based on these cultural aspects it is reasonable to assume that Dutch consumers seek experiences that align with their work-life balance priorities and their view on life. Shopping in Germany, therefore, may not only meet utilitarian, functional needs but also provide an opportunity for enjoyable leisure activities that they seek based on their cultural identity.

Next, Meyer’s (2014) “cultural map” model was used to have another perspective on the Dutch culture from a different angle (see Appendix A). The dimension “Trusting”, as it is always the case for Meyer’s model, is divided into two extremes. On the one hand, task-based trust is established through consistent, dependable work performance, where trust is earned through practical competence. On the other hand, relationship-based trust grows over time through personal interactions and shared experiences, forming deeper, long-lasting connections (Meyer, 2014). It turned out that trust in Dutch culture is primarily task-based which is established through reliability and competence (Meyer, 2024; Appendix A). Task-based trust could be shown in consumer’s behaviour of returning to reliable and consistent shopping environments. Therefore, it may be the case that Dutch consumers are likely to return to stores that consistently meet their expectations, deliver quality, and maintain high standards. It will be examined whether Dutch shoppers repeatedly choose German stores not only for product availability or costs but because of their trust in the dependability of them and the retailers they buy from.

Lastly, Schwartz’s Model was used which is based on three dimensions: embeddedness vs. autonomy, hierarchy vs. egalitarianism, and mastery vs. harmony. Dutch culture is more on the side of autonomy, egalitarianism and harmony (Schwartz, 2009). Interesting for the phenomenon of cross-border shopping is especially autonomy and harmony. Autonomy emphasizes, besides other aspects, curiosity (Schwartz, 2009). One can reason that they therefore may be more likely to explore shopping experiences other than their home country than other cultures that score in the opposite direction. Additionally, their curiosity may lead to an increased interest in exploring different cultures and products. Makkonen et al.’s (2016) reasoning that cross-border shoppers often travel for the trip and experience itself supports this line of reasoning. This sense of autonomy could indicate that Dutch consumers are motivated not only by financial considerations but also by their innate curiosity to explore and engage with a variety of cultural and shopping experiences in Germany.

The Dutch score on harmony links their culture to people who look for cooperative and peaceful interactions (Schwartz, 2009). Hofstede (2001) and Schlizio et al. (2009) support this reasoning with their findings of Dutch people being relationship oriented. Again, one can argue that there are also other reasons than money why Dutch border-crossers visit Germany so often. Thus, they might enjoy shopping trips and further, yet rarely researched, connected activities to this trip. Dutch interviewees in Szytniewski et al.’s study (2017) pointed out the “Kaffee und Kuchen”-experience as an enjoyable leisure experience that they do after doing their groceries. Again, also these insights reinforce the importance of designing cross-border shopping environments that align with Dutch consumers’ values of harmony and relational connection, ensuring that retailers can better address their preferences.

In conclusion, this chapter highlighted the critical role that cultural dimensions may have in understanding the cross-border shopping behaviour of Dutch consumers. By applying Hofstede’s framework, alongside complementary insights from Schwartz and Meyer and others, this chapter demonstrates how cultural traits such as “indulgence”, “individualism”, and more may affect cross-border-shopping motivations. This theoretical foundation not only challenges the simplistic

assumption that Dutch consumers cross the border solely to save money but also offers a perspective on how cultural and economic factors may interplay.

Table 1

Potential cultural factors influencing cross-border shopping of Dutch customers in Germany

Cultural Dimension	Key Characteristics	Impact on Cross-Border Shopping	Supporting Studies
Individualism	Emphasis on personal freedom, self-reliance, and independence	Shopping may be influenced by the focus on personal satisfaction and freedom of choice	Hofstede (2001)
Indulgence; Quality of life	Enjoyment of life, emphasis on self-expression and well-being	Shopping behaviour may be driven by seeking experiences; satisfaction over price	Hofstede (2001), Pandey & Devasagayam (2015), Schlizio et al. (2009)
Relationship Orientation	Dutch people highly value good relationships; strive for good atmospheres	Shopping environment and staff behaviour & service needs to satisfy them	Schlizio et al. (2009)
Motivation towards Achievement and Success	Value equality, work-life balance, and consensus, emphasizing a supportive, inclusive environment	Dutch consumers may prioritize the quality of the shopping environment and the experience over price	Hofstede (2001), Rosemann & Enklaar (forthcoming), Szytniewski et al., (2017)
Long-Term Orientation	Forward-thinking, willingness to break traditions for a better future	Willingness to explore new shopping opportunities if they promise future benefits	Hofstede (2001)
Trusting (Task-based vs Relationship-based)	Dutch customers rely on task-based trust (reliability, competence)	Trust in reliability of shopping locations may lead to repeat visits	Meyer (2014)
Autonomy tendency	Curiosity, desire for new experiences	Curiosity may encourage exploration of new shopping environments	Schwartz (2009)
Harmony tendency (overlaps with relationship-orientation)	Preference for cooperative, peaceful interactions	Dutch consumers may seek cooperative and enjoyable shopping experiences	Schwartz (2009)

2.2 Utilitarian reasons for cross-border shopping

After analysing many cultural aspects that complement the simple opinion that Dutch customers only come to Germany to save money, the following needs to be mentioned as well. Rosemann and Enklaar (forthcoming) found the characteristic of “utility“ which causes a continuous cost-benefit calculation as a characteristic of Dutch culture. For this research, this factor is called solution orientation. This means the Dutch prioritize finding immediate, effective solutions over focusing on analysing roots or unattractive options. Dutch consumers may apply their solution-oriented mindset when deciding where to shop as well. If they see an immediate benefit – such as better prices, unique products, or a more convenient shopping experience – they tend to act without overanalysing. This could mean they choose shopping in Germany simply because it solves a need efficiently, whether it’s finding a specific product, enjoying a different variety, or accessing quality goods not available locally. This is a counterargument to the cultural drivers discussed earlier, and an argument in favour of the utilitarian reasons outlined in the following, which may also be influential drivers of cross-border shopping.

However, this does not exclude the possibility of cultural motivations playing a role. Dutch shoppers may find cultural enjoyment in German shopping environments while simultaneously appreciating the price savings based on their solution-oriented nature. Thus, it can be a mixture of all factors influencing cross-border shopping. It may also be that some Dutchmen come to Germany because they enjoy it there and some come over only because they are typically solution-oriented and want to save money. In the following, the utilitarian reasons are investigated that may affect cross-border shopping as well. Further investigation through the interviews will help determine which of the factors, the cultural, the utilitarian, or an interplay between both are the driver of Dutch border shoppers.

Factor 1: Price advantage through Germany

The price differences from Germany to the Netherlands seem to be a major driver of cross-border shopping. A Dutch newspaper conducted a street survey among Dutchmen in the German town Kleve (Titulaer, 2024) which gave a glimpse of what the border-crossers seem to look for the most in Germany. In the first place, people came for fuel (84), followed by drugstore products (72%), groceries (72%), alcoholic beverages (64%) and lastly, tobacco products (14%). In another article (Arnold, 2023), it was said that some Dutchmen report saving about 30 to 40 euros when they plan a shopping trip in Germany. The main driver of the cheaper prices in Germany seems to be that the VAT in the Netherlands was already higher than in Germany in 2017 (Göttker, 2017) and continues to be a driver of Dutchmen coming to Germany for groceries. This is confirmed by a rather new interview from a German newspaper with a manager of a Dutch supermarket near Germany who is afraid to lose more and more customers to the German markets due to partly high price differences because of higher taxes in the Netherlands (Oversteegen, 2023). Dutch interviewees also reported that they often make bulk purchases to save costs (Oversteegen, 2023).

Scientific sources are rare for this specific topic, but Beck et al. (2020) quantitatively analysed price differences in prices among Germany and the Netherlands and found an overall difference of 4-5% lower prices for the same goods in Germany in general. However, this was a general statistic and a specific comparison of FMCG products or fuel, and tobacco is missing. Based on Quinders (2024), one can summarize that the Dutch supermarkets are more expensive in general while there may be occasional differences for some products. Groceries seem to be more expensive in the Netherlands, but meat products, ready meals, ready-made salads and similar products were named especially. On the other hand, fruits and vegetables as well as coffee are more expensive in Germany (Quinders, 2024). Next to the interviews, a price comparison will be performed to check if the price differences are really that significant.

Especially tobacco is a measurable product for comparison. Due to higher tobacco taxes in the Netherlands, a normal package of cigarettes costs 11.50€ in the Netherlands compared to 8.50€ in Germany (Wagner, 2024). According to Jan Hein Sträter, the Director of the Dutch Association of the Tobacco Industry “VSK”, about half of all cigarettes smoked in the Netherlands and 37 per cent of all fine-cut tobacco stem from Germany or Belgium (Wagner, 2024). Geboers (2024) already predicted this trend in his doctoral thesis on tobacco taxation and hypothesizes that cross-border activities may increase even more in case the price differences get bigger.

Additionally, the fuel prices may play a major role in the fluctuation of Dutchmen in Gronau as well. Based on Jansen and Jonker (2018) it seems to be a prevalent phenomenon that Dutchmen cross the border for fuel, but they found that this seems to be restricted to those who live about 10km away from the border and not more. This phenomenon will be investigated as well more in detail next to the interviews.

Factor 2 – Product range and availability

According to Pilelienė et al. (2023) who researched cross-border shopping in Poland, one of the main reasons Hungarians came over was to access products that were unavailable in their home country. This may also be the case for Dutchmen visiting Germany. According to the trade expert Paul Moers cited by BNNVARA (2024), one key difference between Germany and the Netherlands is the availability of organic products. Germany seems to offer a wider selection of organic goods, which is, according to Moers, highly appealing to Dutch customers. The expert noted that many Dutch customers appreciate the broader variety of organic products in Germany. This added availability of organic products may therefore be a pull factor for Dutchmen crossing the border.

Based on Paul Moers, who was cited by the MAXmagazine (2024), Dutch customers are increasingly attracted to shopping in Germany because of soft drinks and alike that contain sugar particularly after the introduction of the “sugar tax” on non-alcoholic drinks in the Netherlands are more expensive. Additionally, Dutch shoppers aim for cosmetics from stores like DM. Some shoppers report saving up to 75 euros on bulk purchases of items like deodorant and razor blades compared to prices in the Netherlands. Although supermarkets like Edeka are often seen as pricier, they still offer discounts that can rival Dutch deals, making Germany an appealing destination for Dutch consumers looking for variety and savings (MAXMagazine, 2024). As all these goods are sold in the shops in Gronau under investigation in this research, it will be checked whether the Dutch customers in Gronau align with these suggested motivations for cross-border shopping.

Factor 3: The border

Szytniewski et al. (2017) differentiate between a physical and a somewhat mental effect that a border can have on those who cross it. In their research in Kleve (a German border town), it was shown that nevertheless the border was physically quite permissive, people perceived it as a symbolic line. Thus, people seem to make a difference between the physical and the mental border. The physical border does not seem to worry people that much in the Dutch-German context as there are not big effort obstacles passing through unless no major obstacles like occasional border controls happen. The mental or symbolic border is of more interest as border crossers seem to recognize a change when entering (Szytniewski et al., 2017). According to Makkonen et al. (2016), this may also be a driver as people seek excitement in different experiences compared to their home country.

Through own experiences as a commuter between Germany and Enschede, physically, the border region between Gronau in Germany and the Enschede area is characterized by high permeability, with minimal administrative barriers for cross-border activities, including shopping. Although there are occasional checks by custom officers, these do not significantly hinder the flow of cross-border traffic. In case one is not stopped for such a control, there are no (physical) barriers. The infrastructure around the border supports seamless connectivity, with well-developed roads and transportation links facilitating short travel distances between the two countries. The cross-border traffic between Enschede-area and Gronau is facilitated by regional connections like the B54 which is a highway called “Bundesstraße” that connects Enschede with Münster and from which one can access the A31 and many more highways in this region. One can also drive directly through the towns ahead of Gronau and take the route through the cities. Next to the good infrastructure by car, Dutch citizens can also use trains from Enschede to Münster (RB64), and Enschede to Dortmund (RB 51). Dutchmen can also access these routes by train from Hengelo to Enschede for example. Leick et al. (2021) found that a good infrastructure combined with short travel distances as well as low transport costs can enhance cross-border shopping. Based on the author’s viewpoint who is based in this region, these conditions may be given, and it is interesting what the Dutch respondents think about this and how they think it influences their behaviour.

Mentally, there may be aspects influencing the crossing as well which this research needs to reveal. Still, the linguistic barrier may not be high as many Dutch people understand and speak German and

vice versa some Germans understand and speak Dutch. It will be asked if Dutch border crossers perceive any obstacles when travelling to Gronau for shopping. It will be assessed if the respondents perceive that their cross-border shopping is influenced by any of the physical or mental border aspects, in case they exist for them.

Factor 4 – Familiarity vs. differences

The following factor may be as well connected to some cultural parts of chapter one. On the one hand, Szytniewski et al. (2017) found that people feel like the German town has become so familiar that they experience it as an everyday activity to go shopping there. Thus, the German shops seem to have become a normal stop as they started to feel comfortable there. It may be that these customers just become so used to shopping in Germany that they do not scrutinise it anymore. Maybe it has become a weekly routine. Additionally, some people living in the border region have been used to this activity ever since. It was mentioned that many of the interviewed Dutchmen reported being used to visiting German towns since their childhood and therefore the shopping trips seemed to be not a big deal for them (Szytniewski et al., 2017). This may be the same case for Gronau and therefore is an interesting aspect that needs to be assessed. It may even be the case that people did occasional shopping trips to Germany and then increased their visits since the price differences increased.

On the other hand, the Dutch customers in Kleve reported that they still have a feeling of visiting a place different from their culture that keeps it interesting which increases the shopping experience (Szytniewski et al., 2017). The study revealed that Dutch border crossers still noticed the cultural differences towards stereotypical German behaviour like “Kaffee und Kuchen” which positively affected their experience as they still feel like seeing something different than at home next to them doing their groceries as an everyday action in Kleve. Additionally, a difference between German and Dutch supermarkets may be the availability of self-checkout systems. While self-checkout is quite common in the Netherlands already, it may be less common in German supermarkets, at least in rural areas (Quinders, 2024). It will be interesting to understand which payment method Dutch customers prefer and if they would favour it more having self-checkouts in Germany as well. This needs to be checked in practice and will be assessed in the interviews as well.

Lastly, the mixture of familiarity and exotism and different experiences than at home may increase the tendency to repeat the shopping trips to Germany (Szytniewski et al., 2017). This line of reasoning can be supported by Makkonen et al.’s (2016) suggestion that people engage in cross-border shopping for the trip itself. It will be investigated if this mixture of familiarity and exotism on a cross-border shopping trip is a factor that increases a Dutch customer’s tendency to visit Germany regularly.

Factor 5 – Marketing of German retailers in the Enschede area

Marketing plays a key role in cross-border shopping research (Choi et al., 2016). Well-developed shopping infrastructures, such as supermarkets, discounters, and shopping centres, attract consumers by offering a wider range of products at competitive prices, making them appealing destinations for shoppers from neighbouring countries (Choi et al., 2016). The aforementioned reasons like price differences, the availability of different products (e.g., organic), the good infrastructure to access Gronau from the Enschede area as well as the possibility of the trip itself being an excitement on its own do contribute may even cause word of mouth marketing among customers from the Netherlands. Word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) can be defined as the exchange of information between consumers, like sharing personal experiences and opinions about a product or service (Gildin, 2003). In the case of Gronau, this service may be the shopping centre area under investigation. According to Bar-Kořelis and Wendt (2018), market opportunities in terms of product availability, pricing, and retail spaces between the neighbouring countries can further increase cross-border shopping.

Additionally, consumer choices and behaviours can be influenced by emotional and mental responses triggered by marketing activities (Alsharif et al., 2023). Promotional tactics such as advertisements,

product catalogues, and other channels impact how consumers decide (Jia Niu et al., 2024; Michalko & Ratz, 2006). Next to online brochures of the supermarkets and alike, applications like “LIDL Plus” exists that, once registered, provide customers with more discounts. Throughout the interviews, it will be investigated if people came because of online advertisement or based on other reasons. It will be interesting to know if Dutch customers actively search for the prices online and if they are susceptible to advertisements from German supermarkets and alike at all. Moreover, it will be investigated if people are subject to WOMM and more generally, how they became aware of the Gronau shopping area. Additionally, movement data will show where customers came from.

Table 2

Potential utilitarian factors influencing cross-border shopping of Dutch customers in Germany

Utilitarian Factor	Key Characteristics	Impact on Cross-Border Shopping	Supporting Studies/Theories
Solution Orientation	Dutch consumers prioritize finding immediate and effective solutions to their needs	Consumers may shop in Germany for convenience, to solve an immediate need (e.g., better prices, unique products)	Rosemann & Enklaar (forthcoming)
Price Advantage through Germany	Dutch consumers seek price advantages, such as savings on fuel, groceries, and tobacco products	Price differences drive Dutch consumers to purchase in Germany, particularly for fuel, groceries, and tobacco	Arnold (2023), Beck et al. (2020), Geboers (2024), Jansen & Jonker (2018), Oversteegen (2023), Quinders (2024), Titulaer (2024), Wagner (2024)
Product Range and Availability	Dutch consumers may be attracted to unique and different products unavailable in the Netherlands	The availability of unique products, such as organic goods and specific cosmetics, may attract Dutch shoppers	Pilelienè et al. (2023), BNNVARA (2024), MAXmagazine (2024)
The Border	The border can have a physical but also a mental or symbolic impact on shoppers	The perception of the border as a symbolic line may enhance the shopping experience and excitement; the good infrastructure and the good cross-ability may increase the visits	Szytniewski et al. (2017), Makkonen et al. (2016)
Familiarity vs. Differences	Familiarity with the shopping environment and the excitement of cultural differences	Dutch shoppers may return to Germany due to familiarity with the environment and the novelty of cultural differences	Szytniewski et al. (2017), Makkonen et al. (2016)
Marketing of German Retailers in Enschede Area	Word-of-mouth marketing and emotional responses to promotional tactics influence decisions	Marketing strategies and word-of-mouth may influence Dutch shoppers' decisions to visit specific stores in Germany	Choi et al. (2016), Alsharif et al. (2023), Jia Niu et al. (2024)

Transition: Using these insights to inform evidence-based marketing strategies

By investigating all these factors, the underlying cultural and the utilitarian ones within the same sample, the author will be able to give recommendations on how to incorporate the most important findings in marketing strategies aimed at appealing to the Dutch target group. Importantly, this

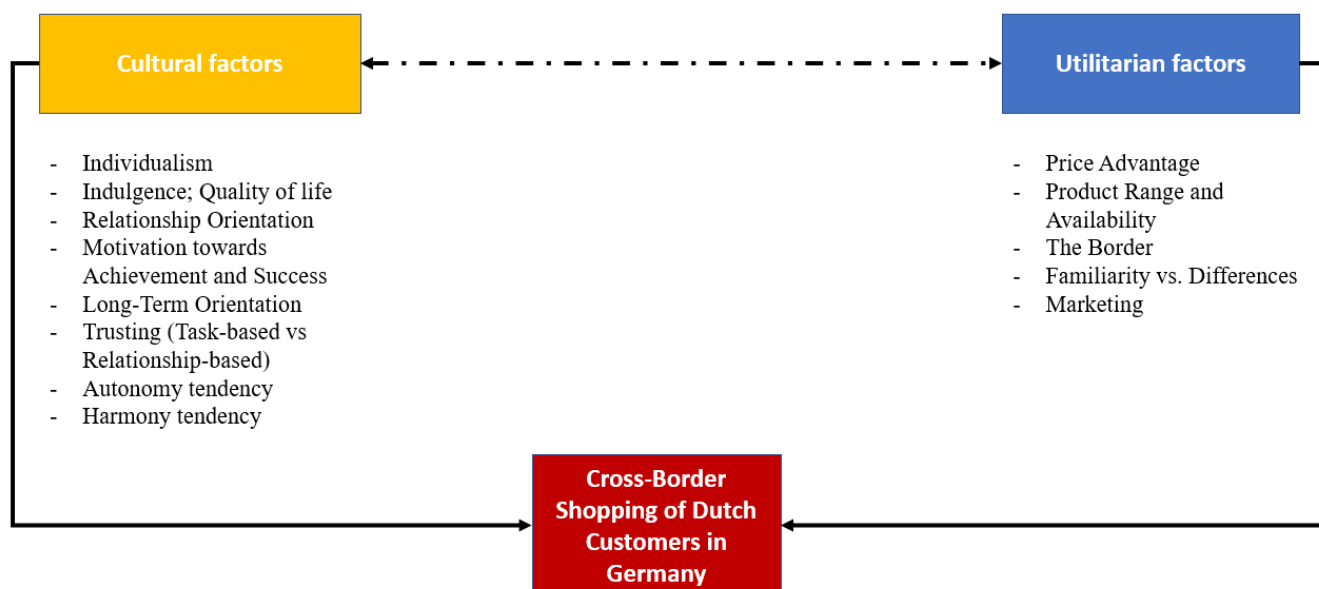
research aims to enable a deeper understanding of Dutch cross-border shopping in Germany to provide practical implications for marketing strategies in favour of in-store shopping of FMCG products and not online shopping. The aim is to understand the target group through the interviews and take their preferences into account when creating marketing campaigns. Kim and Lim (2021) propose that effective digital marketing is needed to increase customers in stores.

To name examples, some approaches include adapting to the preferences of the target group, such as product descriptions and payment methods and leveraging digital platforms and technologies (Alam, 2021; Wang, 2024). Thus, it will be interesting to see if Dutch customers know about digital platforms like “LIDL Plus” (LIDL, 2025) or applications of other shops like DM which provide users with discounts via the app. As shown by Hui et al. in 2013 already, mobile promotions that encourage customers to explore more of the store can also lead to an increase in unplanned spending as well. Additionally, price discounts, through applications or general discounts can increase sales as well (Jia Niu et al., 2024). Additionally, Golding et al. (2021) suggest combining offers with in-store merchandising to increase sales.

As said, cross-border shopping seems to be influenced by tourism as well and can become a tourist attraction itself (Makkonen, 2016). However, Makkonen et al. (2016) concluded that this potential is often underutilized in marketing strategies at locations that could benefit from it. Researchers suggest integrating cultural insights, adapt to digital trends, and capitalize on the unique appeal of cross-border commerce in their marketing strategies to attract more customers (Wang, 2024; Alam, 2021; Makkonen, 2016). After analysing how the utilitarian factors and, more importantly as it was not done before, the cultural aspects affect cross-border shopping of Dutch customers (see Figure 2), a guideline for marketing practices aimed to appeal to Dutch customers to FMCG shops in border regions will be provided. Through the insights gained in the interviews, marketing campaigns can be tailored to the target group to increase their effect.

Figure 2

Conceptual framework: Potential utilitarian and cultural factors influencing cross-border shopping of Dutch customers in Germany



3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

Exploratory research aims to explore phenomena which are not entirely studied to bring more clarity to them (Olawale et al., 2023). Saunders et al. (2016) point out that it is used to find out what is happening, seeking new insights and revising the topic with new insights. This qualitative explorative research is constructed as a case study in the real-life context of cross-border shopping as it is based on an in-depth analysis of the Dutch customers in German supermarkets near the border (Lichtman, 2017). This study aims to understand the Dutch customers near the German border, to see how they behave and if assumptions from the theoretical framework can be confirmed and if there are new insights that need to be taken care of.

In the end, these insights will be used to make suggestions on how to use these insights in marketing campaigns. Thus, the Gronau-Enschede area lacks qualitative data that further explains why Dutch customers visit border towns like Gronau so often. The German companies need to understand the behaviour and motivations of this group. The literature-based factors led to interview questions which aim to close this gap and enable a better understanding of the Dutch customers in Gronau. The interview guide (see Appendix B) focuses on open questions addressing general motivation, personal experiences, and socio-cultural aspects, complemented by demographic questions at the end. This interview guide will be used to interview Dutch pedestrians in the Gronau area under investigation at the place of interest and via Microsoft Teams.

In order to capture both anticipated and emergent aspects of Dutch cross-border shopping behaviour, this study employs a semi-structured interview approach. The interview guide consists of a few central, open questions that allow the conversation to develop organically, with optional follow-up questions such as “Why?” or “How?” used to deepen the discussion. The approach for data analysis combines a deductive basis (derived from literature) with an inductive openness for new insights.

3.2 Participant Selection and Data Collection Methods

The fieldwork was conducted in front of the parking lot that is located directly next to the shops of interest as purposive sampling. In this way Dutch customers will be anticipated by their license plate and through openly communicating that researchers look for Dutch customers for a short interview. Five participants were gained through this sampling method. In addition, the researcher has found nine Dutch participants in his network who regularly shop in Gronau. These interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and followed the same procedure as the other ones. Thus, by presenting them informed consent, participants are asked to agree to participate and consent with an audio recording of their interview. Participants needed to verbally accept the informed consent (Appendix C) and the recording of the interview. They also needed to be at least 18, Dutch, and have been shopping in Germany at least once. The sampling followed the principle of saturation. As soon as the researcher recognized the same reasons and was sure to have a good understanding of the target group's characteristics towards the research question, the sampling stopped (Saunders et al., 2018).

The demographics of the participants in detail can be seen in table 6. The sample consisted of 14 Dutch participants, including 8 males and 6 females, aged between 18 and 73 years ($M = 32.21$, $SD = 17.3$). The majority of participants were younger adults, with a concentration in their early to mid-twenties, reflecting a group of master students with part-time employment. The sample also included middle-aged and older adults, offering a broader generational perspective.

Most participants held at least a secondary or tertiary educational qualification. Specifically, five individuals had completed a Bachelor's degree, two held a Master's degree, one completed the MBO, one the VMBO, and two the HAVO. Occupations varied and included students (both full-time and

part-time workers), professionals (e.g., IT specialist, installer of charging stations), and one retired individual with previous entrepreneurial experience.

The majority lived in Enschede (seven) whereas one mentioned Lonneker which is a suburb of Enschede and Hengelo (five). Interestingly, one participant (with his family) came from Amersfoort (which is a one-and-a-half-hour drive to Gronau) to check if they want to come more often.

This demographic variation allowed for exploration of cultural and practical motivations across different age groups, educational backgrounds, and shopping habits.

3.3 Data Analysis

Based on Hsieh and Shannon (2005), a directed “Directed Content analysis” was performed which is characterized by systematically searching for quotes and keywords that confirm or reject what the theoretical framework hypothesizes (Pandey, 2019; White & Marsh, 2006). This content analysis is deductive and can also be called “directed content analysis” as the literature-based factors will function as the codebook for the content of the comments selected through the data collection (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In addition to this deductive approach, the analysis remains open to emerging themes (inductive approach), allowing for the generation of new codes when content appears that do not fit the existing scheme.

By doing this, this study aims to understand the Dutch customers near the German border, to see how they behave and if assumptions from the theoretical framework can be confirmed and if there are new insights that need to be taken care of. In the end, these insights will be used to make suggestions on how to use these insights in marketing campaigns.

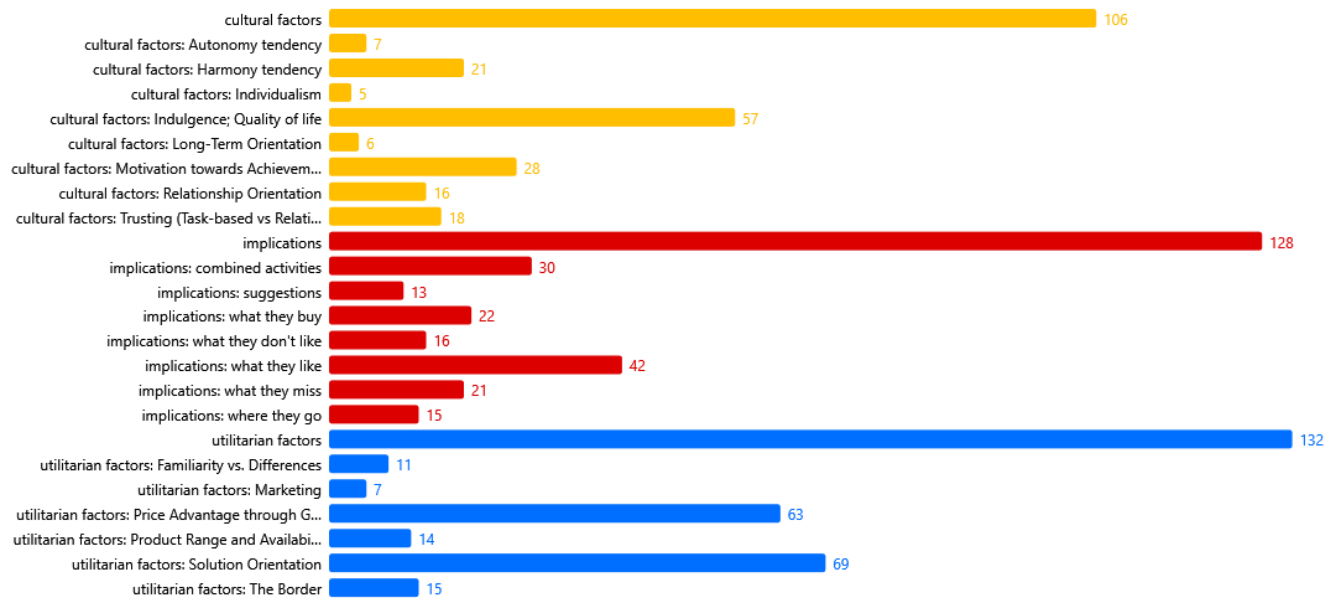
Thus, as outlined above already, the research project started by doing a lot of literature research and scanning through utilitarian as well as Dutch cultural factors that may influence their shopping behaviour. All these sources led to the conceptual framework (see Figure 2) that is explained and backed up with literature through the theoretical framework of this research which is summarized in table 1 and 2.

These tables functioned as the codebook to code the collected interviews deductively (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Pandey 2019). The (anonymized) transcripts were transferred to Word documents which were coded using ATLAS.ti. Other authors have already practised similar approaches to this research and were able to find rich data as well (Mokdad & Christensen, 2021; Goh et al., 2021) which also supported the choice of this approach.

It is expected that there may be content which is interesting and useful to understand the Dutch target group that cannot be coded with the existing literature-based codes. In addition to the deductive coding, the researcher will document any new, unanticipated themes by writing memos (Saldana, 2021), ensuring that the analysis captures the depth and richness of the interview data.

4. Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the reasons behind the cross-border shopping of Dutch consumers in Germany. This section presents the findings of the qualitative analysis conducted through semi-structured interviews with Dutch consumers who engage in cross-border shopping in Gronau, Germany. A deductive coding process was employed using Atlas.ti, guided by a predefined codebook based on theoretical constructs from Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and economic literature. The findings are structured according to the three main categories: (1) cultural factors, (2) utilitarian factors, and (3) implications for German retailers. Figure 3 shows the frequencies of codes throughout the interviews.

Figure 3*Frequencies of all codes***Table 3***Frequencies of interviews at least once mentioned a respective code*

Factor	Named in __ interviews
<i>Cultural factors</i>	
Autonomy	4
Harmony tendency	8
Individualism	4
Indulgence; Quality of life	12
Long-Term Orientation	4
Motivation towards Achievements and Success	12
Relationship Orientation	8
Trusting (Task-based vs Relationship-based)	5
<i>Utilitarian factors</i>	
Familiarity vs differences	6
Marketing	6
Price advantage through Germany	14
Product range and availability	9
Solution orientation	13
The Border	14
<i>Implications</i>	
Combined activities	13
Suggestions	7
What they buy	11
What they don't like	8
What they like	14
What they miss	8
Where they go	8

4.1 Research Question 1: How do cultural factors drive consumer behaviour of Dutchmen in cross border shopping?

To answer this question, the codebook of table 1 “*Potential cultural factors influencing cross-border shopping of Dutch customers in Germany*”, as well as the codebook of table 2 “*Potential utilitarian factors influencing cross-border shopping of Dutch customers in Germany*”, were applied to the interview using “ATLAS.ti”. In the revised tables 4 and 5 below, an anchor example of a quote was added for each factor.

Table 4

Cultural factors influencing cross-border shopping of Dutch customers in Germany

Cultural Dimension	Key Characteristics	Impact on Cross-Border Shopping	Anchor Examples
Individualism (n = 5)	Emphasis on personal freedom, self-reliance, and independence	Shopping may be influenced by the focus on personal satisfaction and freedom of choice	“For example, in the Netherlands, we don't sell whiskey or vodka in supermarkets, so in Germany you can just buy it directly and I think some people as well find that handy. In the Netherlands is not allowed by law but in Germany it is.” (Interviewee 6)
Indulgence; Quality of life (n = 57)	Enjoyment of life, emphasis on self-expression and well-being	Shopping behaviour may be driven by seeking experiences; satisfaction over price	“for some Dutch people, it also might feel like a little holiday or. Yeah, I will say breakaway or something like that because you're out of your own area” (Interviewee 10)
Relationship Orientation (n = 16)	Dutch people highly value good relationships; strive for good atmospheres	Shopping environment and staff behaviour & service needs to satisfy them	“We speak to people by their first names. That isn't the case here. Here everything is more formal. ... I don't like it.” (Interviewee 1)
Motivation towards Achievement and Success (n = 28)	Value equality, work-life balance, and consensus, emphasizing a supportive, inclusive environment	Dutch consumers may prioritize the quality of the shopping environment and the experience over price	“... it's more calm here in Germany ... that's why I come here too. I can go shopping in peace.” (Interviewee 4) compared to: “Researcher: So the only real motivation is that you can save money here compared to the Netherlands? Interviewee 3: Just that.”
Long-Term Orientation (n = 6)	Forward-thinking, willingness to break traditions for a better future	Willingness to explore new shopping opportunities if they promise future benefits	“And we are looking if it is cheaper here or not.. it is out first time here. We don't know. This is our

			first time here.” (Interviewee 5)
Trusting (Task-based vs Relationship-based) (n = 18)	Dutch customers rely on task-based trust (reliability, competence)	Trust in reliability of shopping locations may lead to repeat visits	“I mostly go shopping in Germany for cosmetic products.” (Interviewee 6)
Autonomy tendency (n = 7)	Curiosity, desire for new experiences	Curiosity may encourage exploration of new shopping environments	“Researcher: So you also come for the experience itself? Interviewee 5: Yeah. ... Have a German beer maybe – and a “Currywurst”.”
Harmony tendency (n = 21) (overlaps with relationship-orientation)	Preference for cooperative, peaceful interactions	Dutch consumers may seek cooperative and enjoyable shopping experiences	“The Dutch are very selfish ... Germans are a bit more polite” (Interviewee 3)

Table 5

Utilitarian factors influencing cross-border shopping of Dutch customers in Germany

Utilitarian Factor	Key Characteristics	Impact on Cross-Border Shopping	Anchor Examples
Solution Orientation (n = 69)	Dutch consumers prioritize finding immediate and effective solutions to their needs	Consumers may shop in Germany for convenience, to solve an immediate need (e.g., better prices, unique products)	“It really saves a lot of money compared to the Netherlands and then I also always like filled up my car with gasoline because it's always very cheaper there. Yeah so.” (Interviewee 11)
Price Advantage through Germany (n = 63)	Dutch consumers seek price advantages, such as savings on fuel, groceries, and tobacco products	Price differences drive Dutch consumers to purchase in Germany, particularly for fuel, groceries, and tobacco	“You can buy them all quite easy in Germany for way lower price for the same quality.” (Interviewee 11)
Product Range and Availability (n = 14)	Dutch consumers may be attracted to unique and different products unavailable in the Netherlands	The availability of unique products, such as organic goods and specific cosmetics, may attract Dutch shoppers	“And a better, a larger assortment.” (Interviewee 3)
The Border (n = 15)	The border can have a physical but also a mental or symbolic impact on shoppers	The perception of the border as a symbolic line may enhance the shopping experience and excitement; the good infrastructure and the good cross-ability may increase the visits	“Yes, because always you can see it on like the way of building houses and stuff. I really see the difference always. So, I always know: “OK, now I'm in Germany”, yeah.” (Interviewee 12)

Familiarity vs. Differences (n = 11)	Familiarity with the shopping environment and the excitement of cultural differences	Dutch shoppers may return to Germany due to familiarity with the environment and the novelty of cultural differences	“What I like about Gronau is that you have three supermarkets together: The “Penny the “Edeka”, the “LIDL” and even the “DM”.” (Interviewee 14)
Marketing of German Retailers in Enschede Area (n = 7)	Word-of-mouth marketing and emotional responses to promotional tactics influence decisions	Marketing strategies and word-of-mouth may influence Dutch shoppers' decisions to visit specific stores in Germany	“It was also on television, on Dutch television this week. They said you can save at least €50 if you shop well.” (Interviewee 4)

Cultural Factors

Cultural dimensions (see table 3 & 4) emerged as important drivers in cross-border shopping behaviour, as the codes in that category were coded 106 times. The most frequently coded subcategory was “Indulgence; Quality of Life” (n = 57; named by 12 interviewees), indicating that, as expected, many Dutch participants value enjoyment, freedom of choice, and leisure and that they seem to search for this in Germany as well (Hofstede (2001), Pandey & Devasagayam (2015), Schlizio et al. (2009)). It was mentioned by some but not all participants (n = 11, all except interviewee 3, 7 & 12) that they also make a fun trip out of it when they come to Germany and that they combine it with drinking coffee and letting themselves a bit more time for shopping. Interviewee 1 described this quite well:

“... for some Dutch people, it also might feel like a little holiday or. Yeah, I will say breakaway or something like that because you're out of your own area.” What could not be confirmed is that they value this experience over money.

Four interviewees (4, 6, 9, 10) also indicated that they perceive the Germans and the German shopping experience as calm and peaceful compared to the Netherlands, where things seem to be more hectic. They said that they like the shopping experience and also the big parking lots in front, which is also a plus for the quality of the shopping experience in terms of avoiding stress. All these quotations under the code “Indulgence/quality of life” confirm what was expected based on theory and the cultural profile of Dutchmen (Hofstede, 2001; Pandey & Devasagayam, 2015; Schlizio et al., 2009).

Thus, “Motivation towards Achievement and Success” (n = 28; named by 12 interviewees) was coded often too, but the findings partially contradicted initial literature-based expectations. Against what was concluded about the Dutch consumers prioritising quality of life over achievement and success (Hofstede, 2001; Rosemann & Enklaar, forthcoming) leading to a potential preference for shopping experience quality over just price savings, interviewees framed their shopping in Germany as an efficient, goal-orientated, and solution-driven activity primarily motivated by price savings (more about this in the utilitarian section). Interviewees 1, 3 and 7 even said that their only motivation to go to Germany is the price saving and that they do not care about the shopping experience itself. While there were also a majority that indicated that they like the shopping experience, it became clear that money is the most driving motivation to come to Germany, as every interviewee had it as their main reason. This does not align with what was expected by the Dutch consumers based on theory. Interviewee 9 made it very clear:

“Looking at Dutch people. I think we are very conscious of the price and are looking for the cheapest.”

“Harmony Tendency” (n = 21) and “Relationship Orientation” (n = 16) (both named by 8 interviewees) were, as expected, often coded at the same passages. Dutch people really care about the atmosphere and how the people feel that are around them – even the staff at the supermarket or the other people shopping, as expected by Schwartz (2009) and Schlizio et al. (2009). But interviewee perceptions

varied: some stressed the positive, calm, or polite nature of German staff and visitors (Interviewee 3, 4 & 10), while others perceived Germans as more distant or formal (Interviewee 1, 10 & 12).

Interviewee 1 noted:

"We speak to people by their first names. That isn't the case here. Here everything is more formal. I don't like it". Interviewee 12 commented, "I do think the German people are less nice in, like, the stores... I think Dutch people are more open and really want to help you. And like in Germany, sometimes it feels like if you ask something that it's almost too much of work for them."

Conversely, interviewee 3 found German people to be "a bit nicer" and "a little more polite" compared to the Dutch, who are "very selfish". What can be confirmed is that Dutch people do care about harmony and relationships as expected, but their perception of the German shopping environment in this regard is mixed (Schlizio et al., 2009; Schwartz, 2009).

"Trusting (Task-based vs. Relationship-based)" (n = 18) was mentioned 5 interviewees. The interviews showed, as expected based on theory, that Dutch people go to Germany very regularly and to the same spots, which showed that they are really getting used to the shops and like the quality. The interviews showed, as expected based on theory regarding task-based trust (Meyer, 2014), that Dutch people visit Germany regularly and often return to the same specific stores where they buy the same things over and over again (every interviewee except 2, 5 & 10). An example from Interviewee 6:

"I mostly go shopping in Germany for cosmetic products", or from interviewee 7: "Lidl, for groceries."

In conclusion, the factors "Indulgence; Quality of Life", "Harmony Tendency" and "Relationship Orientation" as well as "Trusting (Task-based vs. Relationship-based)" seem to influence the cross-border shopping behaviour of Dutch consumers in a subtle but existent way which is in line with what was expected from the theoretical framework. The factor "Motivation towards Achievement and Success" was coded a lot and also influential, but the interviews proved the theory-based definition wrong and showed that they cared more about saving money than about the quality of the experience itself.

While the former cultural factors were confirmed as potential drivers of cross-border shopping, the rest of the cultural factors emerged as less influential based on the interview data. Specifically, the cultural dimensions of "Long-Term Orientation" (n = 6; named by 4 interviewees), "Autonomy Tendency" (n = 7; named by 4 interviewees), and "Individualism" (n = 5; named by 4 interviewees) were not frequently mentioned.

The code for "Long-Term Orientation", theoretically, suggested a willingness to explore new shopping opportunities if they promise future benefits (Hofstede, 2001) but did not appear to be as manifested in the Dutch consumers as expected. Still, especially interviewee 5 was a perfect example that some Dutch consumers seem to think this way: "And we are looking if it is cheaper here or not... it is out first time here.", as they clearly show their curiousness and willingness to explore new opportunities to save money in the future.

Just this quotation also shows that this Dutch consumer also inherits the "Autonomy tendency" that Dutch culture seems to have based on Hofstede (2001). It means that people have the desire to experience new things. Interviewee 5 drove over an hour to check the experience in Germany, as they also got there to grab a beer or a "Currywurst" and "something new" (Interviewee 5). Still, most of the interviewed Dutch consumers did not come for the curiosity, which means that this person is rather the exception.

Lastly, "Individualism" which is defined as being focused on personal freedom, self-reliance, and independence (Hofstede, 2001), was rarely applicable to the target group of Dutch cross-border shoppers. The expectation that personal satisfaction would be a driver in Dutch cross-border shopping and would be an influencing factor was not confirmed. Still, quotations from interviewee 6:

“For example, in the Netherlands, we don't sell whisky or vodka in supermarkets, so in Germany you can just buy it directly, and I think some people as well find that handy. In the Netherlands it is not allowed by law, but in Germany it is.” Or interviewee 14: *“Yeah, you only have the “Miro” here where it's very focused with different shops together. So, I like that about Gronau. And in the German supermarkets they sell tend to sell different products, so that's nice too to be surrounded by different products, to buy different drinks, sort of stuff.”*

This gives a solid basis to argue that also the “Individualism” code was given in this sample.

All in all, the coding analysis indicated that these last three specific cultural factors were not so applicable or important for the shopping context investigated in this study and therefore do not seem to be influential drivers behind cross-border shopping of Dutch consumers in Germany. The findings from this study, in the context of these specific cultural dimensions, reject the expectation that these factors significantly influence cross-border shopping for this sample. Still, the factors can be supported with individual examples.

Utilitarian factors

On the other hand, the utilitarian factors (see table 5) appeared to be significantly more influential drivers behind the cross-border shopping phenomenon. Compared to the total of 106 cultural codes, the total for utilitarian codes was 132.

The most frequently coded utilitarian factor was "Solution orientation" (n = 69; named by 13 interviewees). This highlights how practical and decisive Dutch customers are regarding their decision to shop in Germany, as expected by theory (Rosemann & Enklaar, forthcoming). This factor often overlapped with the primary reason Dutch customers came to Germany: the "Price advantage through Germany" (n = 63; named by 14 interviewees). For example, interviewees consistently mentioned the lower prices in supermarkets and particularly drugstores like "DM" (Interviewee 1, 6 & 14). Specific products named as being cheaper included cosmetic articles (Interviewee 1, 6 & 14), alcohol (Interviewee 3, 6, 10, 11 & 13), soft drinks (like Coca-Cola) (Interviewee 12, 13 & 14), tobacco (Interviewee 1, 3, 6 & 9) and gasoline (everyone except interviewee 2 and 12). One interviewee explicitly stated saving €15 on refuelling alone and another 30 or 40 euros on groceries (Interviewee 4). All this confirms that cross-border shopping is strongly driven by price difference as suggested by the literature (Studzińska et al., 2018; Burstein et al., 2023; Pilelienė et al., 2023; Arnold, 2023; Titulaer, 2024; Oversteegen, 2023).

The high taxes of the Dutch government were also mentioned as a motivation to shop in Germany (Interviewee 11 & 13). The strong appearance of Solution Orientation codes (n=69) demonstrates how the Dutch apply a practical approach to overcome these price differences. Thus, they perceive the problem that the prices are higher as the taxes are too high, and they seek solutions to overcome this and choose Germany because it is cheaper. This is the reason why these codes often appeared in the same quotations. They were the most influential factors for cross-border shopping in this sample. Interviewee 11 demonstrated how solution orientation and price advantage often occurred in one quotation:

“It really saves a lot of money comparison the Netherlands and then I also always like filled up my car with gasoline because it's always very cheaper there.”

“Product range and availability” was named 14 times and by 9 participants. Although less frequent coded than price, many participants felt that German supermarkets had a more varied assortment, which was perceived positively. Next to that, specific products mentioned included a larger assortment of gluten-free and lactose-free products (Interviewee 5 & 9), specific large sizes of energy drinks not easily found in the Netherlands (Interviewee 14), or, in general, “the bigger packages” (Interviewee 12). The variety of beer was also highlighted throughout the interviews (Interviewee 6, 11 & 12). This

supports the literature indicating product availability and a bigger assortment as a driver for cross-border shopping in Germany (Pilelienė et al., 2023; BNNVARA, 2024; MAXmagazine, 2024).

The factor "Familiarity vs. difference" was mentioned eleven times by six participants, and these quotations indicated, as expected by theory, that Dutch customers become very used to the shopping experience in Germany. They are indeed becoming familiar with the environment while still noticing differences (Szytniewski et al., 2017). The interview data indicated that participants frequently experience a sense of familiarity with shopping in Germany. For many living near the border, crossing into Germany has become a routine and normal activity (Interviewee 1, 11 & 13). Interviewee 1 even described Germany as feeling like a "second home", and interviewee 11 noted that they had "done it so many times that it feels like it's normal". This supports the idea that the shopping trip becomes a familiar, everyday practice (Szytniewski et al., 2017).

However, despite this familiarity, participants consistently noticed differences when they were shopping in Germany. The perceived differences related to the shopping experience itself included the layout and organisation of stores (Interviewee 3 & 11) or the availability of different or surprising products that are not typical for a grocery store (Interviewee 9). Interviewee 9 experiences the German stores as less aesthetically pleasing than Dutch supermarkets. Beyond these physical distinctions, some interviewees mentioned differences in the atmosphere or "vibe" (Interviewee 10). As mentioned before, the German shopping experience seems to be a bit calmer for some and was perceived as a positive aspect of shopping in Germany.

The factor "The Border" was coded 15 times. The question "Do you feel like you are crossing a border when coming here? Why or why not?" was answered by every interviewee, and answers varied a bit. For many living near the border, crossing into Germany has become a routine and normal activity. Interviewees living nearby often stated they did not feel like they were crossing a border at all (Interviewee 1) or that there are so many similarities between Gronau and Enschede that it feels normal (Interviewee 2). Despite these similarities, interviewees also noticed physical cues that indicated they were in Germany, like the different building styles (Interviewee 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 & 14), the roads (Interviewee 11 & 13), the language (Interviewees 1, 2, 5, 9 & 10) or occasionally the police checks at the border (Interviewee 1, 6, 7 & 13). However, contrary to the theoretical expectation that perceiving the border as a symbolic line might increase curiosity (Szytniewski et al., 2017; Makkonen et al., 2016), none of the interviewees indicated these differences or the "border itself" to increase their decision to visit Germany or make them more curious about the country itself. Luckily, they also do not seem to "scare them off to not come to Germany anymore" (Interviewee 12).

In conclusion, all these named factors were apparent in the interviews and seem to influence or at least explain the cross-border shopping of Dutch consumers. While the "solution orientation", the "price advantage through Germany", the "Product range and availability" and the "Familiarity vs. difference" factors seem to be drivers of cross-border shopping as expected, the factor "the border" did not appear as a driver, and findings solely explain how Dutch consumers perceive crossing the border. What can be said is that the border is nothing that hinders people from cross-border shopping. What needs more analysis in the result section of research question two, as well as the discussion section, is the factor of utilitarian "marketing", which was only mentioned 7 times by 6 interviewees.

Thus, what comes as a surprise is that the code "Marketing" could only be applied 7 times. Furthermore, these coded quotations were only about "word of mouth marketing" (Interviewee 2) and hearing about price advantages through Dutch media (Interviewee 4) – so the Dutch customers seem to only be motivated by their peers and their own country's media. After asking more specifically about how they became aware of the German offerings, they said that they just go because it is cheaper anyway. No interviewee mentioned being influenced by direct marketing or advertisements from German retailers, suggesting a potential gap and opportunity for German businesses.

4.2 Research Question 1.1: To what extent do these differences vary among various target groups?

Striking differences were found between the gender groups, male and female. Thus, the female participants in this sample do visit Germany less regularly than the male group. The male group have all participants that come once every or every two weeks, while the female groups approximately visit once a month or less (see table 6). It seems that male Dutch consumers engage in cross-border shopping more frequently and regularly.

Contextually, another thing that stood out was that the female interviewees seemed to have a more pronounced perception of crossing a border, as they mentioned the differences of the buildings and the atmosphere more often and more elaborately than their male counterparts. The latter, male and more frequent visiting group, describes the border as something that is barely felt anymore due to routine.

Additionally, the female group also seem to add more leisure activities to their shopping trips, as they report that they go shopping for clothes and check out other places around as they like to be in another country. This was also named by male participants, but it seems to be more common among female consumers in this sample (see table 6). Thus, interviewee 5, for example, explicitly states they "also come for the experience itself" and combine shopping with having a German beer and a "Currywurst". Interviewee 8 mentions visiting Germany for "cultural things", enjoying Christmas markets and their (typically German) "vibe", and also visiting outlet stores. Interviewee 9 combines grocery shopping with fashion shopping in larger towns like Düsseldorf, visiting department stores ("Kaufhäuser", like Galleria), and making the trip itself more like an activity that is relaxed." On the other hand, the male group combine shopping primarily with refuelling their car. While some male interviews also mentioned some leisure aspects, the integration of diverse leisure, cultural exploration, and varied non-grocery shopping appears more prominent in females' motivation to come to Germany.

Through the questionnaire, it was assessed if and with whom participants combine shopping for groceries in Germany. Several participants combined their cross-border shopping trip with refuelling gasoline (7); leisure activities such as outlet shopping (1); shopping for clothes (1); getting a snack or drinking coffee (1); or checking out specific product categories like beer brands. Only two participants said that they only come to do groceries and nothing more than that.

Despite checking all other possible different groups, like age, occupation or students and workers, there were no significant differences between any other groups except the former-explained gender effect. By going through the demographics and once more scanning the interviews based on them, it became clear that all had in common most of the things named under the result section of research question 1.1, irrespective of their occupation, age, gender, or frequency of visits. Most apparent commonalities between all interviewees were "price advantage through Germany" and utility-driven factors. Additionally, almost everyone at least combined their shopping experience with another activity – at least fuelling up their car (except interviewee 2 & 13).

Table 6
Demographics of participants

ID	Age	Gender	Occupation	Education	Hometown	Visits	Combined with
1	54	Male	Electrician	MBO	Enschede	Approximately every three months.	Gasoline
2	18	Male	Student	VMBO	Enschede	Once per month.	X
3	61	Male	IT Specialist	Bachelor	Enschede	Once every two weeks.	Gasoline
4	73	Male	Retired. Former owner of a logistic business.	HAVO	Enschede	Once every two weeks.	Gasoline
5	35	Female	Installer of charging stations	HAVO	Amersfoort	First time.	A fun trip and checking if they want to go more often.
6	25	Male	Master student & working in a liquor store	Bachelor	Hengelo	Once every two months.	Buying beer. Get a coffee or a snack.
7	22	Male	Master student & working part-time in marketing	Bachelor	Hengelo	Once every two weeks.	Gasoline.
8	23	Female	Master student & working part-time in a shop	Bachelor	Hengelo	Once a month.	Gasoline. Go shopping in Outlet stores.
9	23	Female	Master student & working part-time in a restaurant	Bachelor	Enschede	Once a month.	Shopping clothes in bigger towns.
10	24	Male	Master student & working part-time at Intersport	Bachelor	Hengelo	About 5 times a year.	Likes to be in a different country.
11	23	Male	Master student & working part-time in Sales	Bachelor	Enschede	Once a week.	Gasoline.
12	23	Female	Master student & working part-time in IT	Bachelor	Lonneker	Once a month.	Gasoline.
13	23	Male	Master student & working part-time in a restaurant	Bachelor	Enschede	Once a month.	X
14	24	Male	Working part-time in logistics	Master	Hengelo	Once every two weeks.	Gasoline.

4.3 Research Question 2: What are implications for German retail strategies?

This section presents findings related to the implications for German retailers targeting Dutch consumers, as derived from the analysis of interview data coded under the broad theme of "implications" (n = 128). Throughout the semi-structured interviews, interviewees provided valuable descriptions that inform German retailers about what they like and dislike and what they miss and suggest for the German supermarkets and shopping experience in general (see table 7). Sometimes interviewees mentioned these aspects after they were asked specifically, but sometimes, they brought them up randomly because something else in the conversation reminded them of what they wanted to say about the German shopping experience – in a positive or negative way. Thus, “what they like” was coded 42 (named by all interviewees) times compared to 16 times (named by 8 interviewees) for “what they don’t like”. It seems like overall, Dutch participants were quite positive about the German experience, and seven interviewees even made “suggestions” and reported 21 aspects “(what) they miss” (named by 8 interviewees), which will also be the basis for further suggestions that the findings of this study can give the German retailers.

Interesting is that it really seems to be the case that almost all of them at least combine the shopping trip with fuelling the car or even do leisure, fun things like grab a coffee or a “Currywurst” (named 2 times by Interviewee 5 & 6), go shopping for clothes in a “Kaufhaus” or outlet centre (Interviewee 8 & 9), or go to a restaurant (Interviewee 1). “Combined activities” was coded 30 times in 13 interviews. Only two interviewees mentioned that they really only come for the groceries. Another interesting code was “where they go” (named by 8 interviewees), which was coded 15 times, which gave some

more insights into the shopping behaviour and preference of Dutch consumers in Germany. The same applies to “what they buy”, which was named 22 times (named by 11 interviewees).

Table 7
Implications for German retailers regarding Dutch consumers

Implications	Key Characteristics	Impact for German retailers	Anchor Examples
Combined activities (n = 30)	Dutch consumers seem to do more than just shopping when in Germany	Understanding what and how they do additionally can help marketing strategies	“Shopping and refuelling the car.” (Interviewee 1)
Suggestions from interviewees (n = 13)	Things that interviewees explicitly mentioned that they want to change in Germany	This is something that consulting companies directly hand over to retailers	“Check out those types of stuffs and yeah, everything is really well organised and everything. If you go to every store for example “Albert Heijn” or whatever, they also gamified for example with an app. (Interviewee 13)
What they buy (n = 22)	Direct quotes of what they buy (and why)	Hints for specific campaigns	“cosmetic stuff and non-food products” (Interviewee 7)
What they don’t like (n = 16)	Direct quotes of what they don’t like in Germany	Hints for what to change	“I think the supermarkets look nicer in the Netherlands... they look better and more luxurious (Alber Heijn).” (Interviewee 3)
What they like (n = 42)	What interviewees stressed to be very positive about Germany	Hints for what to keep or what to stress in marketing	“Bigger supermarkets, all in one place and a big comfortable parking space” (Interviewee 5)
What they miss (n = 21)	What they miss in their shopping experiences	Implications on what to add in the shopping environment	“Self-scans” (Interviewee 6)
Where they go (n = 15)	Quotes for where they exactly go	Hints about where they go the most	“Lidl, for groceries” (Interviewee 7)

The analysis of sub-codes revealed specific dimensions of the German shopping experience that inform strategic implications for German retailers. As mentioned before, the consumers only came based on word-of-mouth marketing or based on Dutch news contributions and not because of direct marketing of German retailers. Therefore, in the following, a more detailed result section of the analysed “implications” codes and quotations.

What Dutch consumers liked in Germany

One aspect they like is termed “convenience of the stores and location”. Before going into detail, interviewee 5 summarised all this on point: “Bigger supermarkets, all in one place and a big comfortable parking space.”

Dutch consumers especially liked the clustering of all the relevant and different shops in one place (here especially for the area of interest: Gronau). For example, interviewee 14 made it clear that he

especially likes that he has everything in one place to go; he likes the different supermarkets in one place accompanied by the drug store “DM”. Interviewee 6 also mentioned the liquor store “Getränke Hofmann”. Interviewee 14 made clear that such places do not exist like that in the Netherlands.

Another aspect that was mentioned is that this is even more convenient and comfortable for Dutch visitors because of the big parking spaces, which are also not usual in the Netherlands. Thus, interviewee 5 added:

“A lot of places for parking,” and interviewee 4 elaborated, “It is Saturday, and you can easily drive and park here – there is enough space.”

Another aspect that Dutch interviewees like is the “atmosphere”, which is, according to them, calmer and more pleasant in the German shops compared to the Netherlands. Thus, they perceive the whole shopping experience as less hectic and that people are less rushing through the stores like in the Netherlands and that the Germans are very polite (Interviewee 2, 3, 4, 6, 9 & 14).

Other more specific things they mentioned were:

- “much more products in bigger packages” (Interviewee 12)
- “Beer” (mentioned 13 times) and the larger beer assortment in Germany (Interviewee 6)
- “Currywurst” (mentioned by Interviewee 5 & 6)
- That they have more gluten-free (Interviewee 9) and lactose-intolerant products (Interviewee 5)
- Drinks like Coca-Cola (e.g., Interviewee 12)
- The DM and the cheaper cosmetic products (e.g., Interviewee 14)

And of course, the things that were analyzed before, the “Price Advantage through Germany” and the “Product Range and Availability”.

What Dutch shoppers, disliked, miss, and what they suggest in Germany – things to improve

To report the results for the codes “what Dutch shoppers disliked” (n = 16), “what they missed” (n = 21), and what their “suggestions” were, table 8 below combines them all and give the basis for the discussion and implications for German retailers later on.

Table 8

Implications for German retailers regarding Dutch consumers Problems

Problems Identified by Dutch Shoppers	Suggested Improvements by Dutch Shoppers
Long waiting times at checkouts/ not enough cashiers (mentioned by interviewee 6, 8, 11, 14)	Adding “Self-checkouts” next to normal cashiers (Interviews 6, 8, 11, 13, & 14)
Supermarket set-up is perceived as “old-fashioned” and without convenience (Interviewee 13)	Put focus on “constantly innovating... with like automation” and add better application that combine the shopping-experience with gamification (Interviewee 13) Concrete example: “The app also offers "recipes that you can use from what's in your shopping list or what you bought” (Interviewee 13)
Stores “do not look that nice” and “miss a nice atmosphere” (Interviewee 8) and “more anonymous” and “less personal” compared to smaller Dutch stores (Interviewee 9).	Get inspired by the Dutch store-setup and design, interviewees (3, 13, & 14) referred to Albert-Heijn as very pleasant and convenient.

Additionally, there were some things that Dutch people did not like with no direct solution provided through the interviews. Thus, by some interviewees, it was mentioned that the staff are perceived as

less friendly, less open, or more formal in their interaction style compared to the Netherlands. Interviewee 1 perceived the interactions towards staff sometimes "from the top down", and he does not like that at all. Interviewee 12 indicated that asking for help felt like "almost too much work for them". She also described employees as "very serious" compared to the "easygoing" Dutch staff. On the contrary, the majority of interviewees (3, 4, 6, 10 & 14) said that they really like the good atmosphere and people in Germany.

What they buy

First of all, all interviewees went for groceries in Germany, so this was confirmed for 100% of the interviewees. But interviewees also explicitly mentioned products which can be helpful for German retailers. Appendix D shows a full list of all the products that were mentioned by interviewees.

Where they go (shopping) / combined activities

Additionally, interviewees mentioned specific places they visit and which other activities they combine with doing groceries in Gronau which can be seen in Appendix D as well.

5. Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore the motivations behind Dutch consumers' cross-border shopping in Gronau, Germany, investigating both utilitarian and cultural factors and their implications for German retailers. By applying a qualitative, exploratory research design based on semi-structured interviews with 14 Dutch participants, the phenomenon "cross-border shopping of Dutch consumers in Germany" was investigated in detail. On the one hand, the cultural and utilitarian factors based on existing theory were investigated and in what way they are drivers of cross-border shopping. It was tested how much influence the cultural factors have and how much of the Dutch cultural value can be found in this specific target group and activity. It was investigated if the cultural aspects are more powerful than the utilitarian factors and foremost the price advantage in Germany or not. On the other hand, practical implications for German retailers were collected and investigated to ensure better marketing by understanding the Dutch target group and their needs better.

Research Question 1: How do cultural factors drive consumer behaviour of Dutchmen in cross border shopping?

Utilitarian factors

First of all, this qualitative interview study clearly highlighted that the phenomenon "cross-border shopping" still is a current situation that happens in Germany. For the case of Gronau, on a casual Saturday morning when the fieldwork interviews took place, roughly half of the cars in the parking lot of the shopping centre had Dutch license plates, and those that were interviewed also confirmed that they come regularly, varying from once in one or two weeks up to once a month or less. Thus, the phenomenon described by Studzińska et al. (2018) and Burstein et al. (2023) was confirmed for the Dutch population – at least in the area of Gronau. It could also be confirmed that those who live near tend to come more often (Agarwal et al., 2017). What stood out here is that the first reason interviewees named for their reason to come to Germany was always something like "because it's cheaper" and not because they especially like coming there. Thus, contrary to theory-based expectations about Dutch culture, the utilitarian and economic reasons did outperform the cultural factors in terms of the most influential driver behind cross-border shopping.

Through the interviews it became clear that people especially came for price advantages in Germany compared to the Netherlands for groceries and non-food products as well as gasoline and more. Quotes like: "It really saves a lot of money [in] comparison [to] the Netherlands, and then I also always like filled up my car with gasoline because it's always very cheap there. Yeah, so." (Interviewee 12)

showed how significant these differences seem to be. Thus, the definition of cross-border shopping based on Studzińska et al. (2018) and Burstein et al. (2023) – which said that it is defined by consumers crossing the border to purchase goods in neighbouring countries – often driven by price differences and product availability – was confirmed with this study.

Next to the factor price differences, the aforementioned and a lot of similar quotes showed that the Dutch customers are very utility-driven factors, as expected by the theoretical framework based on Rosemann and Enklaar (forthcoming). Thus, they become aware of that “... the Dutch Government is putting so much taxes on it all the time ...” (Interviewee 12), and as a consequence, they come very regularly (see table 6) to Germany to avoid these taxes and save tactically on groceries and gasoline. At least for the Dutch population that is going cross-border shopping regularly, the factor solution orientation (n = 69) is way more visible in and influencing their behaviour than the cultural theoretical framework codes (n = 106 in total).

It was not mentioned as much as the price differences, but interviewees reported to visit and value Germany also for its larger and more varied product assortment compared to the Netherlands. For example, interviewees five and eight indicated that they visit Germany for very specific products that they do not get in the Netherlands, namely gluten- and lactose-free products. In summary, the product range and availability were mentioned 14 times (and in each interview). This investigation showed that people come – as expected by Pilelienė et al. (2023), BNNVARA (2024) and MAXmagazine (2024) – as well for the larger and different product assortment.

It was also proven that the people who live closer to the border are the majority of Dutch cross-border visitors in Germany, as hypothesised based on Agarwal et al. (2017). 13 of the 14 interviewed people came from Enschede or around that city, which is equal to about a 30-minute drive to Gronau. Only one person came all the way for a fun trip with her friends from Amersfort (a 90-minute drive), which was a real exception but a strong argument for the theory that cross-border shoppers also come to Germany for the trip itself (Studzińska et al., 2018; Burstein et al., 2023).

Agarwal (2017) was also right with his argument that those living closer to the border also come more often for shopping in Germany. Almost half of the interviewed Dutch consumers (see table 6) indicated they visit Germany for shopping once in one or two weeks, while another few people visit once a month or less, up to only a few times a year.

Another factor under investigation was how interviewees perceive the border. Interviewees did not even feel like crossing the border actively. What they mentioned is that they are in Germany, based on the building style. That is something they really perceived a difference compared to the Netherlands, but it was nothing that influenced them in any way in their decision to go to Germany or not, like it was expected by Szytniewski et al. (2017) and Makkonen et al. (2016). It is not the border that makes the Dutch customers curious; it is more about the different setting in Germany and mainly because of the price difference. But still, some people also come to Germany because “it's not the Netherlands. It's just being in a foreign country, something new.” (Interviewee 5) – which is in line with the reasoning that cross-border shoppers also come for the experience itself (Makkonen et al., 2016; Studzińska et al., 2018).

All in all, this study showed that the utilitarian reasons, and first and foremost the price advantage through Germany, are the most striking arguments for Dutch consumers to visit Germany for shopping. The factor of marketing will be investigated later on because the following cultural factors are important for the implications of this factor too.

Cultural factors

The theoretical and literature-based cultural factors were applied to 106 quotes. Thus, at first glance, the utilitarian reasons (132 quotes) were more striking than the cultural ones. As expected by former investigations (Arnold, 2023; Titulaer, 2024; Göttker, 2017; Oversteegen, 2023), the price advantage

was the top motivation for Dutch customers to come to Germany. But after diving deeper into the analysis of interviews, it became clear that the cultural insights from this interview are nurturing ground for marketing aspects and practical implications for German retailers on how to approach Dutch consumers in their stores even better. Actually, an alarming sign is that none of the interviewed persons visited Gronau due to marketing measures from German retailers; they only came out of their own interest, Dutch TV news, and word of mouth spreading.

Regarding cultural factors, the findings offered a different picture compared to theoretical expectations. "Indulgence; Quality of Life" was the most frequently coded cultural dimension, indicating that many Dutch participants do value enjoyment and leisure during their trips, often combining shopping with activities like having coffee or trying local food. This confirms theoretical expectations that this cultural factor also influences Dutch consumers' shopping behaviour (Hofstede, 2001; Pandey & Devasagayam, 2015; Schlizio et al., 2009).

The factor "Motivation towards Achievement and Success" suggests that Dutch consumers value a good experience more than a good price (Hofstede, 2001; Rosemann & Enklaar, forthcoming; Szytniewski et al., 2017). Contrary to the expectation that the quality of the shopping experience might be prioritised over price savings, the interviews made it clear that saving money was the main driving motivation for every interviewee. Some explicitly stated price differences were their only motivation (Interviewee 3 & 7). Thus, it is different from what was expected in the theoretical framework, suggesting that while a good experience is valued, it does not outperform the economic advantages for this group of Dutch border shoppers. Consequently, the Dutch consumers do not come for fun in the first place – they may search and judge things to enjoy when they are there, but their first motivation is the money. Still, the atmosphere and experience are an important topic to them and may even increase their visits and spending – when the later outlined implications are performed right.

Harmony Tendency" and "Relationship Orientation" were confirmed as important cultural values, as expected by theory (Schlizio et al., 2009; Schwartz, 2009). Important to say is that interviewees did not indicate these factors as something that motivates them to visit Germany more often or would scare them off in case they do not like this aspect in Germany. Still, Dutch consumers care about the atmosphere and interactions, as it was frequently mentioned in interviews. Perceptions of German staff and fellow shoppers were mixed, with some finding them calmer and more polite (Interviewee 2, 3, 4 & 10), while others perceived them as more distant or formal compared to staff and people in Dutch supermarkets (Interviewee 1 & 12). This suggests that while harmony is valued, the actual experience in German stores varies for individuals. And it would be something that German retailers should be aware of to make the shopping experience as appealing to the Dutch target group as possible.

The factor "Trusting (Task-based vs Relationship-based)" could be confirmed as Dutch consumers indicated that they actually go to the same place and the same stores for the products they know regularly (some more often than others), and they are happy with it. Thus, the theoretical insights of Meyer (2014) can be confirmed for the Dutch culture once again – also for the Dutch cross-border shoppers.

The rest of the cultural factors from the theoretical framework, namely "Long-Term Orientation", "Autonomy Tendency", and "Individualism", were coded far less frequently and appeared less influential as direct drivers for cross-border shopping in this specific context. While individual examples supporting these dimensions existed, they were not prominent themes across the sample. Still, especially the "outlier"-interviewee 5 delivered insights that prove the existence of these cultural aspects in Dutch culture. This interviewee took a 90-minute drive just to check if it is worth going and for the trip itself for fun. All this showed that people come for fun (Makkonen et al., 2016; Studzińska et al., 2018) and to satisfy their curiosity for new advantages, as suggested by the factor "autonomy tendency" (Schwartz, 2009). Accordingly, individual examples proved that it seems to be a part of Dutch culture, but for the cross-border shopping context, they do not seem to play a major role and are therefore not relevant for this specific target group.

All in all, the dominant motivations remain the utilitarian factors, particularly price advantage and solution orientation, uninfluenced by the cultural factors. However, the presence of a comfortable yet distinctly different environment, combined with the ability to easily access convenient shopping locations, likely plays a role in reinforcing the routine and encouraging repeat visits for those already motivated by practical benefits.

This research filled the gap of understanding and differentiating the cultural aspects of Dutch people when it comes to cross-border shopping and provided a better, scientifically researched view on the cultural values in this context. Results showed that this research on cultural values in this specific context was crucial, as the values that hold for Dutch people in general cannot be applied in the same way to this specific target group of Dutch people who regularly shop in Germany. These insights, and especially the last point, “marketing”, are valuable for German retailers aiming to reach the Dutch consumers.

Thus, it is highly likely that Dutch people will come to Germany anyway as long as the price difference exists, but there is a lot of potential for marketing by understanding Dutch cultural preferences and this specific target group in this specific context throughout the results of this research. Therefore, and lastly, the factor “marketing” needs consideration. As pointed out in the result section, there were only seven quotes resembling “marketing”-related activities. But there was no information derived from German campaigns reaching Dutch customers; Dutch interviewees derived information about Germany's supermarkets from word-of-mouth or based on Dutch News. This fact is at the same time an alarming sign but also a real big opportunity for marketers in the German border regions.

Participants indicated they were primarily influenced by word-of-mouth and mentions in Dutch media regarding price advantages. No interviewee mentioned being influenced by direct marketing or advertisements from German retailers. This highlights a significant gap and a potentially big opportunity for marketers in German border regions. Luckily, this study revealed a lot of utilitarian reasons that drive Dutch consumers and which cultural factors they value; it gave information on where they go, what they combine their shopping trips with and what special products they aim for. This gives a lot of practical insights which will be outlined next.

Research Question 1.1: To what extent do these differences vary among various target groups?

Additionally, differences between possible different groups within the sample were investigated. Demographic factors like age or occupation did not show significant differences in motivations or behaviour. The only factor on which findings differed kind of systematically was “Gender”. Female participants tended to visit Germany less regularly than males. Females also appeared to have a more pronounced perception of crossing a border and were more likely to combine shopping trips with leisure activities beyond just fuelling their car, such as shopping for clothes, visiting outlet stores, or seeking cultural experiences. Male participants, who visited more frequently, described the border as barely felt due to routine and primarily combined shopping with refuelling.

Female participants also more frequently mentioned that they did not like the setup, look and atmosphere of the German supermarkets compared to the supermarkets in the Netherlands like Albert Heijn (Interviewee 8 & 9). This result resembles the findings of Helgesen & Nettet (2010), who found that females seem to like and value the aesthetics of grocery stores more than males.

Research Question 2: What are implications for German retail strategies? Practical implications

On a more basic level, Appendix D gives direct insights on which specific products interviewees report to buy and where they go. These insights can help German retailers in their Marketing campaigns by specifically make these products visible to the Dutch consumers. Additionally, it shows where the Dutch customers like to go the most and with which activities they combine their shopping trip. These products and places seem to explicitly drive Dutch consumers to Germany and should be considered when developing marketing campaigns.

5.1 Recommendations

First, German retailers need to invest more in marketing across the Dutch border. The most striking finding next to the content is that not even one interviewee was shopping in Germany because they got attracted by marketing campaigns of German retailers. Thus, the marketing measures need to be highly increased and specialised by German retailers to reach their Dutch target group even more. Geo-marketing (Saini & Bansal, 2023) – thus, spreading the individualised online-marketing campaigns to Dutch people across the border would be the most fitting measure here.

Second, these marketing campaigns should directly catch upon what interviewees report to like in Germany and frequently buy; therefore, they should promote and incorporate the following.

- Make sure to promote the significant price advantage and the bigger product assortment.
- The products listed in Appendix D.
- Stress that one can get products in larger packages and sizes.
- Stress the proximity to activities and places that Dutch interviewees reported to combine frequently with their groceries: gasoline, food spots, and leisure activities.
- Promote the “holiday-like” experience in Germany, making the trip feel like a “breakaway” from home.

Third, and as it was mentioned so often, German retailers – maybe even in cooperation with all shops and companies close to each other (like the one in Gronau) – should actively promote that one can “get everything in one place” and that they have big and free parking lots to ensure a convenient and relaxing shopping experience.

Fourth, to build upon the fact that this research confirmed that Dutch people also come for the trip itself that was suggested by Makkonen et al. (2016) and Studzińska et al. (2018) already, the things people like about Germany should be taken into consideration. Retailers should think about offering food trucks at bigger shopping places like in Gronau with a stand for “Currywurst”, fries, or other typical German food products. On weekends it may even be an idea to offer fresh beer on tap, as so many interviewees reported that they come for beer. The bottom line of this point is that it is noteworthy to think about these typical German things Dutch people especially like, as they may be promising marketing moves.

Furthermore, there were some very insightful reports on problems Dutch interviewees perceived when they were in Germany which can be tackled by the attached implications to enhance their shopping experience to increase their visits and spending.

Dutch customers reported to be slightly annoyed by the fact that the waiting queues are too long and equipped with too few cashiers. Interviewees also mentioned that German supermarkets are outdated compared to the Netherlands and not innovating enough. Thus, something that is obvious and was mentioned by quite a few interviewees is that German supermarkets need to add self-checkouts in every supermarket to increase efficiency in stores and to make the stores more appealing to the Dutch preference for convenience and innovation (based on Interviews 6, 8, 11, 13 & 14).

Sixth, there is a controversy about the perception of the German staff in supermarkets: some interviewees indicated that they perceive the staff as very competent and polite, while others perceive them as very distant and unfriendly and not willing to help. As expected by theory and proven through analysis of the interviews, Dutch people are very focused on harmony and healthy relationships, which is why they also seem to place high value on it when interacting with staff in a supermarket as well. It seems that some of the German staff are not aware that they come across as unfriendly or distant (or they do not care about that). This is not something one can completely erase as an owner of a supermarket, but one can do something against it. Thus, retail owners can either place emphasis on the behaviour and charisma of people when hiring them or make sure that people become culturally aware of the fact that Dutch customers may have different needs than the German customers. This could also

be achieved by introducing cultural awareness training to the staff. Thus, enhancing training on customer interaction or highlighting the perceived politeness could improve the experience of Dutch customers due to more awareness of the German staff (Chenyang, 2022).

Seventh, and related to the store setup or design as well, interviewees mentioned that they did not like that the shops look so functional and miss design and a nice atmosphere. As a solution, German supermarkets should get inspiration from the Netherlands. Albert Heijn was frequently and very positively mentioned as a store with good and convenient design throughout the interviews (3, 8, 9, 12 & 14).

Lastly, a digital-related implication is the measure that supermarkets need to enhance the prominence of the apps from the supermarkets and stores that list promotions, coupons and more. Throughout the 14 interviews, no one mentioned that they use these – existing and used by German consumers – apps (for example, “Lidl Plus”). It seems that they are not even aware of them. Thus, interviewee 13 criticised that the supermarkets have no such apps like they have in the Netherlands for Albert Heijn. Thus, the fourth implication is that the German retailers need to increase the prominence of their apps and need to make them usable in Dutch and for Dutch customers. The use of such apps giving customers promotions likely increases visits and spending of users (Alsharif et al., 2023; Jia Niu et al., 2024; Michalko & Ratz, 2006; Interviewee 13).

Furthermore, there are even more opportunities within this measure. Retailers could make use of the insights from this study and make special collaborations with places and activities that Dutch customers reported to combine with their groceries: fuel stations, bakeries, fast food restaurants, restaurants, liquor stores, and shopping centers.

5.2 Limitations

Although the saturation principle (Saunders et al., 2018) was used and no new insights appeared throughout the interviews, the sample size of 14 participants has the potential to have missed more insights from different perspectives. This limitation is based on the fact that only one participant from farther away than the nearby Enschede area was interviewed. Sources like Makkonen et al. (2016) and Studzińska et al. (2018) stressed that cross-border shopping can always be a matter of fun and the trip itself. It may be that this is not the case for Gronau, but it may also be that the sample size was just not big enough to catch more insights about this perspective.

Additionally, the generalisability of this study’s results is limited as well. The research was intentionally focused on the German border town Gronau and the customers that specifically visit this location. Thus, the findings are very useful for this specific area, while they are not so easily generalisable to Dutch culture overall. Still, they show that Dutch cultural norms do not apply to all Dutch people in the same amount in every situation. Caution also has to be exercised by taking the results for other border regions as granted, as cultural characteristics can also be different in different areas within the same country (Kaasa et al., 2014).

The last limitation is methodological and caused by missing resources. The research was conducted, sampled, coded, analysed and interpreted by the same person. This can lead to coding biases (Campbell et al., 2013), like subjectivity or simply missing information in the interviews. This bias has to be taken into account for interpreting this research.

5.3 Future research

In the theoretical framework, it was suggested that, based on Dutch economic experts Paul Moers cited by BNNVARA (2024), Dutch customers may value the larger assortment of organic products. No interviewee mentioned this factor, which raises the question of if they really do not care about such a product standard or if the open nature of interviews just missed this aspect. Future research should concentrate on this aspect to bring clarity for German marketers.

To increase the statistical validity of the findings that this research has brought, future research should aim to perform qualitative research with a larger sample size to confirm or revise the findings and implications based on this initial research on cross-border shopping. Additionally, this research should be performed in geographically diverse border towns to see if the results differ and why.

Another interesting research question is if the values of Dutch customers are the same as for grocery shopping when they shop for furniture, clothes – or even when they come to Germany for leisure activities. It will be interesting to test whether they also place the most emphasis on the price or if other cultural values are more important at these activities. It is necessary to research each area on their own to achieve the best insights and implications for the marketing measures of respective areas.

Lastly, one thing that is very important to research is if there are differences in behaviour and values between different income groups. For example, McCollough (2007) found that the higher the disposable income of people is, the more they tend to spend money on disposable instead of reusable goods. It would be very interesting to see if those Dutch people who shop in Germany do so because of their lower disposable income and if their cultural values only change because they have to (financially) or if it is a more general Dutch characteristic to focus on saving money. Thus, future research should check if cross-border shopping is only a phenomenon of people with lower disposable income or if the “solution orientation” of Dutch people can be manifested as a new cultural standard of Dutch people.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, cultural aspects are not as powerful drivers for cross-border shopping of Dutch customers in Germany as utilitarian reasons. Specifically, the solution orientation of Dutch people (based on Rosemann and Enklaar (forthcoming)) is the most important factor influencing cross-border shopping, as Dutch consumers make use of the price advantages in Germany. Still, the cultural factors are further influencing how Dutch customers perceive their visits and therefore show a large potential to increase their experience to increase visits and sales by tactical adaptations and marketing measures. By addressing the practical implications, German retailers can better align their offerings and marketing efforts with the specific motivations and preferences of Dutch cross-border shoppers, potentially increasing visits, spending, and customer loyalty. The insight into the low impact of current marketing of German retailers – while already having loads of Dutch customers – also highlights the potential for additional substantial growth of Dutch customers through strategic and targeted communication based on this research.

Dutch cultural standards seem to differ by fields of applications, and thus, research like this is needed to understand the specific target groups for each branch to tailor the experience of customers and the marketing as close as possible to their needs to increase sales. In this current case Dutch customers come for the price difference in the first place. Still, analysis revealed an interplay of drivers, dominated by practical considerations but also influenced by cultural nuances, offering valuable insights for both academic understanding and practical implications for German retailers.

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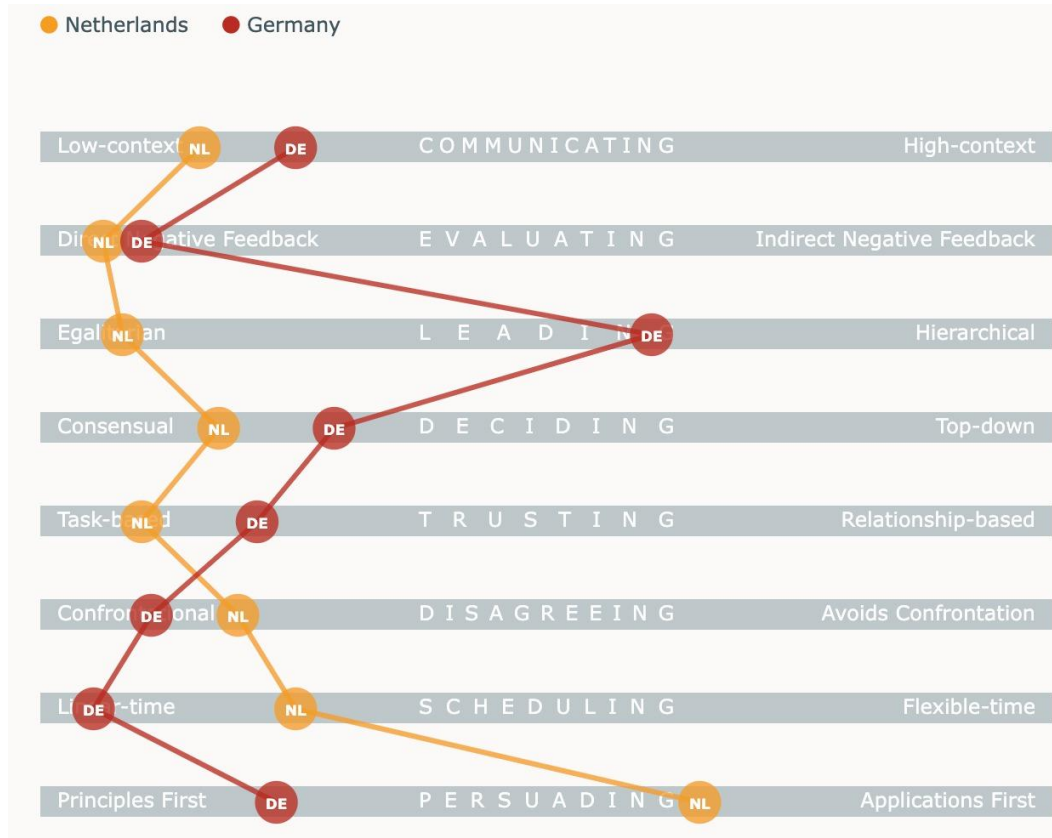
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Appendices

Appendix A – Meyer's Comparison between Germany and the Netherlands



Appendix B – Semi-structured interview guide

Interview guide:

1. General Motivation and Behaviour:

- What brought you to Germany today?
- How often do you come shopping in Germany?
- In your opinion, what defines typical Dutch shopping behaviour?
- What do you think Dutch people particularly like about this place in Germany?

2. Personal Experiences and Perceptions:

- What are the biggest differences for you between shopping in Germany and in the Netherlands?
- How would you describe your shopping experience here in Germany?
- Are there specific aspects you enjoy more here or things you feel are missing?

3. Socio-Cultural Aspects:

- Do you feel like you are crossing a border when coming here? Why or why not?
- How do you perceive the cultural differences between Germany and the Netherlands when it comes to shopping?

4. Demographics:

- What is your age? (e.g., 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, etc.)
- What is your occupation?
- What is your highest level of education?

Note: This semi-structured guide allows the use of targeted follow-up questions, such as “Why?” and “How?”, in response to the interviewees’ answers, thereby generating rich, exploratory data. This approach avoids the potentially leading nature of highly specific, structured questions.

Appendix C – Informed consent for interviews

Informed Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study

Dear Participant,

This study is being conducted by Tim Lippers, me, a student in the Master of Business Administration program at the University of Twente. The data collected will be analyzed as part of a Master’s thesis. The aim of this research is to investigate the motivations of Dutch consumers for engaging in cross-border shopping in Gronau, Germany.

Purpose of the Study: The objective of this research is to understand the factors influencing Dutch consumers’ decision to shop in Germany instead of the Netherlands. You will be asked several questions related to your cross-border shopping behaviour in Gronau.

Eligibility: To participate, you must meet the following criteria:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Be a Dutch national
- Have visited Gronau for shopping at least once

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason, and there will be no negative consequences for choosing not to participate.

Data Confidentiality:

All data will be treated confidentially and will only be accessible to the researcher and the research supervisors.

The interview will be audio-recorded for analysis purposes only, and the recordings will be stored securely and anonymized.

Personal information, such as your name, will not be collected. Only the following non-personally identifiable data will be gathered: your age, the distance you travel to Gronau, the frequency of your shopping trips, and your reasons for shopping in Germany.

Duration: The interview will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Consent to Participate and Record: By giving oral consent to participate in this study and agreeing to the audio recording (which will be deleted now if you don't), you confirm that you have read and understood the information provided above. You also acknowledge that:

- Participation is voluntary
- Data will be processed anonymously
- You can withdraw your consent and data up until the end of the thesis research period
- You can contact the researcher at any time with questions or concerns via email: t.j.lippers@student.utwente.nl

Do you consent?

Sign here:

Appendix D – Results shopping preferences

Table 9

Hard facts named by Dutch interviewees about their shopping behaviour

Where they go	What they buy there
Supermarkets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand-products in general (Interviewee 14) - surprising non-grocery items on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, such as a mixer for your kitchen, handy tools for the garden, blankets, or ski clothes (especially at ALDI) (Interviewee 9) - junk-food and drinks a BBQ or a party (Interviewee 10, & 13) - “Zewa” (Interviewee 4) - Pre-cooked meals for the microwave (Interviewee 4) - “Kinder” (chocolate) products (14) - Brand-products in general (14) - Soft drinks like “Sprite, Coca-Cola” (Interviewee 9, 12, 13, & 14) - Monster Energy (the 500 ml cans which are not available in the Netherlands) and Red bull cans in bulks (Interviewee 14) - gluten-free products (brand: “Schär”) (Interviewee 9) - lactose-intolerant products (Interviewee 5)
Drug stores	cosmetic products
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DM (Interviewee 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, & 14) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - razor blades & foam - skin-care products - brushes (Oral-B) for electric toothbrush - shampoo and deodorant
Beverage stores	Alcohol (Interviewee 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, & 13)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Getränke Hofmann (Interviewee 6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beer, especially “Weizenbier” or the German brands in general (Interviewee 6, 11, & 12) - Hard liquor (Interviewee 10 & 13)

Combined activities:

- Gasoline (everyone except Interviewee 2, 5, 9, 10, & 13)
- Buying German beer (Interviewee 6, 11, & 12)
- Get a coffee or a snack (Interviewee 5, 6)
 - Bakery
 - Currywurst
- Go to a restaurant (Interviewee 1)
- Go shopping in Outlet stores (Interviewee 8)
- Shopping clothes in bigger towns (Interviewee 9)
- Being in a different country / for a day out (Interviewee 5, & 10)