CONTEXT CULTURE IN ADVERTISING: A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF SEPHORA'S US AND INDONESIA OFFICIAL INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS

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ABSTRACT

The notion of adapting a marketing strategy to fit the target audience's culture has been acknowledged for decades. However, in social media, cultural homogeneity has become more apparent that people on the internet communicate similarly. This study examined how a multinational company, Sephora, markets its products by analyzing the communication style of the top 15 most-liked posts in the US and Indonesia Instagram accounts. Using Hall's (1976) context theory as the analytical framework, this study found that both accounts used a communication style that contradicted each country's prominent culture in their most-liked posts, with the US having more high-context-styled posts and Indonesia with low-context posts. The findings challenged the notion and proved that following Hall's dichotomy appears to be no longer accurate as these posts could still gather high engagement despite being in a different communication style.

Keywords: Communication style, high-context culture, low-context culture, Sephora, social media marketing

ABSTRAK

Pemahaman untuk menerapkan strategi pemasaran yang sesuai dengan gaya komunikasi target audiens telah diakui selama bertahun-tahun. Akan tetapi, keseragaman budaya terlihat jelas di dunia maya seperti bagaimana gaya berkomunikasi orang di internet semakin serupa. Maka dari itu, studi ini mengkaji bagaimana perusahaan multinasional seperti Sephora memasarkan produk-produknya dengan menganalisis gaya komunikasi dari 15 postingan Instagram yang paling disukai dari akun Sephora AS dan Indoensia. Menggunakan teori konteks dari Hall (1976) sebagai kerangka teoritis, studi ini menemukan bahwa kedua akun menerapkan gaya berkomunikasi yang berbeda dari budaya utama masing-masing negara di postingan yang paling banyak disukai. Gaya komunikasi di akun Instagram Sephora AS lebih tinggi konteks, sedangkan akun Sephora Indonesia bergaya konteks rendah. Penemuan ini menentang pemahaman dan membuktikkan bahwa mengikuti pembagian dua budaya konteks yang diajukan oleh Hall terlihat kurang akurat karena postingan-postingan tersebut tetap paling banyak disukai meskipun dalam gaya berkomunikasi yang berbeda dari target audiens.

Kata kunci: *Gaya komunikasi, budaya konteks tinggi, budaya konteks rendah, Sephora, pemasaran di media sosial*

INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing through Instagram has been rising these past decades. More people are joining the social network daily, making it the best platform for companies to market their products to reach a wider audience, even across the border. However, advertising in a new region is often met with cultural adversities, including the different communication styles that affect how well an advertisement will be perceived and liked (Hornikx and Pair, 2017). Therefore, to see whether culture plays a role in getting high engagement, it is important to look at how one of the most successful multinational companies such as Sephora executes its social media marketing on Instagram.

Past discourses around Sephora have noted the brand's understanding of marketing to different regions. Tariq (2021) has reported that Sephora acknowledges the importance of technology and social media to increase sales by having customers engage with the posts. That indicates how high engagement is essential in social media marketing, but normally, getting people to engage with the posts is a task that the marketing team needs to address. Yuan (2008) has found that Sephora struggled to attract customers when it first opened in China. Solving this cultural issue, Sephora successfully connects the gap by combining Chinese and French-European elements in its marketing to attract local customers (Yuan, 2008). This strategy of considering the target audience's culture for the marketing strategy seems to remain until today as Sephora owns country-based Instagram accounts with each posting specific content. This supports the notion that personalizing marketing content based on the target audience's culture and communication style is necessary to make successful advertisements (Singh, Zhao, & Hu, 2005; Bai, 2016; Mele, Van De Kerkhof, & Cantoni, 2021).

Concerning communication style in advertisements, Hall's (1976) classification of low-context (LC) and high-context (HC) cultures is often used to group the target audience's culture, particularly in the communication style aspect. To put it briefly, LC culture is known to be more direct in communicating whereas HC culture is regarded to be more indirect (Hall, 1976). Previous studies have

analyzed that the communication style based on the context culture can be distinguished by looking at the visual, audio, and textual aspects of a digital media post (Wurtz, 2005; Hornikx & Pair, 2017; Wang, Huang, & Pérez-Ríos, 2020), making Hall's (1976) context theory a principle for brands when developing their marketing strategies in culturally distinct regions. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Hall's theory of context culture might have its limitations in today's world as Akaka and Alden (2010) have stated that communication in the digital world has become more homogeneous. People online can understand context beyond their home country and communicate in a style that is associated with another region, creating a cultural homogeneity.

This study is the first to analyze whether Hall's (1976) classification of context culture is used as a principle in the communication styles on Sephora's two culturally distinct countries' Instagram accounts. It is also one of the first to challenge the long-standing notion of personalizing communication styles in marketing to different regions. Moreover, this study attempts to uncover the effectiveness of the communication styles used on Sephora's two Instagram accounts by looking at the Engagement Rate, which measures how well the audiences are interacting with the posts of each account to get additional insight into social media marketing in this digital age. The two regional-based Instagram accounts that are studied are Sephora's US account as a representative of low-context culture and its Indonesia account as a representative of high-context culture.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does Sephora advertise its brand and products on its official US and Indonesian Instagram accounts?
2. What does the prominent communication style in @sephora and @sephoraidn say about social media marketing in the digital age?

This study proposes two arguments. The first one is that both Sephora's US-based and Indonesia-based Instagram accounts do not follow Hall's (1976) classification of culture in their social media marketing. Secondly, this study argues that cultural homogeneity is becoming more prominent in the digital space, thus any social media marketing method and communication style can be understood and liked by the audience on both Instagram accounts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of understanding the target audience's culture and implementing it in the cross-culture advertising strategy has been widely discussed over the decades. Dichotomy proposed by Hall (1976) regarding high/low-context culture is among the popular theories used to distinguish the culture of the analyzed countries (Kim, Pan & Park, 1998; Choi, Lee, & Kim, 2005). Although the context theory suggests that a country cannot be identified as either fully high-context or fully low-context since it is more of a spectrum, it remains popular as it clearly distinguishes cultures, particularly in the communication style. The audio, visual, and textual aspects of social media posts and digital media are often analyzed to see how culture plays a role in advertisements in different countries.

Previous studies have found that advertisements from various countries reflect the countries' prominent cultures (Choi et al., 2005; Yang, Hou, & Arth, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). In regards to directness and indirectness in the communication style, social media captions in LC countries, such as the US and German-speaking countries (Hall & Hall, 1990; An, 2007), are more explicit in providing information regarding the products or services (Mele et al., 2021). That is due to the goal of providing factual information about the products, which is essential for people in the LC culture to consider before making a purchase (An, 2007). Moreover, providing discounts and sales promotions are common in LC advertisements, which is seen as a hard-selling approach, an approach to directly appeal to the audience's rationale (Campbell, Naidoo, & Campbell, 2020) such as by emphasizing the products and their benefits which capture LC customers' attention quickly (An, 2007). In contrast, Bai (2016) has found that ads in HC countries such as Japan are more ambiguous with the lack of mentions and portrayals of the products thus knowing the context is necessary to digest the complexity of HC ads' messages. This relates to a study by Hornikx and Pair (2017) that HC cultures are more inclined to appreciate and understand complex and indirect messages with visual metaphors even when the product information is limited.

Characteristics of direct and indirect communication styles in LC and HC cultures are also closely related to collectivism and individualism (Wurtz, 2005; Kim, Coyle, & Gould, 2009). Hofstede (1980)

defines collectivistic culture as a culture that prioritizes the group's interests, whereas individualistic is a culture that puts personal welfare first and is less interdependent with others. In advertisements, images and texts associated with individualism such as individuals enjoying their time alone and the use of "I" are found more common in ads from LC countries, while pictures emphasizing togetherness, including the depiction of families and belongingness are commonly found in HC ads (Choi et al., 2005; Wurtz, 2005; Bai, 2016). This distinction in how both cultures utilize pictures and imagery again emphasizes the notion of how culture is reflected in the advertisements.

Apart from advertisements, the website design can also reflect the cultures of the countries to which the site is targeted. For instance, animated effects and pictures are found more prevalent in HC countries' websites than in their LC counterparts (Singh et al., 2005; Wurtz, 2005). The findings are consistent with the understanding that the HC culture is generally more symbolic-seeking and prefers indirect statements thus using pictures or symbolic visual aids tends to be more effective in communicating the messages than using texts. Meanwhile, website design in LC countries including the US has been found to be less decorated with pictures and instead is filled with more textual formats to rely on the information (Kim et al., 2009). This communication style is proven effective for people in the LC countries as information in a textual form guarantees clarity with only one possible interpretation, which is well-liked by the LC cultures that value practicality when consuming information (Kim et al., 2009).

Although the notion of including the target audience's culture in advertisements has been extensively analyzed, there is still yet a study that takes the possibility of global culture, or culture that is shared among people across borders, playing a role in social media advertisements into account. As the borders between countries become more blurred in the digital space, particularly in social media, perceptions of what is considered a local culture and a global culture are subject to change (Akaka & Alden, 2010). Some studies, however, have proposed an alternative to combine both global and local cultural attributes when creating advertisements (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Steenkamp, 2019), but studies that focus on a single brand's communication style in its two official Instagram profiles of culturally distinct countries seem to be lacking. Considering these aspects, this study aims to use Sephora, a leading multinational beauty company, to see how the brand strategizes its marketing scheme in social media where the existence of global culture is strongly evident, more specifically to see whether Sephora still uses Hall's (1976) cultural classification in content marketing and to uncover the effectiveness of the communication style used.

RESEARCH METHOD

Procedure

This study used qualitative methodology, specifically content analysis where the multimodal aspects were analyzed and categorized (Hignett & McDermott, 2015) into HC/LC classification. In doing so, this study followed analytical procedures. The first step was to collect the top 15 most-liked posts uploaded in October 2023 from each account by screen-capturing the posts alongside the captions. Secondly, the posts were divided first into three content-based groups which are posts that are in distinct formats, posts that portray the products alone, and posts that include public figures and video format. Then, multimodal aspects including the audiovisual and textual aspects of the posts were analyzed to see which communication style was prominently used. In this step, the multimodal aspects were analyzed separately to see whether two communication styles could exist in the same post. The fourth step was to classify each of the multimodal aspects of the posts into either high or low-context communication styles. Next, the Engagement Rate (ER) of the top 15 most-liked posts of each account was also calculated to see the effectiveness of the communication style used. This metric was used to present fair interpretations of how the audience of both accounts actively engaged with the posts (Sehl & Tien, 2023). The last step of the study was to see the connection between the communication style used in two of Sephora's regional-based Instagram accounts with marketing on social media in the digital age.

Data Collection

The corpus of this study was Instagram posts uploaded by Sephora US Instagram (@sephora) and Sephora Indonesia Instagram (@sephoraidn) in October 2023. @sephora uploaded a total of 86 posts, while @sephoraidn uploaded 98 feed posts, not including the Instagram stories as they were not permanently available to the public. The choice to analyze the posts uploaded in October was based on practicality and convenience as this study was conducted in early November 2023, thus the posts from

October were the latest ones that provided up-to-date samples. As this study aimed to analyze the communication style in the posts of both accounts that are well-liked by the target audience, only the top 15 most-liked posts of each account were analyzed. This sampling was chosen because the most-liked posts are considered easily perceived and thus liked by the target audience, and only the top 15 were chosen to minimize redundancy but enough to represent the accounts.

Analytical Framework

This study analyzed Sephora's Instagram marketing strategy on its two culturally distinct country-based accounts, the US account @sephora, and the Indonesian account @sephoraidn. In doing so, the context theory proposed by Hall (1976) was used as the analytical framework to distinguish the posts made by the two accounts. It classified countries into two categories, high-context and low-context.

Based on Hall (1976), the definition of high-context (HC) communication is one where the main message or the information is very little said among the interlocutors. In other words, the HC culture's communication style is indirect as the recipients are expected to understand the underlying message behind what is said. Hall further explains how a high-context person's indirectness would be reflected in some characteristics, including beating around the bush, being ambiguous, and relying upon the listener to grasp the speaker's intention. Most importantly, the speaker and the listener must have the same knowledge or understand the context.

Meanwhile, low-context (LC) culture's communication style is the opposite of HC. Low-context communication by definition is one where the majority of the information and message is explicitly said (Hall, 1976). It is a direct style in which the listener does not have to make assumptions to fully grasp the meaning because the speaker does not suppress any information, even though the message might offend the other parties. Therefore, LC's communication style is known as confrontational and is widely apparent in countries that are more individualistic, such as the US and Scandinavian countries as they do not value togetherness and harmony. Countries like Japan and Indonesia, on the other hand, are known to value togetherness, which makes them an HC culture. In short, the main characteristics of both cultures are listed below:

High-context culture characteristics:
1.   Indirect/ambiguous
2.   Use public figures to promote the products
3.   Soft-selling approach, including story-telling

Low-context culture:
1.   Direct/explicit code
2.   More pictures of the products alone
3.   Hard-selling approach, including discounts/promotion baits

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first argument was analyzed by seeing how Sephora US and Indonesia advertised the brand and products on Instagram. This was done by looking at the visual, audiovisual, and textual aspects of the top 15 most-liked posts on each account.

Table 1. Characteristics of high/low-context communication styles found in the visual, audiovisual, and textual aspects of the top 15 most-liked posts on each account

Format	Number of Posts		Purpose
	Sephora US	Sephora IDN	
High-Context Communication Style			
Visual Format			
1. Meme Usage:			To create a narrative or a story.
Dialogue Format	2	None	To indirectly say the latter is prospering or trendy.
"X walked… so Y could run" Format	1	None	Implicitly remind the audience of something
"Everything reminds me of X" Format	1	None	related.
2. Product Portrayal			To build a connection with the audience more
Illusion of Authenticity	2	None	intimately.
Total	**6**	**0**	
Audiovisual (Video) Format			
1. Public figures			To build a connection with the audience more
Narrating a story	3	None	intimately and add credibility.
2. Time-lapse video with BGM	1	None	To recap an event, not necessarily promoting anything.
3. Quick product portrayal with ASMR	2	None	To give a relaxing sound that attracts the audience.
Total	**6**	**0**	
Textual Format			
1. Storytelling Narrative	7	1	To tell the audience a story to build a connection.
2. Rhetorical Statements	2	None	To indirectly influence the audience.
3. Ambiguous	3	None	Contextual sentences attract only those who understand.
Total	**12**	**1**	
Low-Context Communication Style			
Visual Format			
1. Product Portrayal			
Professional Promotional Pictures	3	7	
Showcasing Gifts with Promotional Words	None	6	To enhance the quality of the products.
Total	**3**	**13**	
Audiovisual (Video) Format			
1. Product portrayal video with a voiceover providing information	None	2	To give clear information.
Total	**0**	**2**	

Textual Format

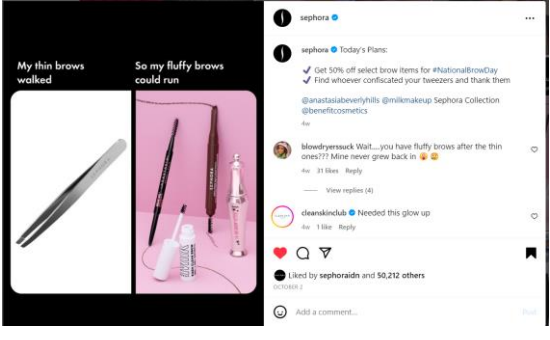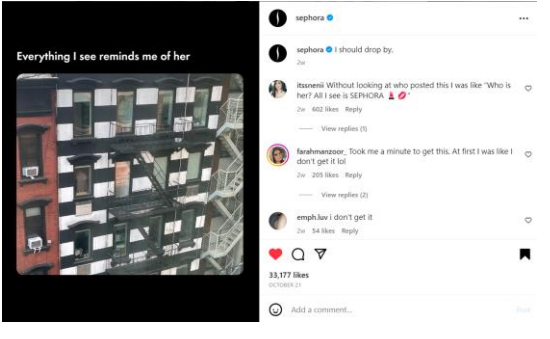|			
1. Promotional words "Giveaway" "Gift"	None None	3 2	To instantly attract the audience's interest.
2. Superlative words	None	3	To instantly attract the audience's interest.
3. Provide Information	3	6	To give clear information to the audience.
Total	**3**	**14**	

Table 1 above shows the summary of the findings of the study. An interesting takeaway from the table above is how Sephora Indonesia relies on a low-context communication style in its Instagram posts despite being targeted to the Indonesian audience, who are known to lean toward a high-context style (Saputri & Saraswati, 2017; Kriyantono & McKenna, 2017). Similarly, Sephora US utilizes a high-context communication style such as memes and storytelling to its audience whose communication style leans more toward the low-context style (Bai, 2016). A deeper analysis is explained in the sections below to fully grasp each post's communication style.
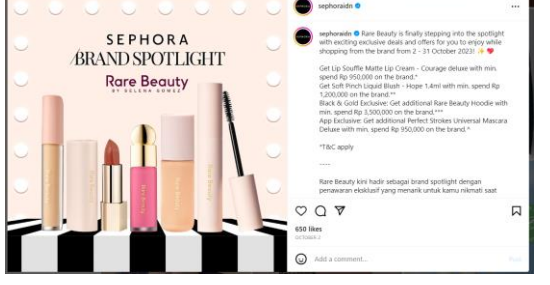
Common Post Format

The table below shows a comprehensive summary of the common post format found in both accounts. Each row has a screenshot of the post alongside the message of what the post wants to convey.

Table 2. Summary of findings in the common post format

Image	Figure	Message
Posts uploaded by Sephora US @sephora		
	Figure 1 - Sephora Savings Event 1	By using a meme format and a narrative caption, this post indirectly announces the Sephora Savings Event which would make the audience spend more than the initial intention, indicating that the sale is huge.
	Figure 2 - Sephora Savings Event 2	By using a meme format and a narrative caption, this post indirectly announces the Sephora Savings Event which would make the audience spend more time in the store, indicating that the sale is huge.

	Figure 3 - National Brow Day	By using a meme format and a narrative caption, this post indirectly promotes the products shown in the right picture which can get the audience the trendy eyebrow makeup look, and announces an ongoing National Brow Day sale event.
	Figure 4 - A building colored in the same manner as Sephora's shopping bags	To indirectly remind people who can recognize the building's color pattern with Sephora's shopping bags to stop by the store.

Posts uploaded by Sephora Indonesia @sephoraidn

	Figure 5 - Gift with Purchase 1	The attention-grabbing word *Gift* attracts the audience's attention directly and lures them to buy the product by using free items as bait. The caption is filled with the information needed for the audience.
	Figure 6 - Gift with Purchase 2	
	Figure 7 - Sephora x Rare Beauty Giveaway	The attention-grabbing word *Giveaway* in bold attracts the audience's attention directly with the products are also shown which can lure the audience to join the contest for a chance to get the products for free. The caption is filled with detailed information needed for the audience.

	Figure 8 - Sephora x MCM Giveaway	
	Figure 9 - Sephora x Supergoop Giveaway	
	Figure 10 - Rare Beauty Brand Spotlight	To give a spotlight to a brand with detailed information to get free items/vouchers in the caption. The caption is filled with detailed information needed for the audience.

Sources: https://www.instagram.com/sephora/ and https://www.instagram.com/sephoraidn/

As seen in Table 1, from the top 15 most-liked posts on Sephora's US Instagram (@sephora), 4 are in a meme form. A meme refers to a piece of media, usually pictures to convey a message through humor where the context is not stated explicitly (Benveniste, 2022). This definition suggests a meme is used to deliver a message implicitly, as the audience has to understand the context to understand the jokes or the messages. Figure 1 shows a meme format post, presenting someone's inner dialogue where the "Me" initially thinks they would just shop for a few products. The second thought is left empty and replaced with a picture of a car trunk filled with shopping bags. The abundance of shopping bags hints that rather than buying a few things, the person ends up going on a shopping spree. From only looking at the visual aspect of the post, this post falls into the category of indirect communication style as the message that the "Me" ends up getting more things is not stated explicitly and only people who can relate will understand this message.

The textual aspect or the caption, however, adds a little context to the post. Although it acts as a further continuation of the meme by justifying the acts of the shopping spree, it implicitly informs the audience about the ongoing Sephora Saving Events. Only after reading the caption does the post become a promotional post for the event. Even so, this post is still an example of an indirect marketing style since it creates a story of an individual going on a shopping spree during the event instead of directly informing the audience about the event. The post also does not contain any supplementary information relating to the event.

Another post in a meme format is also used to implicitly inform the audience about the ongoing sale event. Figure 2 follows a similar meme pattern of a dialogue, where the first person, "Me" has asked the other person to wait in the car because they would be quick. However, instead of any textual response, the other person's reaction is shown through a picture of a skeleton sitting in a car seat. The picture gives the impression that the first person takes longer and that a supposedly alive human has turned into a skeleton from waiting too long. The caption justifies the shopping spree behavior during the special event, insinuating that the audience would spend more time in the shop because of the sales. For these reasons,

this post is another instance of an indirect communication style by Sephora US as it lacks information about the event but is filled with relatable aspects for those who have experienced going on an unintentional shopping spree.

The next meme-styled post uses another popular format of "X walked… so Y could run". This type of meme is used to illustrate that the first thing, or X, paves the way for the second thing, or Y so that the Y prospers. From Figure 3, the left side of the post shows tweezers alongside a description that says "My thin brows walked". This refers to how thin brows used to be the trendy eyebrow look that people attempt to get by using tweezers. The continuation of this meme is on the right side with a picture showing some eyebrow makeup products with the description saying "So my fluffy brows could run". This continuation refers to how the fluffy brows look is currently prospering or on-trend, and that people can get the look by using the products shown in the picture rather than using a manual tool like tweezers. For the caption itself, a narrative of a "To-Do List" is used with the first list essentially being an announcement of the National Brow Day sale event and the second list readdresses the meme by suggesting that the fall of tweezers is a positive thing. As the first list is the only aspect that adds context to the post, this post still falls into the indirect communication style due to its inadequacy in providing the information needed for the audience, including the rules and regulations of the sale event.

Aside from using meme formats to promote sale events, Sephora US also uses memes to persuade people to visit the store. Figure 4 shows a picture of a building, painted in black and white stripes similar to the pattern of Sephora's shopping bags. The in-picture description uses another common meme format of "Everything reminds me of X", but instead of saying "Sephora", the text replaces Sephora with "her", humanizing the brand. This humanization is often known as brand anthropomorphizing in marketing research, where brands apply human qualities to non-human entities, such as the brand image and the products, which tends to be a useful strategy to get consumers' engagement (Kim, Sung, & Moon, 2020; Wu, Dodoo, & Choi, 2023). Moreover, by using "her", Sephora US discreetly invites the audience to visit the store. Still, this message would only be clear to those who can associate the building's pattern with Sephora. Consequently, this post leans more toward a high-context communication style where knowing the context, in this case, the pattern, is important to understand the message. The caption also does not specifically mention where the audience should stop by.

For Sephora Indonesia, a common occurrence found in the top 15 most-liked posts is bold promotional terms on the visual, such as "Gift with Purchase" and "Giveaway". Specifically, 5 out of the top 15 most-liked posts contain these words, which easily capture people's interest due to their attention-grabbing nature hence the high engagement. The phrase "Gift with Purchase" like the ones seen in Figures 5 and 6 is a marketing strategy that promises buyers a gift upon purchasing certain items. This strategy has been studied to influence consumers' purchase decisions because promising gifts trick the mind into buying the products (Martey, Adenutsi, Mante, et al., 2022). Both Figures 5 and 6's captions explicitly lay out the terms and conditions for getting the gift, classifying these posts under direct communication style as the audience gets all the information needed from one reading.

Another promotional term often found in some of Sephora Indonesia's top 15 most-liked posts is "Giveaway". The word can gain high engagement on social media (Jung, Yang, & Kim, 2020) as it effortlessly captures the audience's interest in getting the free products. Its appeal lies in the simplicity of the rules of participation that are stated in the caption, such as only asking the participants to follow, like, and comment on the post, which explains the high engagement on these posts. Figures 7-9 show posts that highlight the word "Giveaway" with products that the audience can get, which is a direct communication style as the context is laid out straight away. The captions of these posts are also consistent with the direct communication style where full information about the giveaway contest is listed orderly and concisely. Figure 10 shows a post showcasing the gifts, but instead of using words like "Giveaway", it highlights a brand that has just become available in Indonesia which directly gives context to the post.

From the prominent formats of both accounts, it becomes clear that Sephora US meme formats are more indirect in promoting the products or events as they require the audience to know the context. The details are also not fully available which is a characteristic of a high-context communication style. Meanwhile, the common format from Sephora Indonesia shows characteristics of low-context communication with attention-grabbing words that directly win the audience's interest. Detailed information is also available on every post which makes it convenient for the audience to get all the information needed.
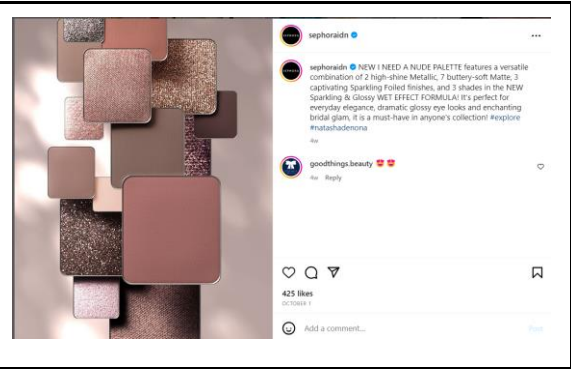
Products Portrayal

This section shows the posts that solely portray the products. The table below summarizes the analysis with each row consisting of the image of each post alongside the messages.

Table 3. Summary of findings in the product portrayal

Image	Figure	Message
Posts uploaded by Sephora US @sephora		
	Figure 11 - Clean at Sephora	The professional look of the picture enhances the products shown, but the caption is written with a rhetorical question to indirectly influence the audience to buy sets.
	Figure 12 - Tarte Cosmetics and Kulfi Beauty	The picture showcases authenticity by showing not only the products but also a hair clip which makes it look like it is taken from a person's vanity. The caption utilizes storytelling of what normally would go into a bag and does not add detailed information about the products.
	Figure 13 - YSL Beauty and Valentino Beauty	The picture showcases authenticity by also showing pouches aside from the products. A rhetorical question is also used to indirectly influence the audience to buy the lipsticks to get free pouches.
	Figure 14 - Dr Jart	The visual is intentionally taken professionally to highlight the product. However, the caption is ambiguous as it can only be understood by people who recognize the context.

	Figure 15 - Kerastase	The visual is straightforward with a stack of Kerastase variants alongside short descriptions of what each variant is for. Nonetheless, some of the descriptions are ambiguous and subjective, which can cause multiple interpretations depending on the person.
	Figure 16 - Sephora Savings Event 3	The video swiftly shows the products which makes it hard for the audience to recognize any product but the ASMR audio makes the video relaxing and engaging. The caption is direct and provides information about the event.
	Figure 17 - Sephora Savings Event 4	The video also swiftly switches between the products and ASMR audio is also used to give a relaxed sound to the audience. The caption uses storytelling and ends it with direct information about the event.
Posts uploaded by Sephora Indonesia @sephoraidn		
	Figure 18 - Natasha Denona New Release	The visual is taken professionally to enhance the products and the caption is straightforward in announcing the new release.

	Figure 19 - Sephora Best Skin Ever Foundation	The visual is taken professionally to enhance the products and the caption uses the superlative word "Best skin ever" to directly promote the product as the best skin foundation.
	Figure 20 - Glow Seeker Highlighter Anastasia Beverly Hills	The visual is taken professionally to enhance the products and the caption uses the superlative word "Perfect" to directly promote the product as the perfect formula to get the smooth and ultra-beam effects.
	Figure 21 - Supergoop New Release	The visual is taken professionally to enhance the products and the caption provides detailed information about the usage and the formula of the product.
	Figure 22 - Mac Cosmetics New Release	The visual is taken professionally to enhance the products and the caption adds detailed information about the formula and innovation within the product.
	Figure 23 - Gucci Beauty	The visual is taken professionally to enhance the products but the caption uses a narrative by assigning words such as "cheerfulness" to describe a product.

	Figure 24 - Natasha Denona New Release 2	The visual is taken professionally to enhance the products and the caption has "perfect for everyday elegance" and "must-have" which directly promote the product as the perfect choice.

Sources: https://www.instagram.com/sephora/ and https://www.instagram.com/sephoraidn/

In this section, this study analyzes how the products are displayed and described. Looking at Sephora US, 7 posts portray the products alone, with 5 posts of still photos and 2 short videos. The posts that showcase the products (see Figures 11-14) are in vibrant colors that are known to attract the audience's attention quickly (Casas & Chinoperekweyi, 2019; Bytyçi, 2020). The products in Figures 12 and 13 are clutteredly placed with some products that have already opened, making it seem like they are taken abruptly and unintentionally. This intentional arrangement creates an illusion of authenticity as if the audience is looking at a real person's vanity instead of a display of products that are usually arranged neatly like the ones in the physical stores. It is also worth noting that this illusion of authenticity builds a connection between the brand and the customers because the brand would seem closer and more personal to the customers (Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, et al., 2014). The products in Figures 11 and 14, however, are placed in a setting that looks more professional and accentuates the products, which are meant for promotion.

Furthermore, the captions of these posts barely describe the products' functions and are instead substituted with rhetorical questions. Figure 11 caption, for example, rather than directly declaring the fun in buying sets, it uses a rhetorical question that starts with a "Why", which can influence the audience's buying decision (Ahluwalia & Burnkrant, 2004). Figure 13 caption is also written in a similar pattern of framing a statement as a question, already knowing that the free bag would intrigue the audience. These rhetorical questions are signs of a high-context communication style as they indirectly promote the products by influencing the audience without telling much about the products' details. In Figures 12 and 14, the product information is also not found, and instead, storytelling copywriting is used, such as talking about what items would normally go in a bag like the one seen in Figure 12, and an ambiguous caption in Figure 14.

Nonetheless, one post in Sephora US stands out as it includes short descriptions of the products' functions. Figure 15 displays a variety of Kerastase's hair care products and succinct information on each product's benefits, which is a characteristic of a direct communication style as the benefits are stated straightforwardly without leaving the audience wondering which variant to pick. However, some of the descriptions though seem simple, yet are ambiguous, such as "$$ dye job", "Thirsty hair", and "bottle blondes". These phrases are subjective without any fixed definition which could cause multiple interpretations. The symbol of the dollar sign, signifying price, is subjective, and thirsty hair and bottle blonds are not common expressions used to describe hair condition. For this reason, this post can be seen as using the best of both worlds, having short descriptions that satisfied low-context cultures, but also thought-provoking obscure words that are classified as high-context communication style.

The two posts in a video format (see Figure 16-17) showcase the products swiftly, making it harder for the audience to see what products are shown. This kind of video format is normally completed using ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) audio which is used in both posts as well. These ASMR-type videos are known to have a positive effect in getting the audience's engagement (Kim, 2020) as ASMR is found to be engaging and relaxing (Klefeker & Devendorf, 2019). Thus, these posts are classified in the high-context communication style as they focus more on creating engaging content instead of telling information about the products.

For Sephora Indonesia, 9 posts feature the products alone, with 7 in the form of pictures and 2 in a video format. Similar to Sephora US, the products are also displayed clutteredly, with some of the products have already been swatched and opened (see Figures 18-24). However, a significant difference is seen in how all of the pictures are shot professionally, which leaves an impression that they are intended

for promotional purposes. Figures 19, 20, and 23, although seem cluttered, are still taken professionally for marketing purposes because of the unseemliness between the products and the background. Figure 20, for example, shows a compact powder standing on a rock, and Figure 23 shows a perfume bottle standing on a beach, complete with beach decorations, making these pictures look heavily staged and inauthentic.
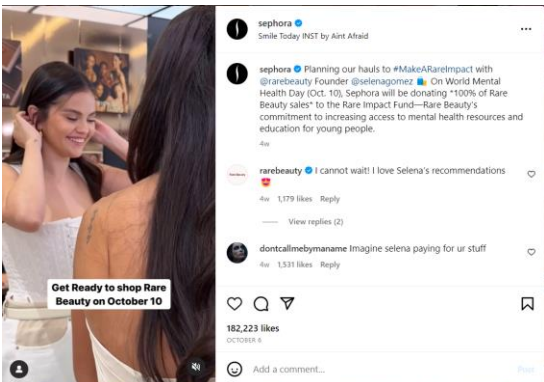
As for the captions, more detailed information is surprisingly found compared to the captions on Sephora US Instagram. Most of the captions either explicitly inform the audience about new releases, talk about the product's benefits, or add information about an in-depth insight into the formula. The captions in Figures 19, 20, 22, and 24 describe the products by talking about their uses and benefits with superlative words like "Perfect" and "Best". These strong words can be seen as characteristic of a low-context communication style due to their strong direct claim. Figure 21 talks about the product's ingredients which can convince the ingredients-conscious audience. Out of the 7 posts, only one caption is written in a narrative style similar to the ones in Sephora US. Figure 23 describes a perfume scent with adjectives normally applied to human beings. It uses words like "cheerfulness", "luminous", and "noble'' instead of evocative and sensory language. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that nearly all 7 posts are reposted or *regram* (a term for reposting Instagram content) from other accounts, meaning that the the posts are from other accounts, thus these captions might not present a complete reflection of the communication style of Sephora Indonesia.

In terms of product portrayal, Sephora US shows a tendency toward the HC culture with a more indirect communication style in its posts. The illusion of authenticity and the use of rhetorical questions make the posts appear to be non-promotional and the products' information is limited. As for Sephora Indonesia, LC culture characteristics are found including the abundance of information provided and well-taken pictures. The use of superlatives is also an indicator of the LC culture as they are a form of hard-selling approach to immediately attract the audience's rationale for buying the products.

Public Figures Appearances

The last section analyzes the posts that feature public figures and posts that are in a video format. Table 4 below lists the summary of each post and the message.

Table 4. Summary of findings in public figures' appearances and videos

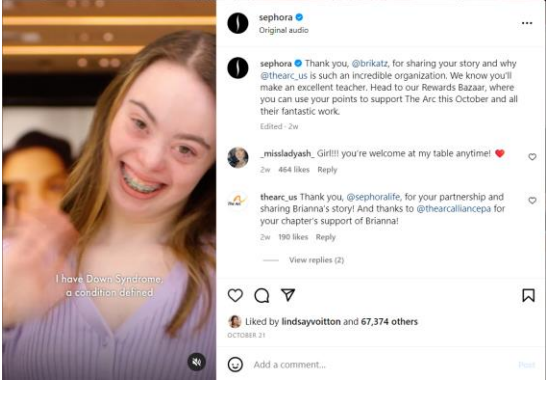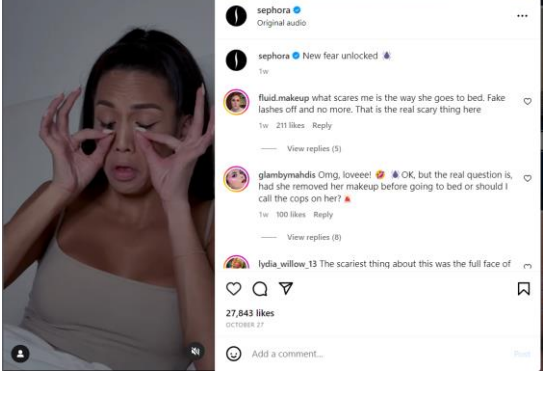| Image	Figure	Message
Posts uploaded by Sephora US @sephora		
	Figure 25 - Selena Gomez Helping a Buyer Picking Up Rare Beauty Products	The video adds credibility to the items personally picked out and loved by Selena Gomez and the narrative of helping a buyer build a connection with the audience.

	Figure 26 - Rewards Bazaar	Brianna's story is used to indirectly promote the Rewards Bazaar as the points can be used to support the Arc and eventually recipients like Brianna. The caption adds more information to the Bazaar.
	Figure 27 - Carla Cassandra's Fear during the Halloween Period	The short skit narrates a story of how Cassandra's fake eyelashes run on their own after lights off. This post makes use of the Halloween season to engage with the audience without necessarily promoting anything.
	Figure 28 - A Time-Lapse Video of SEPHORiA	The video recaps the SEPHORiA event with only background music and no voiceover promoting any product. The caption is ambiguous as it does not state what the "That" refers to.
Posts uploaded by Sephora Indonesia @sephoraidn		
	Figure 29 - Unboxing Video of the New Rare Beauty Minis	This video is straightforward both in the video and the voiceover (audio) in announcing the new Rare Beauty mini editions.

	Figure 30 - A Product Swatch of Rare Beauty's Mini	The video showcases a product swatch with a voiceover announcing the newly launched Rare Beauty mini version. The caption also provides detailed information, especially on where to shop the product.

Sources: https://www.instagram.com/sephora/ and https://www.instagram.com/sephoraidn/

Another aspect analyzed is the frequency of public figures' appearances, this aspect is particularly crucial as it gives a clear-cut in classifying high/low-context communication style. Sephora US has 3 out of the top 15 most-liked posts that feature public figures. These appearances are all in a short video format, all less than 2 minutes. Figure 25 is a video of Selena Gomez, a well-known celebrity who is also the owner of the beauty brand Rare Beauty, assisting a customer shopping for Rare Beauty products. In the video, Selena Gomez recommends her favorite products while explaining their use. For instance, Gomez talks about a "super light" foundation, which is a formula that is often sought after in the beauty community. Nearing the end, Gomez endorses a charity event held by Sephora in collaboration with Rare Beauty, inviting the audience to take part in the event.

This post is intended to promote two things; the Rare Beauty brand and the charity event. With Gomez personally recommending the products, convincing the audience would be effortless as people would trust a public figure's opinion more than a brand's statement (Hà & Lam, 2016). However, a public figure's statement is normally more influential in a high-context society, where high power distance is much more prone (Winterich, Gangwar, & Grewal, 2018), and public figures' opinions are put on a pedestal since they are considered coming from people with higher social status. The fact that the post featuring Selena Gomez is among the most-liked posts shows that public figures' statements are also looked up to in a low-context society. The second purpose is to promote the event, which is explicitly stated with all the information available in one post. Considering these two purposes, this post is categorized in both high and low-context communication styles.

Similarly, Figure 26 narrates the story of Brianna Katz where she talks about her daily routine as someone with Down Syndrome. The post seems to be non-promotional and rather just a heartwarming story of Katz who is working for her dream despite her condition. Only at the end, she mentions The Arc, an organization that helps people with developmental disabilities, that collaborates with Sephora where the customers can support the organization by exchanging loyalty points. Figure 27 is a short clip posted during Halloween of Carla Cassandra taking off her fake eyelashes and those eyelashes walk on their own while she sleeps. This post is an example of content to solely get engagement as the video content is meant to be relatable without mentioning any particular products.

Another video by Sephora US does not mention any information as it only recaps an event with background music that adds no information (see Figure 30). The caption is also ambiguous as it does not specifically mention what "That" refers to. In contrast, the top 15 most-liked posts from Sephora Indonesia do not feature any public figures or celebrities. All posts only display the products or showcase promotional words like giveaways and gifts. Even with posts that are in a video format, none of them feature a person. As seen in Figures 29 and 30, the videos only showcase the products aesthetically and the audio is a voiceover that announces new releases and the products' information.

These findings concerning celebrity appearances are consistent with the findings in the previous sections. Sephora US's posts lean more toward the HC communication style with a narrative style across the posts and only mention the purpose briefly at the end. Conversely, Sephora Indonesia leans toward the LC communication style as the videos directly provide information and highlight the products concisely. The lack of celebrity appearances in the most-liked posts is noteworthy knowing that the Indonesian audience could be easily influenced by celebrities (Andita, Najib, Zulfikar, & Purnamasari, 2021). Although Sephora Indonesia has posts featuring celebrities, the posts about Giveaway, Free Gifts, and direct product information gain more likes than the ones featuring celebrities, indicating that Sephora

Indonesia's audience prefers getting free items and knowing the product information directly compared to hearing what the celebrities have to say.

Engagement Rate

The table below is a calculation of the Engagement Rate (ER) only for the top 15 most-liked posts of each account.

Table 5. Engagement Rate Calculation as of 25th November 2023

Account	Number of Posts	Total Likes	Total Followers	ER
Sephora US (@sephora)	15	852831	21900291	4%
Sephora Indonesia (@sephoraidn)	15	27676	487510	6%

Note: The calculation is based on Keyhole.com's formula

To see the effectiveness of HC/LC communication style in both accounts and to gain a fair interpretation regarding the communication styles, this study analyzes the engagement rate of each account briefly. ER is a metric used by marketers to see the average number of interactions of the posts (Keyhole, 2023) which is useful for analyzing the quality of the posts. A post is considered high quality if it can get high engagement including likes and comments. ER is calculated with the total number of interactions divided by the number of followers, multiplied by 100% (Keyhole, 2023). For this study, the total interactions only consist of the total likes since the number of comments and shares is not available. Moreover, this study only analyzes the ER of the top 15 most-liked posts from each account in October 2023. The ER calculation shows that Sephora Indonesia Instagram is leading with ER of 6% whereas Sephora US Instagram is at 4%. With Sephora Indonesia leading the ER by 2%, it appears that the LC communication style used is effective despite being targeted to a high-context culture country.

In light of the evidence and arguments presented, this study finds that from the top 15 most-liked posts of each account, Sephora US Instagram (@sephora) shows characteristics that lean more toward a high-context communication style. The frequent use of memes, storytelling, and public figures' appearances gathers high engagement from the audience. Meanwhile, the top 15 most-liked posts on Sephora Indonesia Instagram (@sephoraidn) display characteristics that incline more toward a low-context communication style. Posts that contain promotional words and detailed information gain high engagement in the form of likes in October 2023. These findings imply that there is an inconsistency between the prominent communication style of each country and the communication style on the most-liked posts of both accounts.

This discrepancy between each country's prominent communication styles and the posts on both accounts indicates a shift in how brands communicate or market their products to culturally diverse audiences. The notion that has been held for decades that claims brands should personalize their marketing strategy to each target market of different cultural backgrounds seems irrelevant in the age of social media advertising. With social media, users from any background can interact with one another thus cultural homogeneity is becoming more apparent. Internet users also share similar lingo, enabling them to understand the context behind the jokes. Consequently, the results of this study have proved that catering the marketing strategy to each target market's culture is not a necessity since the distinction between cultures in the digital space has blurred and the notion should not be considered as the sole principle for marketing to culturally distinct regions.

Moreover, considering that the top 15 most-liked posts from each account utilized a different communication style that is not aligned with the country's prominent style, Sephora Indonesia's higher ER of 6% indicates an interesting implication that a low-context communication style, even in a high-context country, turns out to be more effective in getting the audience to engage. Promotional words and detailed information are two of the aspects that the Indonesian audience prefers. However, it does not necessarily imply that a low-context communication style should be the only way for social media marketing since despite having lower ER, the majority of Sephora US' most-liked posts reflect a high-context style. The findings from Sephora US infer another implication of this study that social media marketing has other purposes than just informing or promoting the products to the audience. Nowadays, it is a platform for brands to create a community of people and build a connection with the audience who find the content relatable and entertaining rather than informing which can also turn them into a loyal audience in the long run. Although the ER is lower than Sephora Indonesia, it does not directly indicate

that the use of a high-context communication style is inaccurate since its audience still engages with those posts the most.

Furthermore, it is also evident that Hall's (1976) dichotomy of high/low-context culture is not used in Sephora US and Indonesia's Instagram marketing. The findings show that the way Sephora markets its brand and products in two different countries does not exclusively reflect each country's prominent communication style, alluding that social media advertising in the digital age can be fluid and that Hall's (1976) dichotomy should be seen as a dynamic spectrum as one post could comprise both characteristics with one being a more prominent one. Both accounts apply contrasting communication styles and yet still manage to generate high engagement from the audience who might not speak in the same communication style as the posts that they have liked. Further studies, however, can specifically investigate each country's audiences' preferences and reasons behind liking an advertisement, whether in the form of a social media post or a TV commercial. Moreover, comparing the results of this study to other HC countries to see whether the same condition can be found will give additional insights into Instagram marketing in the digital age as well.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The notion that companies should adhere to the target audience's most prominent culture with the help of Hall's (1976) dichotomy of high/low context as guidance has been held for decades in the marketing literature. It has been long believed that to get the target audience's attention and likes, the communication style used in the marketing or advertisement should be aligned with how the target communicates, as it has been understood that they would perceive the ads easily. However, in the digital world, cultural homogeneity has become more obvious that people on the internet started to communicate similarly regardless of where they are from. This aspect is often overlooked in the literature, thus this study is the first to challenge the notion by looking at Sephora's two country-based Instagram accounts.

The results indicate that cultural homogeneity does exist in the digital space as both accounts' communication styles did not adhere to Hall's (1976) classification of context culture, thus there is a misalignment between the assumption of how ads follow the target audience's communication style with the results of this study. Sephora US uses both styles, but the high-context communication style is more prominent than the low-context in the top 15 most-liked posts. This result indeed contradicts the US' strong culture of low-context, where US citizens are known to be more direct. Knowing that, Sephora US still chooses to use a high-context style on Instagram by using an indirect communication style such as the use of memes, narratives, and rhetorical questions. Though the style is not aligned with the country's culture, these posts manage to get high engagement from the audience, indicating that they understand the hidden messages.

Similarly, Sephora Indonesia's communication style is found to be low-context, contradicting the country's prominent culture of high-context where the people are known to be indirect. These posts emphasize characteristics of a direct communication style such as utilizing promotional words and providing detailed information. Although the style differs from the country's culture, they also manage to get high engagement from the audience with an even higher Engagement Rate than the posts on Sephora US. The findings further implicate how cultural homogeneity has affected marketing in the digital space where a big company like Sephora has understood that the target audience's culture is no longer a principle to follow when making an advertisement. Internet users do not necessarily bring their country's culture when communicating in digital space, especially when online identities can be constructed easily (Jakaza, 2020). In addition, the findings have proved that social media marketing is fluid as both communication styles used on each account still managed to grab the audience's attention and engagement, meaning that it might not only be the communication style that played a big role in getting the high engagement.

Although this study brings a new perspective that using Hall's (1976) context theory in social media marketing appears to be irrelevant, this study comes with several limitations as well. The first one is that the posts chosen might not represent the accounts in general since the top 15 most-liked posts are only a small sample of the total posts. Secondly, the reasons behind the audience's preferences in liking the posts are not entirely explored as this study only considers that liking means they perceive the posts well. Further studies should take a look at the audience's reasonings for liking content marketing to gain a more comprehensive understanding of social media marketing in the digital age.

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