

# **Influence of culture on French sauna market penetration**

**Case company: Zenestar**

## Abstract

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Abstract <p>A sauna is a form of dry steam bath that originated in Finland. Nowadays, sauna has become popular all over the world. Zenestar company with its wellness concept wants to diversify the functions of the traditional sauna. By applying advanced technologies, Zenestar has successfully turned a monotonous sauna room into a luxury space for physical and mental wellness. Since 2020, the company has planned to expand to five potential countries, including France.</p> <p>The market research process includes many aspects. Culture is one of those aspects. This thesis was born to analyze the influence of culture on Zenestar's penetration into the French sauna market. Culture has a direct influence on the decision to consume a product or service. It manifests itself through cultural factors. On the other hand, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory helps researchers identify these cultural factors. Studying these factors, the thesis will have an answer to the cultural influence on the sauna consumer decision. From there, it indirectly shows the feasibility of Zenestar's market penetration. That is also the purpose of this thesis.</p> <p>The thesis using deductive reasoning begins by stating the existing theoretical points. Next, through both qualitative and quantitative methods, the thesis reinforces the original theories and draws conclusions for the research. Furthermore, the thesis consists of two main parts, the theoretical part, and the empirical part. In the first part, the main theoretical points, especially Hofstede's theory will be discussed. The second section presents the process of data collection and analysis. From the obtained results, the thesis will have suggestions on whether Zenestar should penetrate the French sauna market or not.</p> <p>Research shows that Zenestar has a good opportunity to penetrate the French market. However, Finnish and French cultural differences should be carefully considered. It includes the power distance in French society, the strong dependence of the French on their families, and their rigidity in receptive to new ideas as well as their rigor in the face of desires.</p>		

Keywords

sauna, wellness, culture, dimensions, Zenestar, France

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Research background

This chapter will systematically show the structure of the whole thesis. By opening with the research background, the author gives readers the most general overview of this study. Next, the thesis objectives, as well as the research questions, will be mentioned. Besides, in this chapter, the author also points out the limitations of the thesis. Indispensably, the theoretical framework introduces to readers the main theoretical points discussed in this study. The research methods and data collection methods used in this study will also be indicated in turn.

Sauna is a form of dry heat bath that originated in Finland long time ago. Moreover, it is also a cultural heritage and pride of the people here. Surprisingly, "sauna" is the only Finnish word in the Oxford English dictionary and the most popular Finnish word that almost everyone has heard once. Nowadays, saunas have appeared all over the world. From the sauna rooms in the apartments to the modern and luxurious saunas, integrated spa, yoga and massage in hotels and resorts. (Nordskog et al. 2010, 1.)

It is no coincidence that it is so well-known. There is a long history behind and revolutions of sauna culture. Through the industrial revolution, people gradually replaced the traditional hot stone stoves with electric stoves (METOS Ltd.). Along with the migration of Finns all over the world and the impact of the world wars, the design of sauna and the culture of Finnish sauna, in general, were carried and since then popular as today (Scheuch 2004, 156).

The company Zenestar is a wellness space solution created by Hallaus Architects, a Finnish interior and product design company specializing in health and wellness. Zenestar is led by CEO and interior architect Susanna Halla. (Pirkkalainen.) In addition to providing services related to the design and installation of traditional saunas, Zenestar is more than that. The CEO of the company wanted to diversify the idea of a sauna as a wellness space and turn it into a real healing environment. Smart technologies are integrated into Zenestar products and services. Therefore, the main segment they want to target is luxury hotels, spas and resorts that can afford the company's high-end services. (Susanna Halla.) In 2017, Zenestar was a finalist for The Idea Mining Business competition in Heinola, Finland. Taking that as a motivation, the company is now actively promoting their brand as well as looking for new investors. (Zenestar 2020, 4.)

In 2020, Zenestar has planned to enter five potential markets including the US, Germany, France, Japan, and China (Zenestar 2020, 10). Before setting foot in these markets, the company needs to make careful preparations. One of the first steps in this preparation is market research. According to Alexandra Twin (2021), it is the process of determining the viability of a new product or service through direct research with potential customers or markets. In other words, it is the discovery of a completely new target market, which includes receiving consumer opinions and feedback about their interest in that product or service (U.S. Small Business Administration). In the process of researching a market, cultural considerations are essential. The cultural values of a society where the product or service is planned to be introduced have great influence. It affects the consumer decision in that society. Sometimes, those cultural values can be generalized broadly to an entire country. (Hunt 2019.) Obviously, they greatly affect the success of entering new markets. Therefore, businesses need to consider cultural factors as well as their influences carefully and seriously.

Susanna Halla has collaborated with four LAB University of Applied Sciences students, including the author of this thesis. We are working on our graduation thesis, and this thesis is intended to help Susanna in researching the French market. We hope that we can effectively assist her in researching these potential markets. Based on the research results, Susanna Halla, as well as Zenestar, will consider and make the wisest decisions to enter the market and avoid unnecessary losses.

In 2018, France recorded 212 million tourists visiting the country (World Data). This Western European country is one of the world's most attractive tourist destinations (Statista Research Department 2021), especially the capital Paris, known as the capital of light. It has led to the number of hotels, saunas, spas, and resorts sprang up like mushrooms. In which, the number of high-class facilities is not small. Wellness services related to sauna and yoga also develop because of that. Seizing this opportunity, Zenestar company chose France as one of the potential markets to enter in the future.

Honestly, the information about sauna culture in France is very limited (World of Sauna 2020), the author will try his best to contribute an objective view from the cultural perspectives to Zenestar whether the company should expand the market there or not. It is a sad fact that sauna culture, especially Finnish saunas, is not so explosive in this Western European country and is probably just Swedish saunas for the most part (Liikkanen 2021). Therefore, this is both an advantage and a disadvantage for any business that wants to enter the sauna market here. The advantage is that they can completely play a pioneering role in this field. On the other hand, to this day, through many historical upheavals and

strong waves of migration, the Finnish sauna is still something new to the French people. Cultural differences are the main reason for this limitation. From there, the author decided to carry out the study. He wants to find out how cultural factors affect the French people's decision to choose a type of wellness service in general and a sauna in particular. Moreover, the research will also partly indicate the feasibility of Zenestar's market penetration.

## 1.2 Thesis objectives, research questions and limitations

### **Thesis objectives**

The first thesis objective is finding out the influence of culture on the entry into the French sauna market. Thereby, readers will see the cultural factors that can influence the selection of potential markets. In addition, the extent of these influences and how they shape the decision-making process to buy a product as well as a service of that culture's customers. The author hopes to help Zenestar have the most accurate overview and consideration before setting foot in the French sauna market. This is also the second objective that this thesis aims at.

### **Research questions**

The main research questions:

*Is there any opportunity for Zenestar in the French sauna market culturally?*

The following sub-questions are intended to expand and develop the subject matter of the main question. By finding answers to the smaller sub-questions, we gradually perfect the answer to the main question above.

- *What cultural factors can influence on the decision to use the sauna in France?*
- *What are the differences between Finnish and French cultures that influence the need for saunas?*
- *What are the cultural advantages and disadvantages of Zenestar?*
- *How to reduce cultural risk and increase the probability of success for Zenestar?*

### **Limitations**

Research limitations are inevitable in all studies. Within the scope of the research, the author has tried to gather information from various sources on the prevalence of sauna culture in France. However, the studies and reports that the author references come from many different authors. Therefore, personal views and feelings about the reality of sauna culture in this Western European country are somewhat relative. From a cultural perspective, this is even more evident. On the other hand, the reliable literature on this matter is extremely



limited. In addition, to reach out to French natives to survey their views on saunas, there are many shortcomings. Language differences and level of openness are barriers to making these outreaches. The French also tend to be more open and appreciative when someone speaks to them in their native language (Just French It). In addition, the information is collected during certain time periods. Therefore, the statements made by this thesis may not be accurate in the future. Moreover, wellness trends and infrastructure of hotels, spas and resorts can be changed. This thesis was also studied during the COVID-19 pandemic. Inevitably, the statistics may be affected in the context of the service and tourism industry slowing down. Zenestar should consider this research relatively as well as carry out the market research in different terms.

### 1.3 Theoretical framework

Theoretically, the author gives an overview of Finnish sauna culture. From there, readers feel the importance of sauna for every citizen in this Nordic country. It is not only a wonderful relaxation therapy or giving great health benefits, but also a unique cultural identity of Finland. Next, the sauna culture in France will be mentioned. Here, the thesis shows the French concept of sauna based on the articles. By pointing out the two sauna cultures in these two countries, readers will have a better overview of the differences.

Next, the thesis shows the influence of culture on the decision to buy a product or service. The main theory used in the thesis is Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Through the six dimensions mentioned in Hofstede theory, the thesis step by step points out cultural factors and their influences on the above process. Besides, the pros and cons will also be indicated, for both the French sauna market in general and the Zenestar case company.

### 1.4 Research methods and data collection

#### **Research approach**

One of the first steps in a research project is to define a research approach. There are different research approaches, each of which assumes different roles of the theory covered in the research. In other words, it serves as a guide for the writer in his/her journey to discover and deepen the theoretical points he/she wants to learn. (Saunders et al. 2009, 124.)

There are two commonly used research approaches: deductive reasoning and Inductive Reasoning. Here is a brief explanation of these two theoretical approaches:

- Deductive reasoning: Theory is shaped from the ground up. By empirical analysis from the original source of theory and hypothesis, the writer can check their objectivity.
- Inductive reasoning: In contrast to deductive reasoning, in this research approach, empirical analysis is performed first from which new theories are derived. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 22.)

In this thesis, the writer uses deductive reasoning to approach the theories he is interested in.

Below are two flow diagrams depicting Inductive Reasoning and Deductive Reasoning. Thereby, readers can see the basic difference between these two research approaches. Those are two completely opposite directions, respectively how these two approaches work. The elements in the flow diagrams are also different from each other.

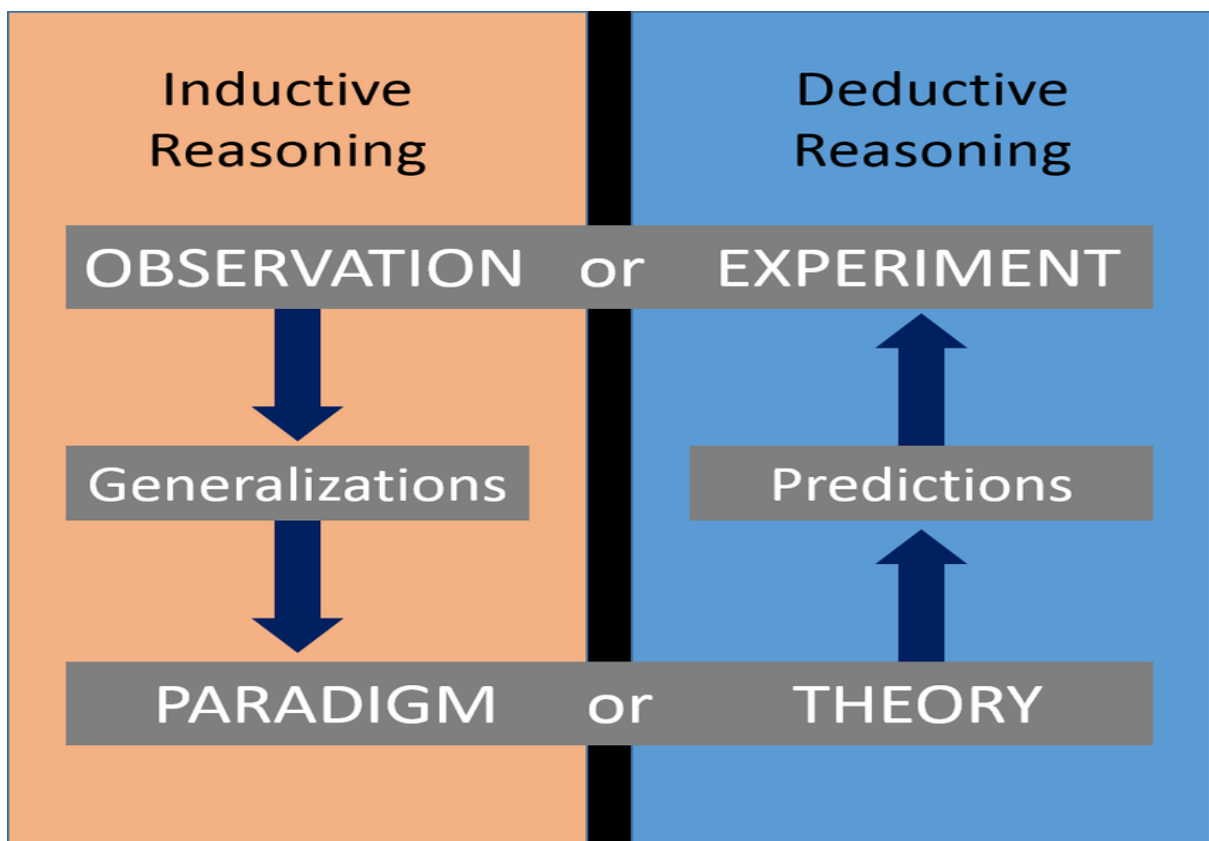


Figure 1. The flow diagrams of inductive and deductive reasoning (Karaman 2015)

The main difference between these two research approaches is how they interact with a theory. Inductive reasoning aims to build a theory through the analysis of the data collected.

In contrast, deductive reasoning tests an existing theory. On the other hand, the dynamic dimension of inductive reasoning goes from specific observations to broad generalizations. Deductive reasoning works in the opposite direction. From the initial broad generalizations, statements are developed that reinforce their origins.

### **Research methods**

The next step, the writer chooses the research method for his thesis. There are two commonly used research methods: qualitative and quantitative. Each method helps to find the answer to the main question that was originally mentioned (Ghuri & Grønhaug, 2010). Qualitative and quantitative methods are not mutually exclusive, as it might be possible to quantify qualitative data. In quantitative research, the outcomes are obtained using statistical methods or other quantitative procedures. On the other hand, qualitative research is carried out to understand the research subject. Specifically, from the research subject, the thesis builds a theory that closely reflects reality. (Eisenhardt, 1989; Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010; Hirsjärvi et al. 2009; Schreier, 2013.)

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this research. The advantage of qualitative method is that it collects significant amounts of information and data from a limited number of sources. To apply this method, the writer needs to conduct observations, group discussions, documents, and interviews to better understand the experiences of the subjects being studied. (Glenn 2010, 95-96.) On the other hand, quantitative research collects information using a sampling method and is conducted through online surveys, online polls, questionnaires, etc. The results obtained are used as a basis for predicting the future of the product or service. At the same time, businesses make changes in their business plans to achieve the desired target. In fact, this thesis was written in the context of the complicated COVID-19 pandemic and the restriction of direct contact between people was recommended. Therefore, instead of directly interviewing a group of research issues, the thesis collects data through an online survey of more than 100 people. Even so, the author still interviews several individuals, namely multi-national colleagues in the company he is interning with. The main market segment of the case company is high-end hotels, spas, and resorts. Therefore, tourists are the main survey target group. But they can come from many countries with different cultures, not necessarily French. This creates more objectivity for the conclusions of empirical research on the influence of culture on consumer decision-making. From there, closely related to the market penetration of Zenestar.



Figure 2. Qualitative Market Research and Quantitative Market Research (Arema Connect, 2014)

### Data collection

In this thesis, primary and secondary data are used. Primary data is data collected by the author of the study through surveys, interviews, personal experiences (Adams et al. 2007, 107). More specifically, in this study, primary data came from a survey of more than 100 individuals from many different cultures about the influence of culture on their decision to use the sauna. In addition, secondary data comes collected through previous studies, books, articles, and other relevant documents (Adams et al. 2007, 117). Secondary data serve as the foundation bricks for the theoretical basis of this study.

### Thesis structure

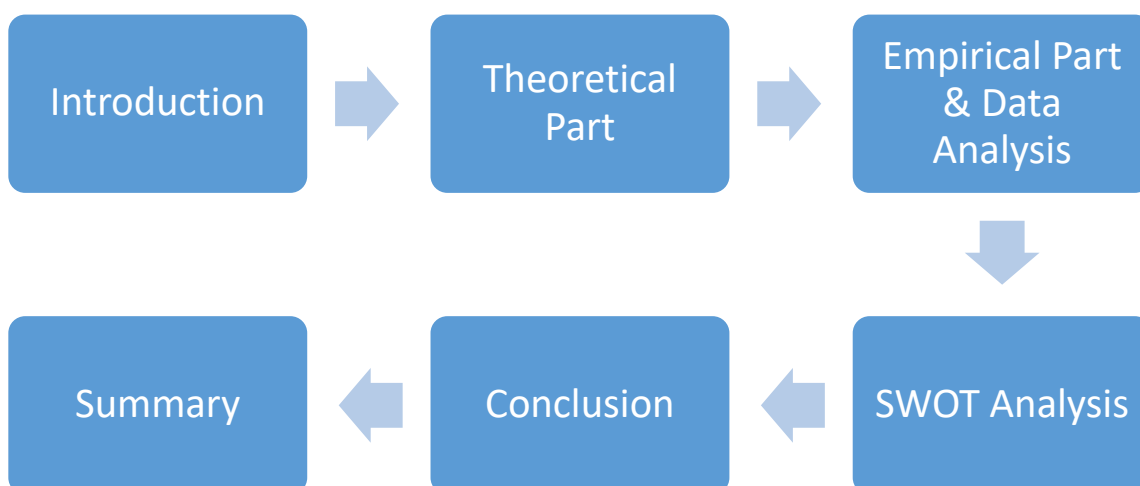


Figure 3. Thesis structure

The thesis begins with an introduction. In this chapter, the author introduces readers to the purpose of the study, the theoretical points mentioned, the research methodology as well as paving the way for the next sections. After the introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into two main parts: the theoretical part and the empirical part. The theoretical part includes chapters from 2 to 7. The author would like to break this part down into smaller chapters to help readers easily follow and logically distinguish the theoretical points. Starting from the initial concepts of Finnish sauna and sauna culture in France, the thesis provides basic information for readers who learn about sauna for the first time. Next, chapter 3 will address the most important theoretical point, the Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. By analyzing the French culture through this theory's dimensions, the thesis outlines the cultural factors affecting the decision to use the sauna of consumers. Case company Zenestar is also introduced in more detail in the next chapter. To conclude the theoretical part, the thesis will outline the significance of the above analysis for the sauna and wellness businesses in France. Specifically, in chapter 6, the thesis will show the potential of these industries in this Western European country as well as of Zenestar company.

The empirical part will be written in chapter 7. This is the process of planning and conducting a survey. In it, more than 100 consumers will be asked about their thoughts on the influence of culture on their decision to use a sauna. From there, the survey partly outlines the overall picture of the feasibility of Zenestar's market penetration.

After the above secondary data collection process, in chapter 9, the author focuses on the Zenestar SWOT analysis in term of culture. From there, Zenestar can make changes to its business plan. In chapter 10, the thesis answers the questions raised in the introductory chapter. Chapter 11 summarizes the whole study and concludes the thesis.

## 2 Overview of Finnish sauna

### 2.1 Definition

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a sauna (/ˈsɔːnə, ˈsɑʊnə/, Finnish: [ˈsɑ̌unɑ]), is a Finnish steam bath in which the steam is provided by water thrown on hot stones or a specialized stove that has been heated. This steam causes the body of the bathers to heat up and sweat. Sauna also means a bathhouse, room or cabinet used for such a dry heat bath.

Currently, there are four ways in which bathers stay in an enclosed space to heat up and sweat. These are sauna, steam bath, rock salt and infrared. Each method has its own way of operating, in which sauna, or Finnish sauna is the name people use for dry heat bath. (Hanteco.) In this thesis, the author gives readers the most comprehensive overview of the Finnish sauna.

Having a sauna can have many different meanings. It could be just a quick 10-minute sauna session, or it could be a family or social event lasting several hours. The Finns love to spend their holidays or special occasions of the year at their summer cottages. They heat up the sauna then get in and out whenever they like. Sauna combined with swimming in the neighboring lakes, barbecues, lawn games and socializing are memorable experiences that should be tried when visiting Finland. (Visit Finland.) Moreover, Finland is known as the land of a thousand lakes. Sauna combined with swimming in the summer or a dip in the ice hole in the winter are often held in summer cottages. That is why they are often built near lakes or beaches.

### 2.2 History

The origin of the sauna is still controversial. Although for many Finns, the sauna originates from their homeland, there is no research to confirm this, and many cultures have steam baths like saunas. According to Vietnamese researcher Que Xuan Vo (2021), the first form of steam bath is considered to date back to the Stone Age. The oldest saunas in Finland were built as pits on a slope in the ground around 7000 BC (My Virtual World Trip 2021). After many historical upheavals, people gradually built saunas on the ground and in the form of small wooden cabins. This makes the use of the sauna more diverse. This is a place to keep people warm during the long winter, allowing them to clean their bodies, give birth to women, take care of the sick and see off the dead. (Taiga Times.) On the other hand, the sauna is also used as a place to store seeds, dry, and smoke food (Vo 2021).

In the late 19th century, the countries around the Baltic Sea and the Ural Mountains as well as the Turkic tribes were reported to have saunas. So are other cultures. These include the sauna of the Romans (*thermae*), the American Indians (*sweat lodge*), the Turks (*hamman*), the Japanese (*furo*), the Russians (*banja*), and the Mexicans (*temascal*). However, the Finnish word *sauna* is the most common today. Used in many languages, the *sauna* is a generic term for the form of steam bath. (Vo 2021.)

Throughout history, waves of migration have spread sauna culture across the globe. From about the 1860s, when the Finns migrated to America, they brought their sauna design and culture with them. (Taiga Times) On the other hand, the world wars, as well as the industrial revolution, have impacted Finland, thereby influencing the sauna culture here. During World War II, on the Soviet-Finnish front, German soldiers had the opportunity to experience the sauna. When the war ended, they brought that experience back to Germany and Austria. Thereby, the sauna culture flourished in the second half of the 20th century. (Scheuch 2004, 156.)

From the Iron Age until the 1930s, saunas without chimneys appeared and were very popular. By the 18th century, wooden saunas with chimneys had the upper hand. (Taiga Times.) As the industrial revolution in Finland broke out, people are gradually replacing wood-burning stoves with electric ones because of their convenience and safety (Vo 2021).

### 2.3 Classification

There are several types of saunas, the most common being electric sauna (*sähkösauna*), wooden sauna (*puusauna*) and smoke sauna (*savusauna*) (Visit Finland; Vo 2021).

- **Wooden sauna (*puusauna*):** This is considered a traditional Finnish sauna. Firewood is burned inside the stove to heat up the sauna. It takes about 45 minutes for the sauna to reach a temperature of 80-110°C and be ready to use. Even if the sauna is hot enough, the wood will still burn, and the smoke will come out of the chimney. This type of sauna is often found in summer cottages or in residential houses. Due to the nature of requiring firewood for heating, wooden saunas are not built-in apartment buildings.
- **Electric sauna (*sähkösauna*):** Since the 1950s, electric saunas have appeared (saunaregion.fi). Electric saunas are convenient, safe, produce less smoke than wooden saunas, so they are often used in apartments. Bathers just need to turn off the switch and wait for about 45 minutes to enjoy the sauna.
- **Smoke sauna (*savusauna*):** This type of sauna is like a wooden sauna, but smoke saunas do not have a chimney. Therefore, as the name implies, when burning wood

on the stove, the smoke in these saunas will be dense and cloudy. The walls in a smoke sauna are often tinged with black soot and the scent of smoke. The stones on the stoves of a smoke sauna are usually larger than those of a wooden sauna. As a result, they produce a heat that is described as super-smooth, soft, and hot. An interesting point is that smoke saunas are likened to time bombs. More clearly, the walls covered with black soot are very flammable and set the whole sauna on fire. Therefore, the life cycle of a smoke sauna is only about 10 years or a little longer. (Taiga Times.)

## 2.4 Use

In a sauna, bathers enjoy the hot steam (*löyly*) emanating from a stove (*kiuas*) by pouring water over the heated stones on the stove. In each sauna room, there is usually a thermometer. Based on that, the bather can adjust the temperature of the sauna and decide whether to pour more water to get more hot steam.

Sauna is heated before use. Normally, a sauna temperature of about 70-80°C can be used. The temperature that Finns usually maintain for a sauna is around 80-110°C. Before entering the sauna, bathers should drink enough water and wet their bodies under the shower. It is recommended to bring a towel, paper towel, or small pad to sit on. This is to ensure the hygiene of the sauna benches as well as to avoid burns from the benches being too hot. Usually, there are two benches, one high and one low in a sauna. When it feels too hot, bathers can sit on the lower benches. You can sit or lie on the sauna benches to enjoy yourself. Each such sauna session can last from 10 minutes to an hour but is recommended no more than two hours. The duration of the sauna depends on the needs of use and the heat tolerance of each person. This thesis' author usually maintains 15 minutes each time of sauna, then goes out to rest, replenishes water, takes a shower, and returns to the sauna. This process is repeated over and over until the bather decides to stop altogether. (Vo 2021.)

Sometimes, people put a few drops of aromatic essential oil in a bucket of water used to pour it on the stove for sauna aromatherapy. Aromatherapy has been used for a long time by civilizations such as Egypt, China, and Greece. Many studies have shown that aromatherapy has medicinal effects, especially for homeopathic remedies. It helps to soothe and relieve pain, prevent depression, reduce stress, improve colds, and promote people to sleep better. (Worwood 2016.) There are many types of aromatic oils. Commonly used for saunas are eucalyptus, birch tar, mint, and lavender.



In the sauna, people also use sauna whisks, small bunches of twigs, from various trees and growing all over Finland, usually birch or oak, to massage the body. They are called *vihta* in the Western parts of Finland and *vasta* in the Eastern parts of this Nordic country. They are also called *venik* in Russia. Using *vihta* in the sauna helps to promote and improve blood circulation as well as help clean the skin. Sauna whisks are dipped in warm water and then lightly splashed on the body. The light fragrance emanating from the sauna whisks leaves bathers feeling relaxed and purified. They also help reduce itching and swelling caused by mosquito bites. (Expert Sauna.)



Figure 4. Finnish Sauna (Sauna from Finland)

Finland is a Nordic country with a long cold winter. The culture of a society is often marked by the geography in which that society lives (Vo 2021). The contrast between the cold of winter and the warmth emanating from the Finnish saunas made a strong impression on the author's mind during the three years of studying here. After warming up in the sauna, some people run outside, take a dip in the perforated icy pools, or roll in the snow. Sipping cold beer and laughing in an ice hole is an idyllic Finnish pastime. After that, they go back to the sauna, warm up for a few minutes, and then run out into the cold again. Just like that, they can do this together all winter night. This is supposed to be good for blood circulation, but most of them are simply because of the incredible rush. (Visit Finland).

Here are some notes when having a sauna to get the safest and most wonderful sauna session:

- Bathers should not be too full or hungry when going to the sauna.
- Do not drink alcohol before sauna.
- People with heart problems should not jump into the freezing lakes or pour cold water suddenly when coming out of a hot sauna to avoid sudden changes in body temperature. (Vo 2021.)

## 2.5 Health effects

Sauna brings great health benefits to users. It is not only a great relaxation therapy. Combined with other therapies or yoga, bathers will feel the effectiveness of the sauna significantly increase. (Zenestar 2020, 7) Regular sauna use is associated with a lower risk of sudden death from cardiovascular and other causes (Laukkanen et al. 2018a, 635-641). In addition, sauna effectively reduced the risk of hypertension (Zaccardi et al. 2017, 1120–1125) and inflammatory markers in the blood (Laukkanen et al. 2018b, 351–353) as well as pneumonia (Kunutsor et al. 2017, 161–163). Moreover, the symptoms of the common cold can be alleviated by having a sauna (Ernst 1990). The prevalence of dementia and Alzheimer's disease among the elderly in Finland is much lower than in other countries in the region, thanks in part to the positive influence of regular sauna habits (Laukkanen 2017, 245–249). Furthermore, sweating in the sauna helps to remove toxins from the body and clean the skin. In addition, regular sauna bathing effectively prevents the risk of psoriasis and other skin diseases such as seborrheic dermatitis and eczema (Hannuksela & Väänänen 1988). On the other hand, the heat from the sauna also helps relieve muscle pain and improves sleep quality for bathers. (Taiga Times.) While studying in Finland, sometimes the thesis author was inevitably stressed. He looked to the sauna to help him relieve the stress and pressure in life.

As mentioned above, when drunk with alcohol and stimulants, bathers should not go to the sauna (Press 1991; Ylikahri et al., 1988). Some recommendations suggest that people with cardiovascular diseases should not use saunas (Taiga Times). Children are also advised to exercise caution when going to the sauna and to have adult supervision. Since the body temperature regulation mechanism in children is not as mature as in adults, their bodies usually heat up faster (Välimäki & Jokinen 2006). Bathers should have water or isotonic drinks regularly during the sauna. This is because the body loses water and electrolytes due to sweating in the sauna.

## 2.6 Finnish sauna culture

In 2020, Finland's sauna culture was recognized as a representative intangible cultural heritage of humanity (UNESCO 2020). In fact, there are about 3.5 million saunas spread across the country of Finland. While the population of this Nordic country is around 5.5 million people, that means everyone can go to a sauna at the same time. Sauna is literally everywhere in Finland. From saunas in studio apartments, at summer cottages, to public swimming pools, gyms, spas, and hotels. People even install sauna rooms on boats and buses. (Visit Finland.) Moreover, you can both experience the sauna in the sky, in sauna cabins, while enjoying the beautiful sea view at SkyWheel of SkySauna Helsinki (SkyWheel Helsinki).



Figure 5. SkyWheel Helsinki (Discovering Finland)

The sauna has always been an integral part of Finnish culture. It seeps into the veins of every human being here; from the moment they are born until they lie down. Throughout the history of this country, the sauna has always emerged as a pride. It is a place where people cleanse themselves physically and mentally, free from all the senses that can be described by words and imbued with the essence of the Finnish people. (Visit Finland.) A Finnish friend of mine told me that his grandmother was born in a sauna. And before she died, she still wanted to lie down in a sauna. In fact, before the 1930s, women mainly gave

birth here. In addition, children who were only a few months old were given a sauna by their parents. And since then, the sauna is like a daily habit, like the way we eat, drink and sleep. Finns usually take a sauna bath at least once a week. Inviting guests to a sauna is a traditional cultural act that shows the hospitality and intimacy of the Finnish people that is still maintained today. Therefore, if you do not want to offend the host when invited to take a sauna, you need to avoid refusing the invitation. Inviting guests to a sauna in Finnish culture is in some ways like the British culture of inviting tea and the ancient Vietnamese culture of inviting betel nut. (Vo 2021.)

In Finland, it is customary to get naked in the sauna. This is natural and nothing is vulgar or sexually suggestive. In particular, the phenomenon of sex in the sauna is considered a "taboo" in the Finnish sauna culture tradition. They see the sauna as something very sacred, pure, and noble. Family members, male or female, young or old, can enjoy the sauna naked. In public saunas, though, there are usually two separate rooms for men and women. If you feel uncomfortable, you can wear a swimsuit when going to the sauna. (Taiga Times.)

A special feature of having a sauna with someone is the conversation. Family members asking each other, the laughter of friends, discussions between soulmates, ... all have painted vivid pictures for this intangible cultural heritage of UNESCO. Moreover, a sauna is also an intimate place where politicians and business partners meet. Here, they temporarily put aside tensions, disagreements, and conflicts to open their hearts and feel the connection. A very popular story related to the sauna is the meeting between the Prime Minister, President Urho Kekkonen (1900-1986), and Soviet diplomats in the sauna at his residence. Unknowingly, important decisions or solutions to outstanding problems were made in saunas, not in meeting rooms! That is also the underlying reason why a sauna was built inside the Parliament in Helsinki. (Vo 2021.)

Furthermore, another interesting piece of information is that the Finns also have their own anniversaries dedicated to the most characteristic cultural heritage of their country. Since 1986, the second Saturday of June has been designated as the National Sauna Day. Since 2015, October 29 is Helsinki Sauna Day. On this day, all the public saunas in the city are open to the public free of charge. (Vo 2021.)

### 3 French sauna culture

#### 3.1 History

According to the World of Sauna (2020) website, the French sauna culture dates to the Middle Ages. However, the workers in the saunas and their customers were the most despised part of this time's workforce.

In the 13th century, the first association of professional bathers was formed and were called *étuveurs* or *étuviers*. The rules about sauna bathing at that time were very strict. Ethical codes and social norms are imposed on all sauna businesses. More specifically, saunas can only be open during the day, not allowed to open on Sundays and public holidays. In addition, saunas are forbidden to receive people who are full of suspicion, are considered immoral or break the law. In 1292, Paris had 25 saunas for men and one bath for women.

By the end of the 14th century, the rules were relaxed but still very strict. Men's saunas must ensure no female presence, and boys will no longer be allowed to bathe with their mothers after the age of seven.

In the 17th century, the popular drink after the sauna was *kvass*. It is made from rye or barley flour mixed with mint oil, vinegar, or grass. In addition, customers also have another choice of a drink that is a mix of beer and wine. The bartenders also added some bread-crumbs, a few slices of lemon, sugar, and nutmeg.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, people who bathed in indoor saunas were given more respect than those who bathed in public saunas. However, they and the sauna workers are still subject to harsh social discrimination.

The sauna workers worked very hard. The hardest part was heating up the sauna. Working conditions were hot, humid, and smelly and they had to work at night. However, in the 14th century, the wages of these workers were three times higher than that of other workers, according to one document.

In the Middle Ages, life was very difficult. Barbers must do the work of dentists, surgeons or draw blood for the poor. That is also the origin of the barber poles commonly seen at barbershops today. Their red and white stripes represent the red color of blood and the white color of the bandages. (Uppercut Deluxe 2015.) To earn extra income, sauna workers have also worked as barbers. This led to a dispute between them and the professional barbers. This is understandable because when life is inherently too hard, someone takes your fishing rod while they are the most despised labor part of society.

### 3.2 Today's French sauna culture

Nowadays, finding a true Finnish sauna in France is like finding a needle in a haystack. Dry heat baths can be found in public swimming pools, gyms, spas, and hotels. However, they are not as common as a must-have standard for public facilities. Even in large hotels or resorts, when you ask the staff about the sauna here, chances are the answer is no.

A Finn, named Anna Kristina said, she did not find the dry heat bath at the University of Paris a bit Finnish when she visited in the late 70s. She also revealed that the Swedish saunas, called *batsu* in Swedish, is slightly more popular in France (Kristina 2020). The most obvious difference between Finnish and Swedish saunas is in the stoves. The stone layer on the stoves in Swedish saunas is thinner, so it is generally not allowed to throw any water on them to comply with electrical safety regulations. (Teir et al. 1974, 15-17.)

In France, many spas and doctors insist that children under the age of 15 should not and are not allowed to enter the sauna because they adversely affect the health and development of children. In contrast, in Finland, children are introduced to the sauna at an early age. Finnish parents bring their children into the sauna with a moderate temperature, and they are also carefully monitored during the sauna. According to professors Ilkka Välimäki (2006), children's bodies are not fully developed, so their heat control mechanisms are not as good as those of adults. They tend to heat up faster at the same ambient temperature. The thermal tissue under the skin of children is small, they cannot sweat effectively, and the need for hydration is higher than that of adults. However, these physiological responses of children can be controlled by parents when they go to the sauna together. When following the following notes, children can fully enjoy the sauna experience. They are:

- Make sure your children are drinking enough water.
- Allow them to move freely between steam room, washroom, and cooler.
- Parents must always supervise the sauna if there are any unusual changes in their children as well as avoid the risk of burns due to the stove.
- Do not take a child with a fever to the sauna.
- Make sure to have a thermometer and clock in the sauna.
- Consult your doctor before going to the sauna if your child has heart failure or limited breathing. (Välimäki & Jokinen 2006.)

A distinct difference between Finnish and French sauna culture is that in France, bathers are not naked but wear swimsuits or wrap towels when going to the sauna. It is shameful for the French to walk around naked in public, even with their closest friends. Especially for women, they think that their bodies should only be admired by their partners. Even when

breastfeeding in public, women are very shy. There is a huge difference between French culture and others. Women always prefer to be neat, elegant, and feminine. They do not want to sweat too much even while working out in public gyms let alone in the saunas.

The French in particular, as well as many other ethnic groups in general, still think that going to a sauna is something indecent and often associated with sex. When the author lived in Germany, he told his foreign friends that he used to have sauna at least once a week during his three years of studying in Finland. They were so surprised and thought it was an aphrodisiac. The purely Finnish sauna culture is still very new to other countries. And so is France!

As mentioned above, it is because the sauna is not a cultural heritage of the Western European country that the people here know about it very dimly. They assume that a "cold" sauna will help them lose weight and misunderstand the other health benefits of saunas. On the other hand, precisely because saunas are not common, going to a sauna for the French is like going to a spa and it is quite a luxury.

However, not all French consider saunas erotic or overly lavish. Many French people, after visiting Finland or other countries, fall in love with the way a model sauna works and the experience it offers. According to World of Sauna, some French people also build some Swedish saunas in their own houses. The thesis author also had a intimate conversation with his German friends about Finnish sauna. He was very happy to see that they were really interested and consider investing in building a sauna at home.

In short, there is not really a sauna culture boom in France. However, every problem has two sides. In fact, more and more French people are aware of the great joy and benefits that sauna bring. That will be a potential opportunity for pioneering businesses to bring Finnish sauna closer to the people of this Western European country. In chapter 5, the thesis will analyze French culture from different angles based on Geert Hofstede's theory. From there, readers will have a broader view of the influence of culture on the decision to choose to use a product or service.

## 4 Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

### 4.1 Definition

In this chapter, the author introduces readers to the main theory analyzed in the thesis. That is Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Based on this theory, in the next chapters, the thesis gradually reveals its application to the practical case of Zenestar company. Specifically, Hofstede's theory serves as a foundation, a guide, and a multidimensional mirror. Through it, the author guides readers step by step in the journey to discover the influence of culture on the decision to enter a potential market. Indeed, the typical consumer behavior of a group of people is deeply influenced by their culture. More deeply, a culture is the sum of cultural values. By exploring aspects of those cultural values, the thesis lifts the curtain on how they affect the decision to consume a product or service. From there, readers as well as Zenestar company will have the answer to the feasibility of entering the French sauna market.

Before presenting the concept of this theory, the thesis answers the question "What is culture and why is it so important". According to Geert Hofstede, culture is the way a person is raised. Metaphorically speaking, if we are a computer, culture is the software of our mind. But to build software, connect and communicate between computers, we need a common programming language. That is culture! In social life, culture forms unwritten rules. They do not specify any detail, on the contrary they serve as the basic structure of the social landscape. One note is that, precisely because culture is the common programming language of society, it does not represent the personality of a single individual. And the importance of culture is nothing more than to help individuals in the association connect and communicate with each other in a natural, rhythmic way. Respect and behave in accordance with social culture makes that member become sociable and easier to receive sympathy from other members. (Hofstede 2010.)

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory was formulated by the Dutch anthropologist Geert Hofstede. It is considered as the framework for cross-cultural communication. By using *factor analysis*, the Hofstede model describes the influence of social culture on members of a society and how these values relate to their behavior. (Adeoye & Tomei 2014, 6.)

Hofstede created his first model because of a factor analysis of a worldwide workforce survey for IBM between 1967 and 1973. Over time, the survey was analyzed and more carefully selected. Initially, four aspects were proposed by this theory to analyze cultural values. These are: individualism-collectivism; uncertainty avoidance; power distance (strength of social hierarchy) and masculinity-femininity (task-orientation versus person-orientation).



Two new aspects were added gradually after that and finally 6 aspects completed today. These two aspects are: long-term orientation (formed by an independent study in Hong Kong in 1991) and indulgence versus self-restraint (2010).

Since then, Hofstede's theory has been endorsed by many other researchers. They constantly support him to make this theory completer and more applicable in many different fields such as psychology, communication, and business. Because of the specificity of culture, Hofstede's cultural dimensions are relevant to almost any field of human factors. Moreover, this theory has been widely used and taught all over the world. It can be said that it serves as an important research tradition in the field of cross-cultural psychology. (Annamoradnejad et al. 2019, 627-636.)

## 4.2 History

From 1965 to 1971, Hofstede founded and operated a personal research center for IBM Europe. A large-scale survey was carried out by him between 1967 and 1973, which later became the basis for the theory of six cultural dimensions. The purpose of the survey is to analyze differences in national values across this multinational corporation's worldwide subsidiaries. 117 000 IBM employees around the world were asked several survey questions. Hofstede then compared those responses. Firstly, he focused his research on the 40 largest countries, then expanded to 50 countries and 3 territories. Due to the large size of the survey, he held the largest matched-sample cross-national database at that time. It was also one of the first quantitative theories that could be reliably applied to the explanation of observed differences between cultures (Hofstede 2010.)

Initially, from the results of the survey, he classified the basic differences of cultures into four main aspects including power distance (PDI), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), individualism (IDV), and masculinity (MAS). He explains on his website that: "*four anthropological problems that different national societies handle different areas: ways of coping with inequality, ways of coping with uncertainty, the relationship of the individual with her or his primary group, and the emotional implications of having been born as a girl or as a boy*". To summarize the results of his research, Hofstede published the book "Consequences of Culture" in 1984. The book includes statistical research from survey results as well as his personal experience.

Six other cross-cultural studies were successfully conducted between 1990 and 2002, covering 14 to 28 countries. These studies aim to confirm the results of previous IBM studies and extend them to other sample populations. The interviewees for this additional study included commercial pilots, students, civil service managers, and middle- and upper-class

consumers. 76 countries and territories were scored for the four primary cultural dimensions.

An independent study was conducted by Michael Harris Bond and colleagues in 1991. The study used a survey tool developed with Chinese staff and managers on a group of students from 23 countries. The study results prompted Hofstede to add the fifth dimension to his model. It is long-term orientation (LTO), initially called Confucian dynamism. In 2010, Michael Minkov conducted a survey to evaluate the national value scores for this dimension. The result brought the number of countries scored by the Hofstede model up to 93. (Minkov et al. 2010, 255-258.) Finally, Minkov's recent *World Values Survey* helped Hofstede perfect his model with the sixth dimension, indulgence versus restraint. (Hofstede 2015.)

### 4.3 Dimensions of national cultures

#### **Power distance index (PDI)**

This index is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally". In this regard, Hofstede emphasizes the perception of less powerful individuals that inequality and concentration of power are a self-evident reality. In a nutshell, this cultural dimension refers to the power distance and degree of equality between individuals in the organization, especially the relationship between boss and employee. Therefore, the higher the PDI, the higher the power distance and the more unequal distribution of power. Furthermore, these are not questioned or doubted. Conversely, the lower the PDI, the lower the power distance and the more even distribution of power. The level of questioning about the distribution of power and efforts to distribute power equally is greater.

#### **Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)**

This indicator says, "degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups". A highly individualistic society has relatively loose ties and individuals tend to stick to their families only. Individuals in this society emphasize the subject "I" slightly as "we". In contrast, a highly collectivist society has strong integrative relationships between the individual and his/her family, other institutions, and groups. Moreover, members of the organization have high loyalty and are willing to assist other members in disputes with other organizations and groups.

#### **Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)**

Described as "a society's tolerance for ambiguity". More specifically, this index shows the extent to which members of a culture feel comfortable or anxious in situations that are ambiguous and different from the norm. A high UAI indicates that members of that society tend to follow behavioral norms, rules, and guidelines. They often believe in absolute truths or a general "rightness" in all respects that all people perceive. On the other hand, the low UAI index sees openness and acceptance of changes as well as controversial, contradictory streams of ideas or thoughts. These societies are usually less regulated, they tend to let things go freely and take risks.

### **Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)**

This cultural dimension describes two different social responses and dispositions. Masculinity is described as "a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success". Meanwhile, femininity represents a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. In a society that is considered femininity, women are valued, and gender equality is upheld. It is a society where the values related to people, humility and happiness are most concerned. In the masculinity society, women are respected, but still one level lower than men.

### **Long-term orientation vs. Short-term orientation (LTO)**

This aspect indicates the connection between the past and the present as well as future actions and challenges. A low LTO indicates a society with short-term orientations. They tend to cherish and uphold traditional values as well as a high degree of constancy. More clearly, the LTO index shows how conservative a society is with current lines and new reforms. Societies with the LTO index are often focused on long-term plans, concerned with adaptation and pragmatics when solving problems. This is an advantage for countries in developing all aspects.

### **Indulgence vs. Restraint (IND)**

This concept refers to the extent to which social norms govern the freedom of citizens to fulfill their human desires. Indulgence is defined as "a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun". Its counterpart is described as "a society that controls gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms". A society that allows for enjoyment often creates the belief in individuals that they, themselves, are in control of their lives and emotions. Meanwhile, a society that promotes self-restraint believes that there are factors other than themselves that control their own lives and emotions. (Hofstede 2015.)

#### 4.4 Practical application of Hofstede's theory in international marketing

By scoring each country on a scale of 1 to 100, Hofstede's six-dimensions model allows for international comparisons between cultures, also known as comparative research.

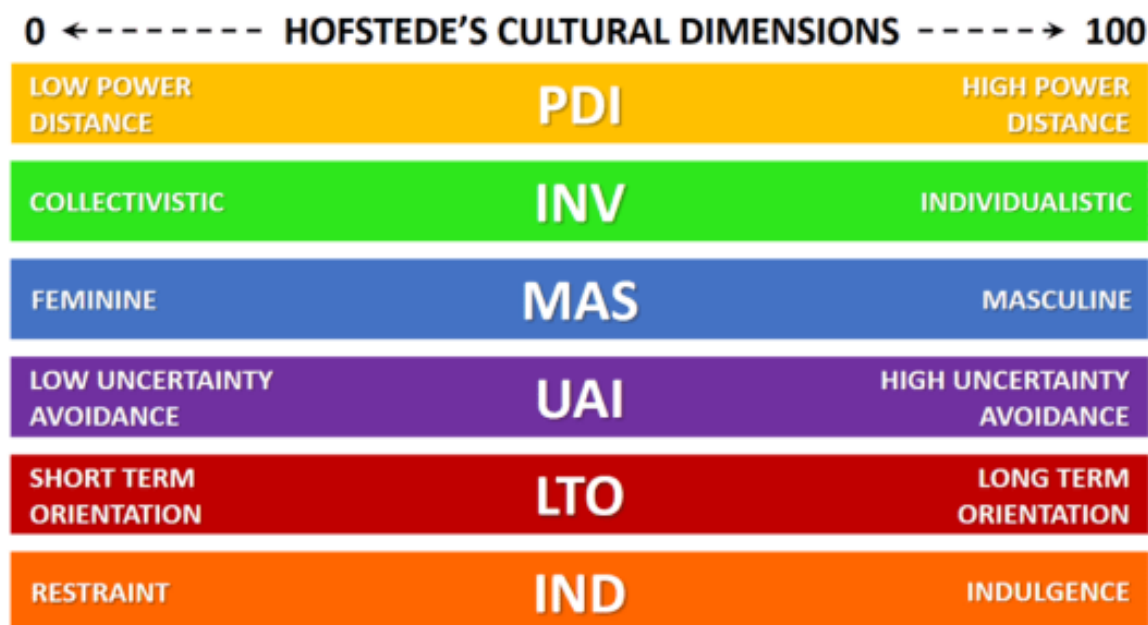


Figure 6. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Framework (Business-to-you 2017)

The six-dimension model is particularly useful in International Marketing because it helps businesses identify the cultural values of a country in which they are planning to expand. The fields of global branding, advertising strategy and consumer behavior have been studied and applied by Marieke de Mooij. Hofstede pointed out the close relationship between culture and consumer behavior of a country. (Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, 85-110.) Furthermore, before introducing their company's products and services to a new country, businesses need to study the culture of that country. From there, businesses will realize whether their products and services are essential, useful, or luxurious to consumers in that market. Consumer preferences and habits have a direct impact on their purchasing decisions. In short, the business needs to determine, whether consumers in that country like its product or service. In fact, some products and services may even be considered culturally unacceptable.

A food company cannot launch products made from pork in Muslim countries. This is like beef products in the Indian market. KFC in Asian countries have added rice to their menus,

besides delicious fried chicken pieces like in other European and American countries. Yamaha and Honda promote motorcycle production in Southeast Asian markets. The above examples show the importance of culture in the process of selecting and launching a new product or service. For case company Zenestar, it is strongly recommended to study aspects of French culture before deciding to enter this market.

## 5 Case company: Zenestar

### 5.1 Zenestar wellness concept

Zenestar® is a protected trademark, concept, and product. The designs are fully owned by the Finnish company Hallaus Architects Ltd. This is an innovative and smart wellness space solution led by CEO and interior architect Susanna Halla. According to her, when the traditional saunas are not in use, they seem to have the same function. Seeing this, Zenestar wanted to make these simple saunas more functional. The company's ambition is to elevate the sauna to a true wellness space. There, users can both use the sauna for its primary purpose, and combine yoga, relaxation as well as experience with effective healing therapies. Responding to sustainable development and focusing on well-being values, Zenestar designs and installs high-class and environmentally friendly sauna spaces. Besides, smart products related to sauna are also researched and marketed by the company. The most advanced technologies are applied by Zenestar, especially the 24/7 smart yoga (*SaunaFlow*) curriculum with a virtual personal trainer and convenient remote control sauna designs. Therefore, the main market segment that the company targets are high-end hotels, spas, and resorts.

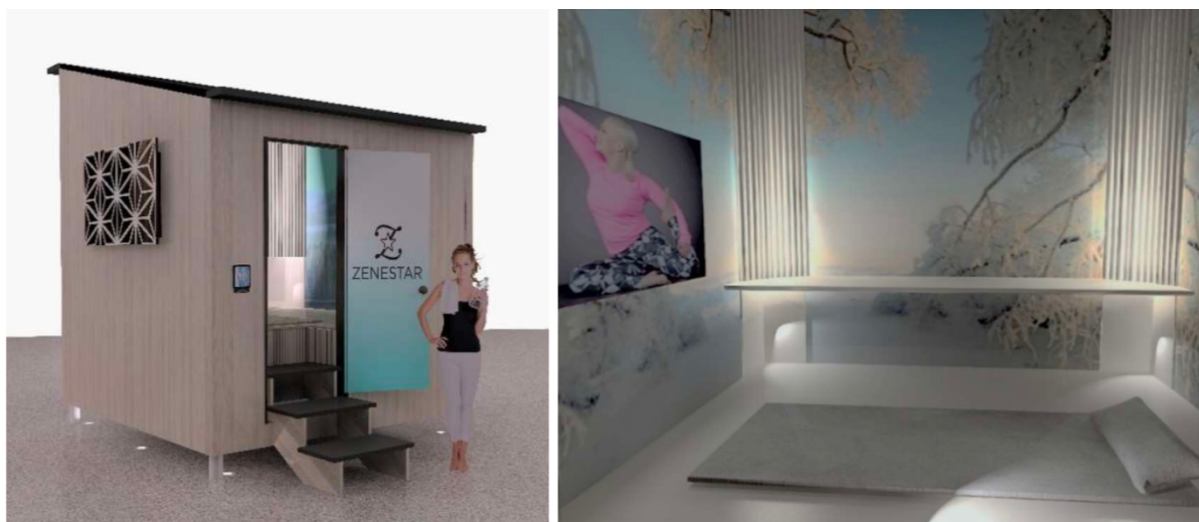


Figure 7. Zenestar® Cabana and Zenestar® Reno, 3D-visualisation (Zenestar 2020, 1)

Zenestar is offered in two different versions/solutions, both are delivered in flat package.

They are:

- Cabana is a small prefab cabin that can be placed inside a building or outdoors. With a surface area of seven square meters, it is designed to be used by one person at a time.
- Reno is an adjustable renovation concept for existing sauna baths, ten-sixty square meters in size. (Zenestar 2020, 1.)

## 5.2 Zenestar's competitive advantages and disadvantages. Risk analysis

### Competitive advantages

The following figure visually and succinctly depicts Zenestar's competitive advantages.

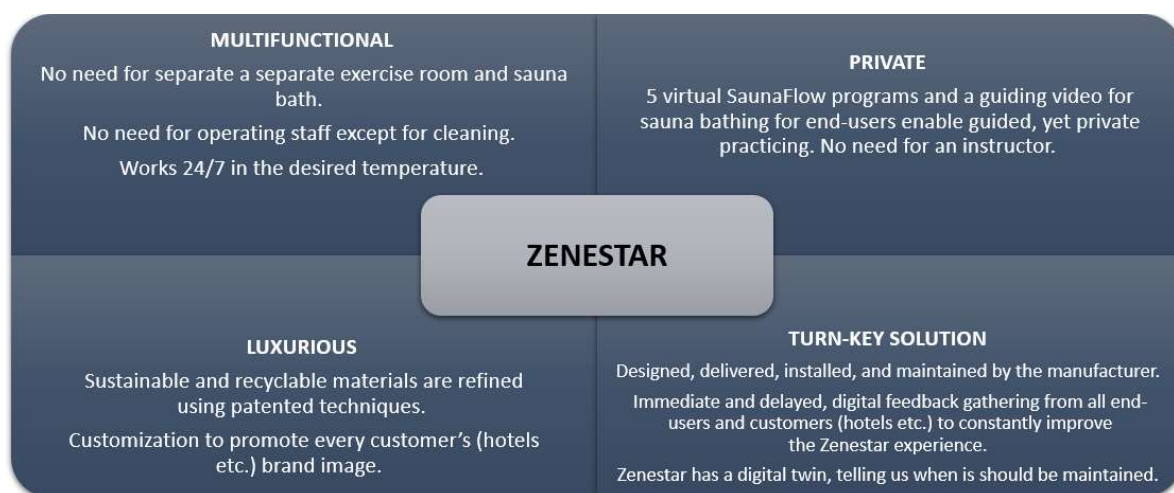


Figure 8. Zenestar's competitive advantages (Zenestar 2020, 5)

- Multifunctional: Zenestar's wellness space is optimized and multifunctional. A common space is used as a traditional sauna and an exercise yoga room. This contributes to saving installation space, creating convenience and compactness. Another advantage is that Zenstar's system works as a gym 24/7. There will be no operators at these wellness spaces. Users can freely use Zenstar's utilities. All instructions are displayed on the intelligent electronic control panels. Therefore, operating costs will be minimized, except for cleaning.
- Private: SaunaFlow virtual training programs are personalized and secure for each user. This creates absolute privacy for them, thereby enhancing the comfort of the wellness experience.

- Luxurious: Zenestar's wellness space is designed in a delicate, meticulous, and luxurious way. The company's sustainable and recyclable ingredients convey a true wellness concept to customers. It is beneficial for the health and well-being of themselves and the community. Furthermore, as a resonance, Zenestar's luxurious spaces will raise the bar for hotels, spas, and resorts.
- Turn-key solution: Zenestar products are designed, delivered, installed, and maintained by the manufacturer. Feedback from partners and customers is regularly collected in order to promptly adjust and improve product quality. In particular, the company will know when their products should be serviced thanks to a digital twin. (Zenestar 2020, 5.)

### **Competitive disadvantages**

One of the company's current disadvantages is the lack of local representatives in the target countries. Realistic market research is essential. Furthermore, the predominant wellness trends available at high-end hotels, spas, and resorts are threats to Zenestar. Wellness is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the hospitality industry. According to the latest report by the Institute of Global Wellness, published at WTM London in October 2021, its growth is on an upward trend, expected to reach \$919 billion by 2022. The wellness trends that are prevalent in hotels these days include saunas from other cultures, massage, relaxation pools, natural therapies, incorporating fitness equipment into bookings/offers, virtual training, etc. (Salomon.) In addition, the competitors in the wellness industry are countless. To stand out with its products and services, Zenestar really must work hard. Especially making their technologies and experiences unique and less common in the hospitality industry. In terms of SaunaFlow with the virtual yoga trainer, many hotels, gyms, and yoga centers have done this. However, within the framework of this research, the thesis only focuses on analyzing competitive disadvantages related to culture.

### **Risk analysis**

Zenestar's limitations lie in its geographical distance. Since the company's headquarters and factories are mainly located in Finland, the company focuses on foreign markets. Therefore, the cost of transporting products from Finland to these markets will be an issue that Zenestar needs to be deeply concerned about. Moreover, there are differences in the regulations for building saunas in Finland and in foreign markets. The risks associated with ventilation, electricity, fire, sanitation, and other security issues, must be carefully considered. Furthermore, investment, supply chain, insurance, design protection, and changes in exchange rates are other major concerns. In addition, cultural differences are an obstacle



for the company. (Zenestar 2020, 14.) This study was born for that purpose. In the following chapters, readers will see the cultural factors influencing Zenestar's market entry in France. Those are the differences analyzed through Hofstede's six-dimensions Model. From there, the thesis will describe more clearly the disadvantages of Zenestar.

On the other hand, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and hospitality industry is immense. Due to travel restrictions, many hotels are empty and have frozen in operation. As a result, this influence caused Zenestar's market penetration process to be delayed as well. However, on the positive side, the company has more time to research, prepare and perfect its products and services. New strategies also need to be established, as the situation today is completely different than in 2020.

### 5.3 Execution plan

#### Target markets and market entry strategy

The global wellness tourism market is constantly expanding. There are five countries that are leading the market, including the USA, Germany, China, France, and Japan. These countries account for 59% of the market share. Realizing the potential of this opportunity, Zenestar plans to expand the market to these countries. (Zenestar 2020, 10.)



Figure 9. The top 5 nations on the global wellness tourism market (billion US Dollars/year) (Global Wellness Institute 2018)

In fact, Zenestar's concept is not merely providing services and products related to traditional sauna. To put it more clearly, it is a wellness concept. The company wants to emphasize the element of diversifying the form of sauna baths based on the use of the traditional Finnish sauna. This diversity includes the use of sauna space for therapeutic and wellness activities by smart technologies. Therefore, Zenestar does not focus on the domestic market, which has a lot of competitors, but focuses on international markets. Here, the company will play a pioneering role in this industry. (Zenestar 2020, 13.)

### **Production plan**

In 2020, the company was implementing a complete plan for its Zenestar Cabana product. Life-size prototypes and materials were under construction and expected to be completed by July 2020. The company's goal was to display Zenestar Cabana at the Finnish Embassy in Japan, as part of the project Metsä Pavilion organized by Business Finland. This event was a response to the Tokyo Olympics in Japan 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic was taking place in a very complicated way globally at that time. As a result, the biggest sporting event on the planet had been postponed to 2021. Hence, Zenestar could not exhibit its products as planned and had to find alternative solutions to launch Zenestar Cabana. Up to that time until October 2021 when the author is writing this thesis, Zenestar is still in the preparation stage. (Zenestar 2020, 5.)

The estimated time to produce a Zenestar Cabana is about four weeks. The company's production process always ensures strict Finnish environmental standards. Zenestar says no to the black box manufacturing process. The materials to produce Zenestar Cabana are transparent, high quality and sourced from Finland. The distance from the sources to the factories is only 300 km maximum. This helps to limit emissions and fuel consumption during transportation as well as to ensure the best quality of raw materials. The number of assembly details is carefully calculated and ordered. This helps to avoid waste of raw materials and reduce the amount of waste from the production process released into the environment. Furthermore, Zenestar adopts the Make-to-Order (MTO) operating model. Components will be ordered from subcontractors and shipped to the company's factory located in Heinola, Finland. Customers will buy products directly from the company without going through intermediary distribution channels. This helps Zenestar products have a high level of trust. After a while, when there are enough production conditions, the company will directly produce some components right at the company's factories. At that time, Zenestar

will no longer need to collect goods from subcontractors. From there, the company will move to an Assemble-to-Order (ATO) operating model. (Zenestar 2020, 11.)

### **Marketing plan, mission, and vision**

Finland has the best saunas in the world. Indeed, the Finnish law on building saunas is very strict. From approved materials, to fire, electrical and environmental safety standards. Zenestar is no exception to that standard. Therefore, with full ambition, Zenestar aspires to become the world's best provider of sauna services and wellness concept in general. That is also the company's mission.

Zenestar's core values all take the customer as the key factor. The company's core values are clearly stated in their Business Plan. They are:

- Finnish guarantee.
- Sustainability and ecology.
- The passion to create delightful environments.

Zenestar's vision is to spread the understanding of the sauna as an environment conducive to human health. The company's next keywords are listed below:

- Tailor-made made rareness designed just for me.
- For all senses: sight, touch, audio, fragrance, flavor.
- Mobile-free moment.
- Time is luxury, the most valuable of all assets.
- Clarity of mind.

Zenestar understands that competition in the domestic market is very difficult because sauna is a familiar concept to people. Therefore, the company is constantly making efforts to expand the market and introduce its products abroad. Zenestar has applied the model of visiting the company's products with virtual reality (VR) technology at international trade shows. By wearing these VR glasses, viewers can tour the production model as well as experience being in a smart sauna room vividly. This cuts down on the cumbersome shipping of actual models. Furthermore, this is in line with the company's eco-friendly principles. In addition, the SaunaFlow virtual yoga training program is also integrated through this virtual reality experience.

(Zenestar 2020, 12.)

## 6 Comparison of Finnish and French cultures through Hofstede's six-dimensions Model (6-D Model©)

### 6.1 Power distance dimension

The following are the scores of Finland and France after being processed through Hofstede's six-dimensions electronic model (6-D Model©) on the Hofstede Insights website. All analyzes below are based on assessments by Hofstede Insight.

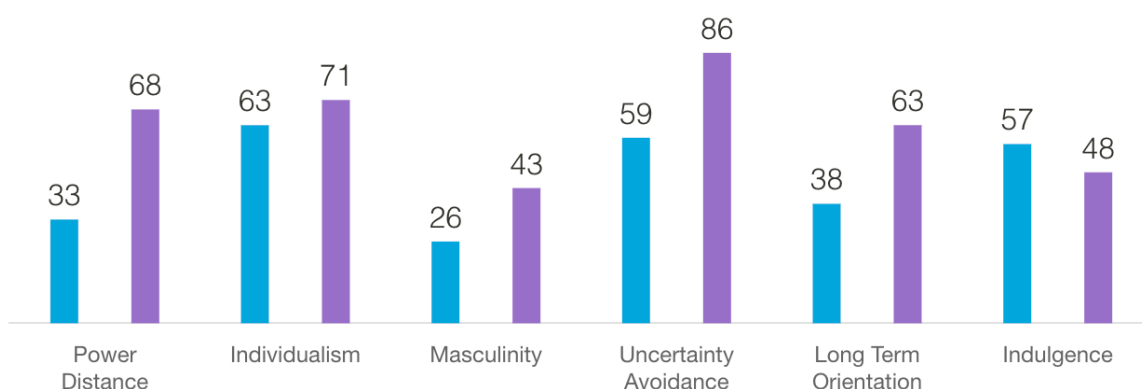


Figure 10. Comparison of Finland and France (Hofstede Insights)

- Finland (33):** In this aspect, Finland scores 33. This means that the power gap and inequality are not so deep in this Nordic country. Furthermore, this score is typical of the Finnish style: independence, a hierarchy for convenience only, equal rights, superiors who are accessible, coaching leaders, management that facilitates and empowers. In businesses and social organizations, power is divided hierarchically, and managers assign tasks based on the experience of the members. Constructive advice is expected from employees. Employees tend to dislike supervision and attitudes towards the above are informal and on a first-name basis. In communication, members of the organization interact directly with each other and are participative.
- France (68):** In contrast to Finland, on this cultural index, France scores 68 and this is a pretty large number for power distance. Children are raised to depend on their parents. By school age, this dependency passes to their teachers. To put it more clearly, it is not a negative thing but an emotional attachment. Besides, French society recognizes inequality to an acceptable level. Furthermore, power is largely in

the hands of the Government and owners of large companies, but also in other aspects such as history and geography. Paris is the capital of France and a place of creative inspiration for many prominent architects, writers, and poets. On the other hand, this capital of light is a world-class tourist destination. Thus, the network of highways leads to Paris. Many studies have shown that French companies are one or two more hierarchical in power than British and German firms. The top management has certain privileges and is often difficult for junior employees to reach. Mister President Director General, abbreviated as Mr. PDG, is a word often used to refer to CEOs in French companies. These PDGs usually attend the most prestigious universities.

- **Comparison:** Finland has hierarchies to represent and facilitate work. Equality is spread throughout the organization and communication between members is direct, open, and close. In France, by contrast, hierarchy is very pronounced and communication between levels is indirect. Power is in the hands of the higher ranks and there is favoritism for the social classes considered "elite".

## 6.2 Individualism vs. Collectivism dimension

- **Finland (63):** Finnish society is an individualist society. Individuals in society are defined as "I", rather than "We" as in collectivism. Members of society often focus only on taking care of themselves and their families, rather than caring for other members of the group in exchange for loyalty. In addition, the offenses deeply affect self-esteem and cause personal inferiority. In businesses, contracts establish the relationship between the employer and the employee. These contracts are based on the mutual interests of both parties on the principle of win-win. Substantial work experience and outstanding personal achievements are common recruitment standards in Finland. Finnish management is about managing individuals.
- **France (71):** Like Finnish society, with a score of 71 higher than Finland, French society is clearly individualist. The upbringing of French parents for generations directly influences this. They teach their children to respect themselves and be emotionally independent. This shows that the French often focus on taking care of themselves and their families, as the Finns. In French society, the family is still the glue that holds the members together emotionally. This makes French society more emotionally connected than other individualist cultures. The great power distance is both fitting and contrasting with French individualism. Family members love each other based on hierarchical respect. Young people respect older people. In French society, however, classes have always been ideologically separate groups. Attempts at

inter-caste communication are often weak, or even by default impossible. Strikes, uprisings, demonstrations, and revolutions were the only means of expressing the resistance of the tower classes to their leaders. Besides, the separation between work and private life is very strong. After work, the French leave the chaos of work and devote the rest of the time to their own lives. In the movie, *Emily in Paris*, the French character Luc says to the American girl, Emily, "You live to work. We work to live." As a result, the French tend to enjoy life rather than bury their heads in work like Americans, even though America's index of individualism is higher than France's. In addition, the French are often more pressured than the Americans because they are fundamentally more sensitive to the words and actions of their superiors. Besides, when they trust and love a product or service of a business, the French will become loyal customers of that business. However, it must be noted that in France, the customers are not kings. You cannot force the chef at a 4-Michelin-starred restaurant to re-cook a steak just because it does not go your way (Mindy Chen at *Emily in Paris*). Your feedback can never change a great French cuisine. Despite this, the French always strive to be leaders in the commercial fields they do. They are willing to serve you well, in return you should respect and appreciate what they do.

- **Comparison:** Despite being the same two individualist cultures, France exhibits some aspects of national self-esteem stemming from high personal self-esteem. The sharp social division combined with high individualism creates an interesting contrasting picture for French society. This has many important meanings for the wellness business in general and the sauna of Zenestar.

### 6.3 Masculinity vs. Femininity dimension

- **Finland (26):** Finland scored 26 in this respect, a rather low score. Therefore, it is a feminine society. In these societies, the focus is on working to live, not living to work. People work together in solidarity, equality, and efficiency. They want to keep their working life as healthy as possible. On the other hand, managers keep the working environment friendly, making efforts for the common consensus. When conflicts arise, members compromise and negotiate to find the best solution for those conflicts. In addition, free time and flexibility are favored in feminine societies. They focus on the values of sustainable well-being as well as status is not shown. A good manager is seen as someone who can effectively support members. The decision-making process is achieved through involvement.

- **France (43):** France also has a feminine culture, but slightly, with a score of 43. At first glance, this may be indicated by its well-known welfare system (*securité sociale*), the 35-hour work week, five weeks of vacation per year, and its emphasis on quality of life. However, in terms of the model, French culture has another distinguishing feature. The upper class is classified as Feminine, while the working class is classified as Masculine. This characteristic is unique to France. This distinction may be reflected in the following: Top managers earn less on average than one might expect given their high-Power Distance score. In the past, married couples in high society could go public with a lover without fear of repercussions. Furthermore, "crime passionnel," or crimes of passion, have always been sentenced very leniently in comparison to other types of murder.
- **Comparison:** Both Finnish and French societies are feminine societies. People in these two societies tend to enjoy life. They work with a relaxed mentality, not letting their work determine their quality of life. The similarity of focus on sustainable well-being values of these two societies is an opportunity for the case company to bring its wellness concept to the French market.

#### 6.4 Uncertainty avoidance dimension

- **Finland (59):** Finland has a score of 59 on this dimension, indicating a strong desire to avoid uncertainty. Furthermore, this Nordic country has rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unconventional behavior and ideas. There is an emotional need for rules, such as time is money, people have an inner urge to be busy and work hard, precision and punctuality are the norm, innovation may be resisted, and security is an important component in individual motivation.
- **France (86):** Like Finland, France also has a high index of uncertainty avoidance. Specifically, the following are typical examples. The French do not like surprises. Structure and planning are required. People want to get all the information they need before meetings or negotiations take place. Therefore, the French are very good at developing complex technologies and systems in a stable environment. For example, in the construction of nuclear power plants, rapid train systems and the aviation industry.
- **Comparison:** The people of both countries are uncomfortable with sudden changes in circumstances. On the other hand, this represents beliefs in absolute truths and social principles. If these are major differences, it would be a significant disadvantage for firms of these two countries to do business in each other's markets.

## 6.5 Long-term orientation vs. Short-term orientation dimension

- **Finland (38):** Finnish culture can be classified as normative due to its low score of 38. People in such societies are preoccupied with establishing absolute Truth; their thinking is normative. They have a strong regard for tradition, a low proclivity to save for the future, and a strong desire to achieve quick results.
- **France (63):** France ranks highly in this dimension (63), indicating that it is pragmatic. People in pragmatic societies believe that truth is highly contextualized by situation, context, and time. They demonstrate the ability to easily adapt traditions to changing circumstances, as well as a strong proclivity to save and invest, thriftiness, and perseverance in achieving results.
- **Comparison:** In this respect, Finland and France are opposites. While the Finns have strong beliefs in absolute truths and are closely tied to their traditions, the French are pragmatic and always prepared for future changes.

## 6.6 Indulgence vs. Restraint dimension

- **Finland (57):** Finland is a passionate country with a relatively high score in this dimension, 57. Finns are not afraid to express their desires about enjoying life and having fun. They possess a positive and optimistic life attitude. In addition, they value leisure time, act on their own, and spend money at will.
- **France (48):** With a score of 48, French society is a society prone to incomplete restraint. That is, the number 48 is close to average point of this cultural dimension (50). Indeed, France has never been rated highly on happiness indicators. This is reflected in the resonating factor of the desire to orient with the involve into social principles. More clearly, this is reflected in the high scores in the cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance. Furthermore, this resonance implicitly confirms that the French are less comfortable enjoying life than they seem to be.
- **Comparison:** It is not exactly that Finland and France are culturally opposite in this respect. France is a complicated society. The overlapping highs and lows of the indexes create contradictions and resonances that are difficult to explain.

French culture is quite tricky to categorize and shape it into a particular cultural form. It is both a culture with high individualism but quite comfortable with inequality and hierarchies in the family, society and at work. On the other hand, it is a society that emphasizes sustainable well-being values and an active working life. However, they are wary of their desires and needs. Sometimes they appear to be extremely enjoying their life, at other times they



are reserved by the social principles rooted in their beliefs. Besides, the French people are quite conservative and afraid of new ideas or opinions. On the other hand, they are making long-term preparations for their future.

## 6.7 Business potential of sauna/wellness industry and Zenestar in the French market based on the comparison between Finnish and French cultures

In this section, the thesis presents the application of the analysis and comparison in Chapter 6 to the business potential of the sauna and wellness industry as well as of the Zenestar case company. As a note, the analysis in the previous chapter aims to show the cultural characteristics as well as the similarities and differences between Finnish and French societies. From there, the thesis points out the advantages and disadvantages when deploying sauna and wellness business in the French market. Therefore, these chapters 6 and 7 only show the business potential of French culture and no other cultures. As mentioned, many times in this thesis, the customers of luxury hotels, spas and resorts in France can come from many different cultures. They could be French natives, and they could also be Americans, Asians, or Africans. Within the research framework of this thesis, the author can only study about French culture. Therefore, chapters 6 and 7 are only valuable for reference for French customers or individuals whose culture background is deeply influenced by French culture. As for customers with other cultural backgrounds, we will see their consumption decisions more clearly in the next chapter with a cultural survey.

- For the sauna and wellness industry

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the French are quite focused on improving their quality of life. The values of sustainable well-being are deeply concerned by them. These statements belong to the cultural dimension Masculinity vs. Femininity. Therefore, there will be a great potential opportunity for the wellness industry in this market. However, the French are quite old-fashioned in their beliefs and social principles. This is reflected in the cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance. In chapter 3, we also learn that the French also have an incorrect view of sauna. They see sauna as associated with luxury as a form of spa. In the literary aspect Indulgence vs. Restraint, most French people are still quite shy about enjoyment, and they consider luxury. In addition, the concept of a sexual sauna is still deeply embedded in the subconscious of the French people. In France, getting naked in the sauna is taboo. All these misconceptions about the purely Finnish sauna will be an obstacle for the Finnish sauna industry here.

There is also one issue that is uncertain and needs to be clarified in the survey in the empirical part. That is the gap between generations in the family, between the high and low level in French organizations is quite large. Is it an obstacle to establishing a Finnish sauna culture? There, family members from young to old, leaders and employees below put aside all social distances to willingly open and bond with each other.

- For case company Zenestar

Based on Hofstede's six-dimensional analysis of culture above, the Zenestar company has real potential in the French market. However, how great this potential is still a question. We can only partially answer this question through empirical research in the following chapters. On the other hand, one of the advantages of entering this market is that Zenestar can play a pioneering role and be the exclusive distributor for luxury French hotels, spas, and resorts. In terms of current Zenestar products and services, there are no unacceptable cultural conflicts. That is a good sign. However, as mentioned in the cultural dimension Individualism vs. Collectivism, the French once love a certain product or service, they will be very loyal customers. This is both an opportunity and a challenge for Zenestar. The company should approach customers carefully, slowly introducing them into the world of sauna and wellness so that they can gradually tolerate it. In addition, adapting their products to suit French cultural values.

## 7 Empirical research and data analysis

### 7.1 Data collection

In this chapter, the author introduces readers to the empirical research that has been conducted for this thesis. The purpose of this study was to find the key answer outlined in the Introduction chapter: "Is there any opportunity for Zenestar in the French sauna market culturally?". This chapter is written as a procedure. Start with data collection, specifically a survey on the influence of culture on consumer decisions about sauna/wellness products and services. The subjects of the survey are students from many countries and cultures studying at LAB University of Applied Sciences and Erasmus students as well as travelers in Facebook groups. Next, the data is analyzed and finally the results are drawn.

Below is a Gantt chart with a time frame to describe the data collection process.

Activity	July 2021	August 2021	September 2021	October 2021
Survey creation				
Survey via Facebook group 1				
Survey via Facebook group 2				
Survey via Facebook group 3				
Data analysis				
Results & Suggestions				

Table 1. Gantt chart of the data collection process

The research process started from July 2021. On the other hand, the thesis was conducted in the context of the complicated ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in Finland. Therefore, it was not possible to organize events to interview subjects from many different cultures. The author decided to use another form of data collection which was deploying three surveys at

three different data channels, with the same survey question form (Appendix 1). The survey topic was: "The influence of culture on the decision to use the sauna" and the survey purpose was to determine the influence of cultural factors on that. The first data channel was a Facebook group called "ESN ERASMUS PARIS 2021-2022 (Officiel)", with over 15,000 members. They were mainly international and Erasmus students in Paris. This process took place throughout July 2021.

After obtaining some preliminary results, the author continued to conduct the second survey. It collected opinions of members of the Facebook group "Erasmus Internships, Erasmus+" with more than 42,000 members. Moreover, they were mainly Erasmus international students and trainees from different countries, studying and researching in Europe. The duration of the second one was from August to September 2021. The reason this survey lasted for 2 months was because the second Facebook group had nearly three times as many members as the first Facebook group.

Next, to increase the objectivity of the collected data, the thesis author decided to conduct third survey. It was applied to individuals of a Facebook group named "Travel to explore Europe" with nearly 3 million members. Furthermore, the people surveyed were tourists from many different cultural backgrounds who share the same passion for travel in general and to explore Europe in particular. In fact, France has been a destination that many people care about and plan to visit. Plus, the main market segment that Zenestar wanted to target were hotels and tourist resorts in this Western European country. Therefore, it would be remiss if we did not collect the perspectives of tourists to France. In addition, this survey was done in October 2021. After three surveys, the total number of responses obtained was 117. Specifically, 24 responses from the first survey, 41 responses from the second survey and the third survey collected 52 responses.

After data collection on different information channels, the thesis goes to the stage of analyzing the collected data and drawing conclusions to answer the main question of this thesis.

## 7.2 Data analysis

### **Age groups**

### 1. Which age group are you in?

117 câu trả lời

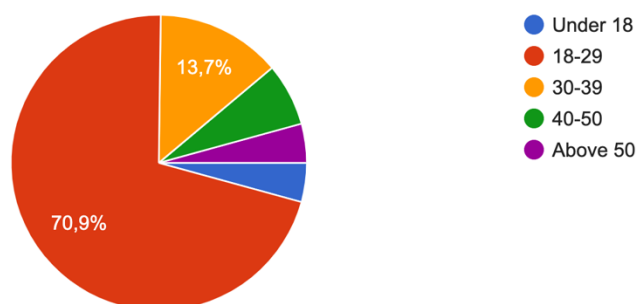


Figure 11. Pie chart of surveyed age groups

The survey begins by classifying the age groups of the surveyed groups. The author noted that all five age groups as shown in the pie chart participated in the survey. The majority is the 18-29 age group, accounting for nearly 80%. This reflects the reality of the main age group that uses Facebook. It is young people who are active and social networks are part of their lives. Next are the age groups 30-39 accounted for 13.7%, 40-50 accounted for 6.8%, the age group under 18 and over 50 divided equally at 4.3% each. This does not mean that the 18-29 age group is more interested in saunas. However, the data shows that this group's interest in the topic is the highest. In addition, the keyword sauna seems to attract the attention of this age group more. It shows that the popularity of sauna concept in today's modern society is real. On the other hand, this age group loves to travel and experience life the most. Moreover, Generation Z and Millennials are the biggest spenders when traveling. (Condor Ferries Company.) This survey data makes perfect sense with Travel Trends by Age Demographic. This promises a new potential for business types of relaxation in high-class hotels, spas, and resorts.

### Genders

## 2. Your gender?

117 câu trả lời

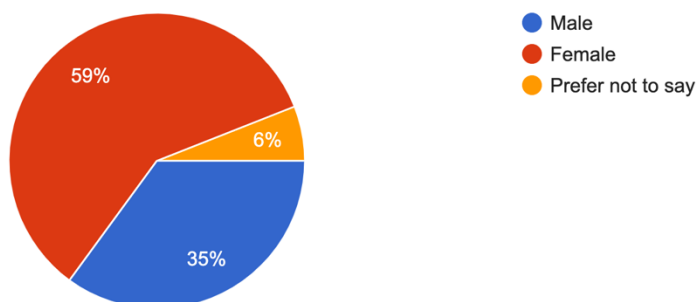


Figure 12. Pie chart of surveyed genders

Continuing the analysis, the thesis shows the results related to the gender of the respondents. With more than 60% of the responses coming from women, this shows that women tend to be more interested in the concept of sauna and wellness than the rest. Indeed, more and more women are focusing on self-improvement and self-development through wellness treatments. They are more aware of the importance of enjoying life, loving themselves and being ready to be happier every day. So, what does this data have to do with culture? According to Hofstede's theory, feminine societies tend towards values of happiness as well as sustainable well-being. In addition, in these societies, women are valued and more comfortable in the pursuit of personal happiness. Furthermore, France is again a feminine culture. Therefore, the data from this survey support the sound analysis of Hofstede's theory in chapter 6.

### **Perspectives on the degree of the cultural influence on the decision to use a product or service**

#### 4. Culture influences the decision to use a product or service

117 câu trả lời

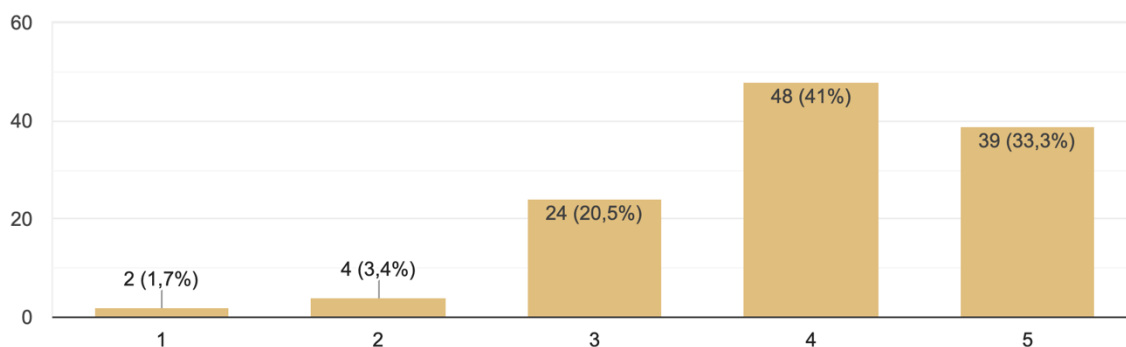


Figure 13. Bar chart of the perspectives on the degree of cultural influence on the decision to use a product or service

In this piece of survey data, the author summarizes the respondents' opinions on the extent to which they approve with the survey topic. This data shows that most respondents strongly agree that culture does influence consumer behavior. From there, this confirms the role of understanding cultural aspects in market research as well as the process of entering a new market.

#### Popularity of Finnish sauna

##### 6. Do you know about Finnish sauna?

117 câu trả lời

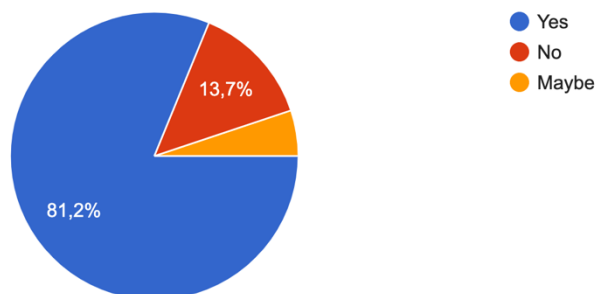


Figure 14. Pie chart of the popularity of Finnish sauna

The graph above indicates that most respondents have heard of Finnish sauna at least once. Thereby, the statements about the popularity of this type of dry sauna globally in the thesis are correct. This also increases the potential for the sauna industry in France and wellness in general.

### Perspectives on sauna

9. What's the first things that comes to your mind when you hear the word sauna?

117 câu trả lời

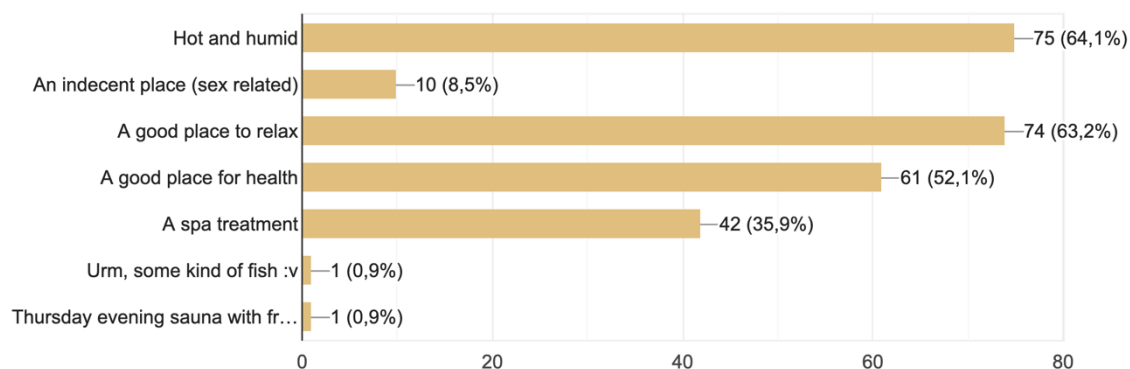


Figure 15. Row chart of the perspectives on sauna



### 11. If you could use a Finnish sauna, what would you like to use it for?

117 câu trả lời

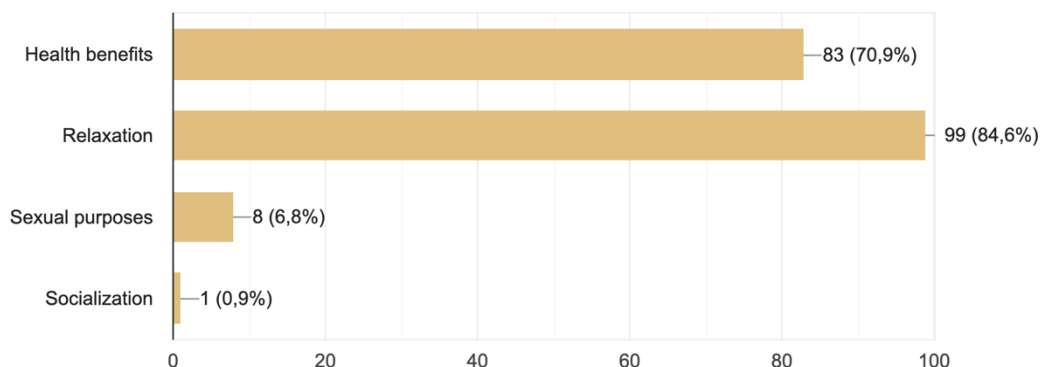


Figure 16. Row chart for the purpose of using sauna

The results obtained from this aspect of the survey really surprised the thesis author as well as changed the personal outlook of the entire thesis. With a rating of approximately 65% for each, most people have a basic impression of a sauna as a hot and humid relaxing space. More than half of the survey respondents agreed that saunas have benefits for human health. This reinforces the author's thinking that more and more people are aware of the great benefits of sauna, not just a relaxation therapy. However, with a rate of about 35%, many people still consider sauna as a type of spa. This is not wrong, but it is not entirely true either. One can enjoy the sauna separately, as the Finns do every day. They do not have to go to spas to have a sauna. On the other hand, it is an advantage for the company because spas are also a segment that Zenestar targets.

What is really wow thesis author is that misconceptions about saunas are not common. Only 8.5% of those surveyed thought the sauna was an indecent place and involved in sexual matters. That's a good sign because the Finnish sauna simply contains no sexual values. Luxury hotels and resorts often do not promote these sensitive issues. Understanding this, the French market can be a promising market for the sauna and wellness industry as well as Zenestar company.

### Outfits when going to the sauna

## 12. What would you wear to the Finnish sauna?

117 câu trả lời

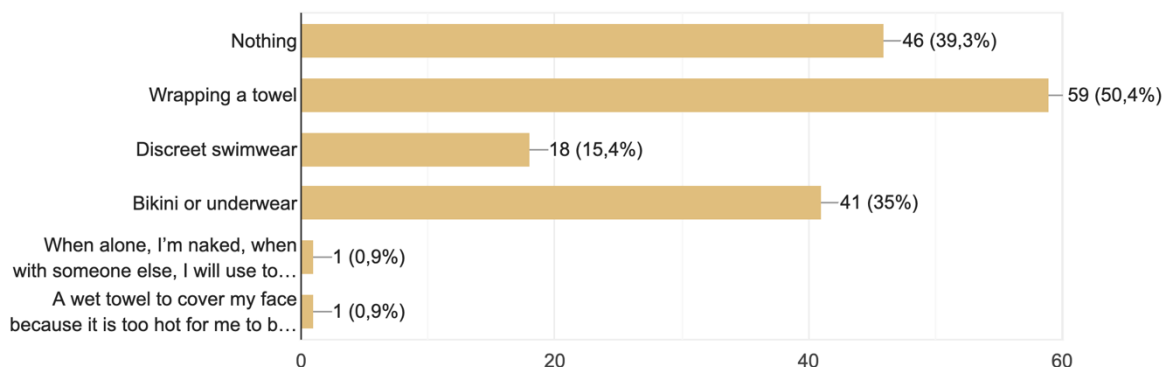


Figure 17. Row chart of sauna outfit preferences

This aspect of research is closely related to culture. Because the way a person wears to the sauna reflects not only personal preferences but also the principles of social behavior in public. Saunas in spas, hotels, and resorts are public saunas. These principles, therefore, play a role in shaping a person's decision to use a sauna. In chapter 3, the thesis shows that the French do not like to be naked when having a sauna. This is consistent with the survey results when up to half of the respondents said that they need a towel to cover their bodies when going to the sauna. Wearing bikinis or swimsuits also accounted for a large proportion of the survey results, 35%. However, the decision to go nude when going to the sauna also accounted for nearly 40%. This means that sometimes people can wear clothes, sometimes they can wear nothing in the sauna. There is no clear definition of when they will decide to wear something when they are comfortable naked. Perhaps, when in public saunas with more strangers, they will bring towels, underwear, or swimwear. Thus, Zenestar needs to flexibly apply Finnish sauna culture to the French market. Besides the instructions for using the traditional Finnish sauna, Zenestar should generally require that people not be naked in public saunas. This does not contradict the liberal philosophy of Finnish sauna culture, but rather the flexibility to apply it in other cultures.

### Perspectives on sauna partners

In this section, the thesis will point out the aspects related to sauna partners in turn. They are preferences for going to the sauna alone or with a partner, their gender, age, and position with respect to the respondents.

### 13. Would you be willing to go to the sauna with someone else?

117 câu trả lời



Figure 18. Pie chart of preference for sauna alone or with partners

Based on the above pie chart, the percentage of respondents who do not care about the number of people going to the sauna with them is the majority, 37.6%. Next is the ratio of preferences to sauna with a maximum of two people and with one person, respectively. These two ratios are not too different, only about 5% difference. The number of people who prefer to go to the sauna alone accounts for 8.5%. This result shows that people tend to be more comfortable in enjoying various types of public relaxation. Linked to the survey results on gender, it seems that the time when women are only associated with cooking and housework is over. They are willing to step out into society, contribute and enjoy life to the fullest. Therefore, this is a positive signal for both the sauna and wellness industry and Zenestar company. As people become more comfortable with public forms of relaxation such as saunas, scaling up saunas with wellness would be a wise move.

#### 14. Do you feel comfortable sharing a sauna with someone of the opposite sex?

117 câu trả lời

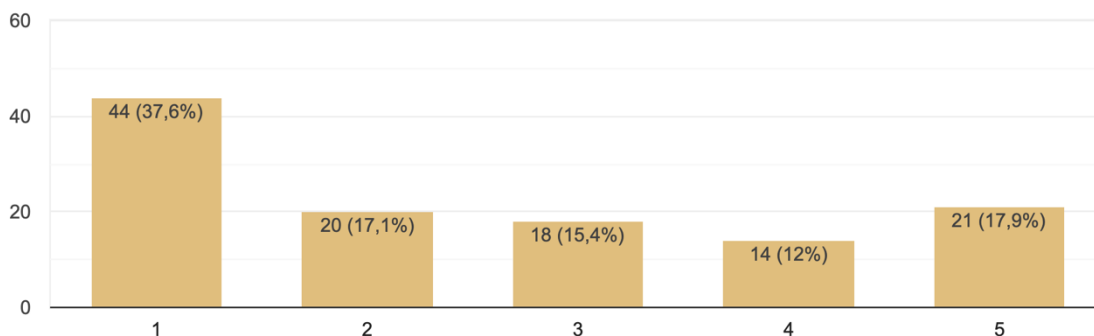


Figure 19. Bar chart of the level of comfort when sharing a sauna with a partner of the opposite sex

However, the graph of the comfort level when going to sauna with friends of the opposite sex reflects gender differences in the construction of sauna rooms. In the bar chart above, the scale from 1 to 5 corresponds to totally uncomfortable to totally comfortable. This fact also exists even in Finland. The public baths each have two separate areas, one for men and the other for women. Therefore, this should be maintained when installing sauna spaces in France.

#### 15. If you are willing to go to a sauna with someone, you are comfortable when that person...

113 câu trả lời

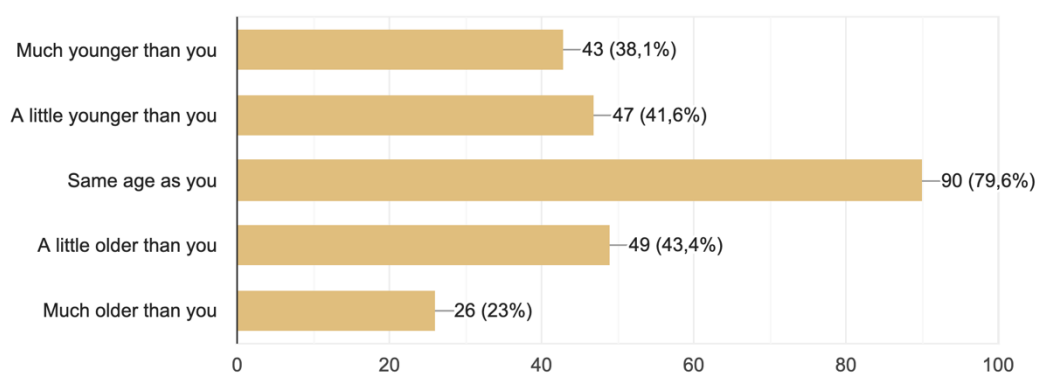


Figure 20. Row chart of the age groups of the preferred sauna partners

Another cultural dimension that is evident in the Power distance cultural dimension is the age gap. Surveyors tend to prefer going to the sauna with people their age or younger than them. This feature is quite like the analysis of French culture in Chapter 6. People tend to be more distant from people who are much older than them. As such Zenestar must accept the fact that there is nothing they can do about it in this respect. Sometimes there are problems for which we cannot find a comprehensive solution. But this is not a big deal as the elderly are usually the least traveled age group. According to Eurostat Statistics Explained (2021), more than half of European residents over the age of 65 did not travel in 2019. On the other hand, according to Condor Ferries Company, about 35% of millennials prefer high-end and luxury hotels/resorts. Also, as noted above, gen Z and millennials are the part that travels the most. Therefore, the segment of luxury spas, hotels, and resorts is very potential.

16. Are you willing to go to the sauna with your family members?

117 câu trả lời

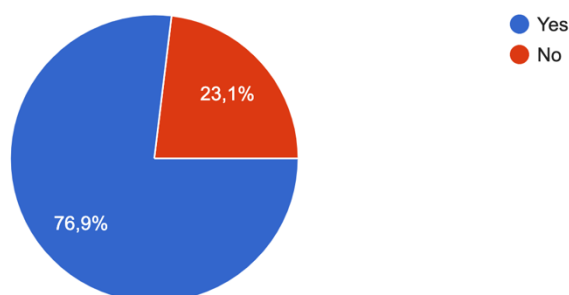


Figure 21. Pie chart of preferences of having the sauna with family members

The pie chart above depicts that more than three-quarters of respondents feel comfortable going to a sauna with their family members. In the cultural dimension of power distance and individualism in chapter 6, Hofstede Insights argues that the French are very attached to their families. This survey data is in good agreement with the analysis based on Hofstede's theory. People often travel with their family, lover, or close group of friends. Sauna and wellness services of Zenestar will be great experiences for them when staying at hotels and resorts. The Finnish sauna's focus on promoting human cohesion is a suggestion for Zenestar. Because many cultures have close connections in family relationships and intimacy.

Therefore, Zenestar should develop SaunaFlow yoga virtual training programs for all family members. Moreover, children can become familiar with yoga through yoga for kids or yoga with parents' programs.

18. Are you willing to go to the sauna with your superiors or subordinates?

117 câu trả lời

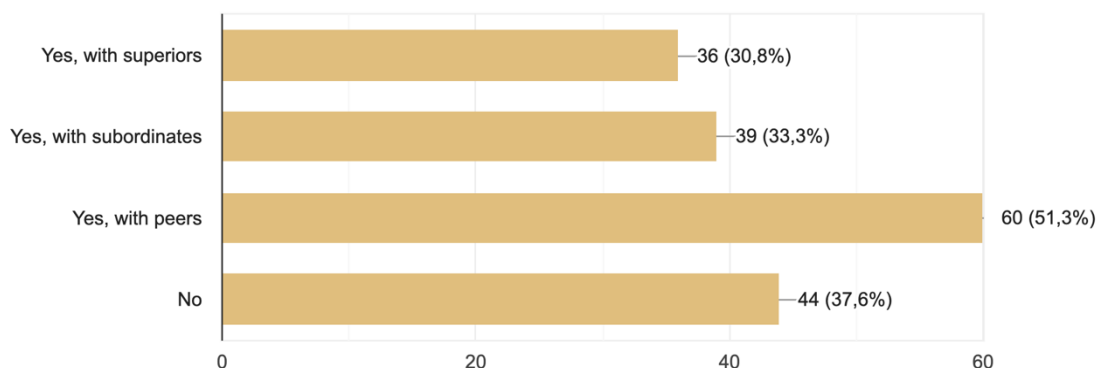


Figure 22. Row chart of the preferences of having the sauna with colleagues

Half of the respondents feel comfortable going to the sauna with their peers. Going to the sauna with superiors, with subordinates or saying no to colleagues is equally divided with the ratio ranging from 30-37%. But most of them were not interested in the presence of their superiors in the sauna. This means that power distance significantly influences the decision to share a sauna with a colleague or member of an organization. Again, the above results match cultural analyzes in previous chapters. It seems that the Finnish culture of going to the sauna with colleagues is not very compatible with other cultures. In addition, setting aside work disagreements and open communication in Finnish saunas is important. This does not really inspire other sauna cultures. Therefore, Zenestar's wellness packages at French hotels should not be aimed at guests who are going on a business trip together and staying in the same hotel.

Through the above data analysis, we see that the arguments mentioned in the theoretical part are mostly like the results of the empirical studies. However, aspects such as the opinion of the French sauna regarding sexual activities are completely opposite. This is understandable because the development of the Internet and mass media today allows people to access more information about an issue. Not many people think of saunas as impolite

places anymore. Therefore, Zenestar can be assured that hotels, spas, or resorts in France are willing to cooperate to develop sauna and wellness concept at their premises.

### 7.3 Case company SWOT Analysis based on the results

In this part, the thesis author uses SWOT Tools to analyze the case company Zenestar from the perspective of culture. It is based on the data analysis as well as the results obtained in the previous chapter. From that, he will make some suggestions for Zenestar to promote its advantages and improve its disadvantages. Hence, the company can better take advantage of current opportunities, increasing the possibility of success in the French market with the lowest risk.

According to the popular website Mind Tools, SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It is a technique to evaluate these four aspects of a business. SWOT analysis is a commonly used tool to help a business realize their current fortes and devise a successful strategy for the future.

#### **Strengths**

Zenestar's strength is a new wellness concept. It is a combination of the characteristics of Finnish sauna culture and spaces for physical and mental wellness. Therefore, it fully carries the great values of the traditional sauna and the modern wellness trend. On the other hand, Zenestar products are made in the homeland. They are high-quality, environmentally friendly and have a wide range of applications. In terms of culture, these products do not conflict with French cultural values and most other cultures in general. Furthermore, Zenestar originates from Finland. For many years in a row, this Nordic country has topped the rankings of the happiest countries in the world. Therefore, a concept like Zenestar is ideal for the French market as it aligns with the sustainable well-being values of French culture.

#### **Weaknesses**

The cultural disadvantage of Zenestar is that the French in particular, as well as many people from different cultures in general, still consider the sauna as a form of luxury spa. However, Zenestar's main market segment is high-end hotels and resorts. Here, customers can pay for premium wellness services. But there is no guarantee that they are willing to spend extra money for such services when renting a hotel room. If adding Zenestar's service price as a mandatory part of the rental price, it will push up the rent quite high. On the other hand, if it's an optional extra, would the tenant be willing to choose Zenestar's service over other options? This study cannot answer this question.

#### **Opportunities**

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Zenestar can play a pioneering role in its kind of sauna combined with wellness. The analysis based on the cultural dimensions of Hofstede as well as the survey results show that France is a potential market for Zenestar. French people care about their health and aim for a happy spiritual life. Moreover, the close family affection and high aesthetic of the French make France a promising market.

### **Threats**

In terms of French culture, the French conservatism as well as the apprehension of their desires will be major barriers. In addition, another concern of Zenestar is the power gap including generation gap and lack of communication between social classes. This is not easy for Zenestar to convey the humane and positive message of human interaction in the sauna. Furthermore, making a French person a loyal customer is both difficult and easy. It is therefore both an opportunity and a challenge.

Internationally, there are not too many threats to Zenestar's business. However, other types of wellness as well as relaxation in France, will be a big threat to this company.



## 8 Conclusion

### 8.1 Answers for research questions

The thesis research will be closed in this chapter. The questions mentioned in the Introduction chapter will be answered here. Next will be the validity and reliability section. Finally, suggestions for further study will serve as the author's goodbye to readers.

The author will answer the sub-questions first. Next, based on those answers, the author will synthesize and conclude a most suitable answer to the main question.

Sub-questions:

#### ***What cultural factors can influence on the decision to use the sauna in France?***

These factors include power distance between French social classes and members of a French organization; the relationship and dependence on the French family background; the French focus on quality of life and sustainable-wellbeing values; conservatism accompanies strong French social principles; a long-term orientation to the future life as well as to the next French generations; restraint against the wishes of the French.

#### ***What are the differences between Finnish and French cultures that influence the need for saunas?***

Firstly, it is the difference in openness and communication when going to the sauna. Specifically, the Finns put everything aside and are willing to connect in the sauna, while the French do not. Secondly, Finns are often naked in the sauna while the French see it a shame. Next, Finns consider sauna as a daily and simple but sacred habit, while the French consider sauna as a kind of luxury spa. Finally, there is still a gap in age and hierarchy when it comes to saunas in France. Meanwhile, on the contrary, everyone is equal when having saunas in Finland.

#### ***What are the cultural advantages and disadvantages of Zenestar?***

Zenestar has the advantage of being a wellness concept in line with the sustainable well-being values of French society. In addition, the company can be a pioneer in the field of sauna and wellness in France because no other company has implemented a similar business model. On the other hand, there is a lack of local representatives in the French market.

#### ***How to reduce cultural risk and increase the probability of success for Zenestar?***

Through the above SWOT analysis, the author has cultural recommendations for Zenestar company. They are:

- Focus on the strengths in terms of sustain well-being
- Diversify virtual training programs for SaunaFlow yoga
- Flexibly adjust of instructions for using traditional Finnish sauna
- Look for local French representatives for the most objective consultation
- Consider the right price for the products and services
- Look for local suppliers to reduce transportation costs, simplify trade procedures and limit the impact of tariff barriers
- Operate the product models in France for a certain period before officially entering the market

The main research question:

***Is there any opportunity for Zenestar in the French sauna market culturally?***

Zenestar Company has a lot of potential to do business in this market in terms of culture. However, the company needs to take slow and cautious steps when entering France. It is necessary to develop a detailed and thorough plan as well as define this long-term process to be successful.

## 8.2 Validity and reliability

Both primary and secondary data are used in the thesis. Secondary sources are books, articles, databases of international and government organizations, as well as electronic documents from well-known and trusted websites. Moreover, the research survey was conducted by the author honestly and objectively. Besides, the theoretical points mentioned in this study are synthesized from reputable authors in the industry. The process of comparing and filtering information is done carefully by the thesis author. In addition, the survey questions (Appendix 1) were carefully prepared and considered from many perspectives. Furthermore, the data collection process was performed in triplicate with three different groups of subjects. When the author analyzed the collected data, there were no major differences in the results. Therefore, this thesis is valid and reliable. It provides pretty accurate information for both readers and the case company Zenestar as a useful reference.

## 8.3 Suggestions for future research

Market research covers many aspects. Within the framework of this thesis, the author only focuses on analyzing cultural aspects through Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Therefore, to have a more comprehensive view of the feasibility of entering the French market, Zenestar company needs to study comprehensively including other aspects.

## 9 Summary

This thesis aims to study the influence of culture on the French market penetration of case company Zenestar. More specifically, the study aims to identify cultural factors affecting the decision to use sauna of not only French but also people from other cultures.

The first chapter introduces the research tools used in the thesis. That is the research approach, research methods and types of data used as well as the layout of the entire thesis. From chapters 2 to 6, the study presents the main theoretical points in turn according to the deductive reasoning approach. Starting from an overview of Finnish and French saunas to the main theory discussed in the thesis, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Through analyzing French culture through the lens of these cultural dimensions, the thesis provides a preliminary description of the cultural factors that the thesis wants to explore. However, those theories are only tested when the author conducts empirical research through three surveys with the same questionnaire. This empirical part is conducted chapter 7.

After both theoretical and empirical parts, the author can draw final conclusions. The cultural factors that he is studying are fully exposed. It includes the power distance in French society, family relationships, values of well-being, conservatism, and foresight of the French as well as restraint from their desires for enjoyment. Next, the thesis analyzes the pros and cons of Zenestar as well as the opportunities and threats to the company's success. From there, the author gives Zenestar tips to limit the risks and increase his chances of success.

At the end of the thesis, the author answers the questions posed in the first chapter. They act as a guideline for the research journey of the thesis author. Furthermore, the validity and reliability as well as suggestions for further research closes this thesis journey spanning more than six months.

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## Appendix 1. Survey questions

1. Which age group are you in?

- Under 18
- 18-29
- 30-39
- 40-50
- Above 50

2. Your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

3. Your occupation?

- Student
- Manual labor
- Mental labor
- Other

4. Culture influences the decision to use a product or service

The answer scale from 1 to 5 corresponds to totally disagree to totally agree.

5. Have you ever heard of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

6. Do you know about Finnish sauna?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

7. Which of the following cultural dimensions do you think influence the decision to use sauna? ( If you are new to Hofstede's theory, please skip this question)

- Power distance
- Individualism vs. Collectivism
- Uncertainty avoidance
- Masculinity vs. Femininity
- Long-term orientation vs. Short-term orientation
- Indulgence vs. Restraint

8. Have you ever used a Finnish sauna?

- Yes
- No

9. What's the first things that comes to your mind when you hear the word sauna?

- Hot and humid
- An indecent place (sex related)
- A good place to relax
- A good place for health
- A spa treatment
- Other

10. Would you be willing to try Finnish sauna if given the chance?

- Yes
- No

11. If you could use a Finnish sauna, what would you like to use it for?

- Health benefits
- Relaxation
- Sexual purposes
- Other

12. What would you wear to the Finnish sauna?

- Nothing
- Wrapping a towel
- Discreet swimwear
- Bikini or underwear
- Other

13. Would you be willing to go to the sauna with someone else?

- Yes, but only 1 more person
- Yes, but only up to 2 more persons
- Yes, the number of person doesn't matter
- No
- Other

14. Do you feel comfortable sharing a sauna with someone of the opposite sex?

The answer scale from 1 to 5 corresponds to totally uncomfortable to totally comfortable.

15. If you are willing to go to a sauna with someone, you are comfortable when that person...

- Much younger than you
- A little younger than you

- Same age as you
- A little older than you
- Much older than you

16. Are you willing to go to the sauna with your family members?

- Yes
- No

17. If yes, who are they?

Write down the answer.

18. Are you willing to go to the sauna with your superiors or subordinates?

- Yes, with superiors
- Yes, with subordinates
- Yes, with peers
- No

19. Please give at least two reasons for the above answer.

Write down the answer.