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Global and Local Dialectics: A Comparative Analysis of Starbucks Indonesia's and Starbucks USA's Instagram Marketing Communication Strategies

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Abstract

Global brands face the challenge of maintaining consistent brand identities while adapting their marketing communication strategies to diverse cultural contexts. Starbucks exemplifies this tension through its Instagram marketing communication practices in the United States and Indonesia. This study aimed to compare the visual and verbal communication strategies employed by @starbucks and @starbucksindonesia and examine how glocalization influences their digital brand narratives. A qualitative comparative approach was adopted, employing document analysis and thematic content analysis of purposively selected Instagram posts featuring product launches, promotional campaigns, and brand values. The content was analyzed in terms of visual aesthetics, verbal messaging, and audience engagement. The findings revealed that @starbucks emphasized minimalist visual aesthetics, seasonal product offerings, individual consumer experiences, and universal lifestyle narratives. In contrast, @starbucksindonesia prioritized promotional incentives, informal language, social interactions, and culturally relevant narratives reflecting collectivist cultural values. Both accounts utilized compelling visual cues and emotional appeals, which were interpreted through the peripheral route of persuasion within the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). These differences demonstrated how local adaptation translated a standardized global brand identity into marketing communication strategies aligned with Indonesian cultural and social values. The study concluded that communication flexibility played a crucial role in balancing global brand consistency with local cultural relevance. These findings provide valuable insights for multinational brands seeking to develop culturally responsive social media marketing strategies while maintaining recognizable brand identities across international markets and fostering stronger connections with local audiences.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary discussions of multinational corporate dynamics, Starbucks represents not only commercial success but also a compelling phenomenon in the study of international marketing communication (Nissa et al., 2026; Nurhasanah & Dewi, 2019; Setiana et al., 2026). As one of the world's largest coffeehouse chains, with thousands of stores operating across numerous countries, Starbucks has successfully transcended the traditional boundaries of the

retail industry. This success is attributable not merely to the quality of its coffee beans or the diversity of its beverage offerings but also to its ability to develop and communicate distinctive value propositions. The central concept underlying Starbucks' brand identity extends beyond selling coffee as a commodity to promoting the idea of the "third place" (Chen et al., 2025; Zhou, 2025).

The concept of the "third place" refers to a social environment distinct from the home (the first place) and the workplace or educational institution (the second place). Starbucks positions its stores as welcoming spaces where individuals can socialize, work, or simply seek relaxation amid the demands of modern life. Its marketing communication strategy is designed to cultivate perceptions of comfort, connectedness, and a premium lifestyle that appeal to consumers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Through this narrative, Starbucks has transformed coffee consumption from a routine activity associated with satisfying physiological needs into a meaningful cultural and social experience (Akasaka, 2022; Chen et al., 2025).

However, beyond this narrative of success, a fundamental question emerges in marketing communication research: How can a global brand with a strong and standardized identity communicate effectively across two contrasting cultural contexts, namely its home market, the United States, and an emerging market such as Indonesia? The tension between the competing imperatives of global standardization and local adaptation constitutes the central foundation of this research (Alshoaibi, 2021; Oliveira & Nogami, 2025).

The United States, as the country of origin of Starbucks, represents a cultural context in which the brand has become integrated into the daily routines of many consumers within a dynamic, fast-paced, and pragmatic society. Marketing communication in its domestic market frequently emphasizes convenience, product innovation, and efficiency, reflecting the lifestyles and consumption preferences of its target audiences. In contrast, Indonesia, as an emerging market characterized by collectivist cultural tendencies, communal relationships, and strong family values, presents distinct challenges and opportunities for Starbucks (Thanasi-Boçe et al., 2023). In Indonesia, coffee shops function not only as establishments for purchasing beverages but also as spaces for expressing social identity, conducting informal business meetings, and spending extended periods socializing with friends and family (Pramasari et al., 2024).

This research is grounded in an understanding of the dialectical relationship between global standardization and local adaptation that Starbucks must navigate. On the one hand, maintaining a consistent brand identity across international markets is essential for ensuring brand recognition and preserving brand equity regardless of geographical location (Mota & Dalmoro, 2025). Its iconic logo, distinctive store designs, and established service standards exemplify the standardization practices that contribute to Starbucks' competitive advantages. Substantial alterations to these core elements could weaken the distinctive brand identity that differentiates Starbucks from local competitors (Irwanda & Setyawan, 2025; Tarigan & Irwadi, 2026).

On the other hand, excessively rigid standardization may lead to brand alienation, whereby consumers perceive a brand as disconnected from their local cultural environment. In international marketing, the failure to adapt communication messages to local cultural norms, values, and preferences can undermine market acceptance and consumer engagement

(Alshoaibi, 2021; Oliveira & Nogami, 2025). This challenge has encouraged the adoption of glocalization strategies, through which global brands seek to "think globally but act locally" (Akasaka, 2022; Prasetio & Ariani, 2025; Zhou, 2025). In Indonesia, for example, Starbucks must navigate the complexities of local consumer behavior, including sensitivity to cultural issues, emerging consumption trends, and social practices that may differ considerably from those observed among consumers in the United States.

This study examines how Starbucks manages these tensions through its marketing communication strategies on Instagram. Social media platforms have become important channels through which brands facilitate two-way communication, reinforce their identities, and respond to audience expectations in real time (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Fiisabilillah et al., 2023; Rawangngam et al., 2025). By comparing the communication strategies employed by the @starbucks and @starbucksindonesia Instagram accounts (Samudra & Sopyan, 2026), this study explores how Starbucks negotiates the relationship between its universal "third place" brand positioning and the specific cultural values of local audiences.

Through this comparative examination, the study seeks to explain how Starbucks aligns its marketing messages to maintain its positioning as a prestigious global brand while simultaneously establishing cultural relevance within Indonesian society. This phenomenon offers valuable insights into international marketing communication by suggesting that the strength of a global brand depends not solely on its ability to communicate a standardized narrative but also on its flexibility in developing meaningful, authentic, and relevant relationships with culturally diverse audiences (Mota & Dalmoro, 2025; Thanasi-Boçe et al., 2023). Accordingly, this research is particularly relevant to understanding how changes in consumer behavior in the digital era require global brands to continuously adapt their communication strategies and incorporate local cultural characteristics without compromising their fundamental global identities (Kotler et al., 2021). Achieving a balance between global consistency and local responsiveness has therefore become an important consideration in fostering consumer engagement and brand loyalty within an increasingly interconnected yet culturally diverse global marketplace.

As one of the world's largest coffeehouse chains, Starbucks provides a compelling case for examining international marketing communication strategies. Its business model extends beyond selling coffee to promoting the concept of the "third place." Nevertheless, an important question remains: How does a global brand communicate effectively across two distinct cultural environments, namely its country of origin, the United States, and an emerging market such as Indonesia? This research addresses that question by examining the tension between global brand standardization and local cultural adaptation.

Specifically, this study investigates how Starbucks constructs and differentiates its visual and verbal marketing communication strategies across two markets with contrasting sociocultural characteristics, namely Indonesia and the United States, through the Instagram platform. This research question arises from the need to understand how global brands adapt their visual language and verbal messaging to ensure that communication resonates with audiences at both cognitive and emotional levels across different geographical and cultural contexts. More specifically, the study examines visual aesthetics (Rahman et al., 2022; Yoo, 2023), linguistic choices, tone of voice, and narrative styles (Mantika & Sulatra, 2025; Syrdal

et al., 2023) to identify patterns of cultural adaptation intended to maintain brand relevance amid competition in local markets.

The primary objective of this study is to conduct an in-depth comparative analysis of thematic differences in the Instagram content published by @starbucks, representing the United States market, and @starbucksindonesia, representing the Indonesian market. The analysis focuses on identifying how universal and culturally localized content themes are constructed and communicated to understand the mechanisms through which Starbucks employs glocalization strategies. By examining these thematic differences, the study seeks to demonstrate how glocalization enables global brands to integrate consistent corporate identities with the cultural values, expectations, and preferences of local consumers. This approach allows a multinational brand to strengthen its cultural relevance, authenticity, and credibility within local communities while maintaining its recognizable global identity. Ultimately, the findings are expected to provide empirical insights into the role of cultural adaptation in digital marketing communication and contribute to a deeper understanding of how multinational brands balance global consistency with local responsiveness in their social media strategies.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using document analysis to examine Starbucks' marketing communication strategies on Instagram. Document analysis was selected to systematically investigate publicly available Instagram posts published by the brand. The analysis focused on identifying the visual and verbal messages communicated to target audiences and examining how these messages were adapted across different cultural contexts, particularly in the United States and Indonesia.

The study employed thematic content analysis to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring patterns and themes within the collected data. This technique enabled the systematic examination of visual elements, linguistic expressions, and brand narratives presented in Starbucks' Instagram content. The analysis focused on identifying thematic similarities and differences between the two accounts and interpreting how their communication strategies reflected global brand consistency and local cultural adaptation.

Sampling Procedure

To maintain the consistency and relevance of the data, this study established strict sample criteria. The sample used consisted of 60 proportionally selected Instagram content, namely 30 content from @starbucksindonesia accounts and 30 content from @starbucks accounts. The time range for data collection was set in the period March to April 2026. The selection of this specific time range is crucial to ensure that the content analyzed reflects the most up-to-date marketing strategies and is relevant to ongoing digital communication trends.

The sampling technique applied is purposive sampling. This method was chosen because the researcher has a specific goal to select content that has a high weight of information about brand identity and marketing strategy. The selected content is focused on material that displays product launches, promotional activities, and the delivery of brand values. By ignoring random or irrelevant content, researchers can ensure that each sample included in the analysis truly represents Starbucks' strategic efforts in communicating with its audience.

Content Analysis Framework

The analysis process is carried out through systematic coding stages to ensure objectivity and clarity of interpretation. Each content is categorized based on three main dimensions:

1. **Visual Dimension:** In this category, the researcher analyzes the aesthetics of the content, including the use of color palettes, the selection of image compositions, as well as the presence of local or universal cultural elements displayed in the product's visuals.
2. **Verbal Message Dimensions:** This category focuses on captions and text in content. The researcher examines language styles, word choices, tone of voice, and the use of local language or English that reflect the company's efforts to adapt to the target audience.
3. **User Engagement Dimension (Interaction):** This category reviews audience responses, such as the number of likes, comments, and how account managers respond to those interactions. This analysis is critical to measuring the effectiveness of marketing communications in building two-way relationships with their community of followers.

Through the integration of these structured content analysis techniques and thematic coding, the research can produce valid and in-depth findings regarding how glocalization strategies are applied in Starbucks marketing communications, while mapping the differences in communication styles between global markets and local markets with high accuracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, in-depth findings are presented from the analysis of 10 Instagram content taken from two official account entities, namely @starbucks as a global account based in the United States, and @starbucksindonesia as a local account. Through thematic content analysis techniques, this study managed to map the differences in communication orientation, visual aesthetics, and narrative approaches used by the two accounts in building brand equity. These findings reveal how Starbucks navigates the balance between a standard global identity with a dynamic local adaptation to stay relevant in a very different market.

Starbucks United States Analysis (@starbucks)

The first Instagram account to be the subject of this study was @starbucks, which is directly operated by Starbucks United States and has a follower base of 17.4 million. This official account represents the global brand identity through a variety of standardized visual content presentations, ranging from minimalist aesthetics to seasonal product campaigns that highlight modern lifestyles. With a massive audience, it serves as a consistent custodian of the brand's image on the international scene, while conveying the universal values it wants to instill in its consumers around the world.

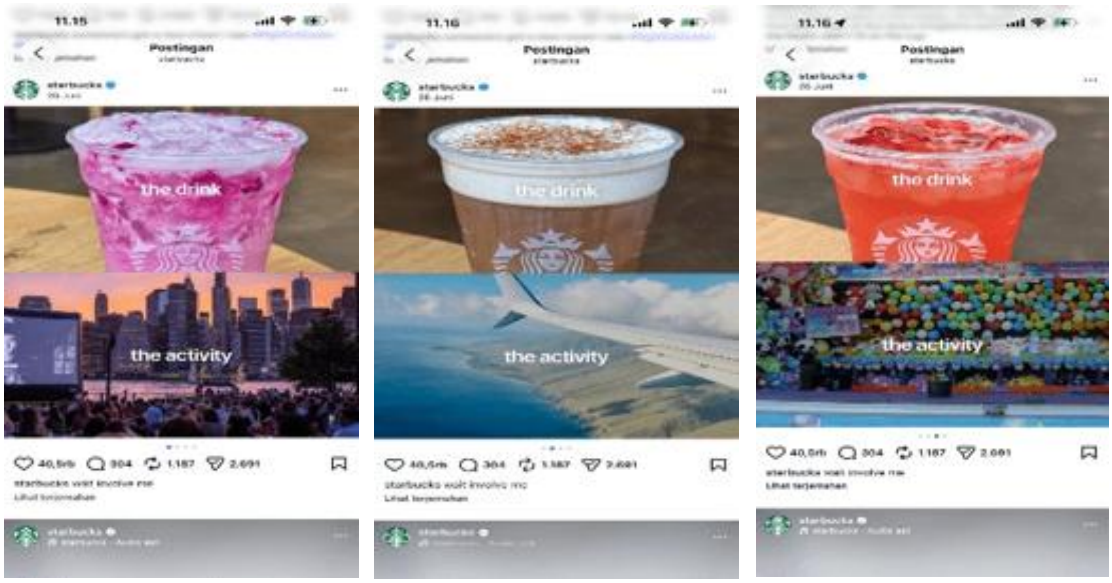


Figure 1. Instagram content @starbucks
Source: Instagram @starbucks, 2026

The three official Instagram content from the Starbucks account feature a visual communication approach that is highly relevant to modern marketing strategies based on lifestyle branding. Through a split-image format that combines "the drink" at the top and "the activity" at the bottom, Starbucks wants to convey the message that their beverage products are not just a consumer commodity, but an integral part of consumers' daily lifestyles and living experiences in various settings. The first image represents the leisure and casual entertainment side through the carnival game setting, which is associated with excitement, youthful energy, and relaxing moments. Meanwhile, the second image associates the product with competitive and dynamic physical activities such as tennis courts, reflecting active lifestyles and urban health trends.

From the point of view of marketing communication management, this content uses a peripheral route approach in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Starbucks leverages aesthetic visual cues and emotional sentiments that are close to a global audience, especially the younger generation, to build positive brand associations instantly. This strategy successfully strengthens global consciousness and brand relevance in the midst of high consumer mobility without demanding complex cognitive processes.

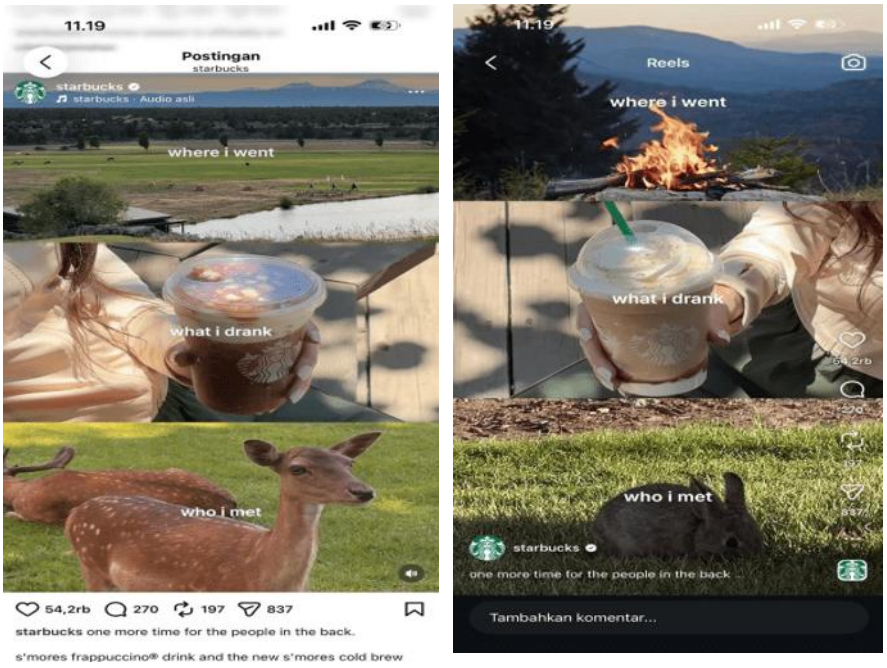


Figure 2. Instagram Content @starbucks
Source: Instagram @starbucks, 2026

Both Instagram Reels content from Starbucks' official account use a highly consistent three-panel visual storytelling format, containing the narratives of "where i went", "what i drank", and "who i met". In depth, the meaning of this content is the brand's attempt to position its beverage products as essential companions in every moment of adventure, escape from routine, and closeness to nature. Through the backdrop of beautiful outdoor scenery, campfires, meadows, and unexpected encounters with wildlife such as rabbits and deer, Starbucks wants to convey the message that the experience of enjoying their coffee or beverage products is closely tied to a relaxed lifestyle, exploration, and personal freedom.

Based on observations of 5 Instagram content of @starbucks account, it was found that there is a very strong focus on three main elements: minimalist aesthetics, lifestyle-based seasonal promotions, and the value of inclusivity. Visually, this global account consistently displays images with a clean color palette, dramatic yet natural lighting, and very neat compositions. The focus of seasonal promotions, such as the launch of seasonal cold foam variants or limited-edition drinks, is packed with narratives that highlight modern lifestyle trends.

The interpretation of this pattern shows that Starbucks global is massively implementing a universal emotional branding strategy. The message conveyed does not attempt to target specific cultural groups, but rather targets the universal human desire for comfort, affordable luxury, and a trendy lifestyle. The content places more emphasis on the individual experience of enjoying coffee, where the product is positioned as an accessory to support fast-paced daily activities. This approach reflects the characteristics of the pragmatic and individualistic culture of the United States, where the values of "speed" and "style" are the main commodities in marketing. Starbucks Global has succeeded in positioning their brand as a consistent lifestyle

brand, no matter where consumers are, providing a sense of ownership to a prestigious global identity.

Analysis of Starbucks Indonesia (@starbucksindonesia)

Starbucks Indonesia's official Instagram account serves as the main digital storefront and interactive means of communication of the corporation with its millions of followers in the country. The characteristics and management of this account can be described in detail. The account has been verified with a blue tick, uses the iconic green Siren logo that is consistent with Starbucks' global identity, and embeds an official link in the bio to facilitate customer access to delivery services, loyalty programs, and menu updates. The content is dominated by product photography of high aesthetic value, the use of pastel or bright contrast colors, and a neat graphic layout.

This visual approach is designed to pamper the audience's eyes amid the rapid flow of social media information (time and space compression). This account regularly shares information about seasonal product launches, special discount offers (such as payment cooperation via certain banks or Treat A Friend promos), and limited-edition merchandise that triggers high engagement in the form of likes, comments, and shares. It uses a casual, friendly, contemporary, and mixed English style (Anak Jaksel style), which strongly reflects the demographic profile of millennial and Gen Z urban consumers in Indonesia.

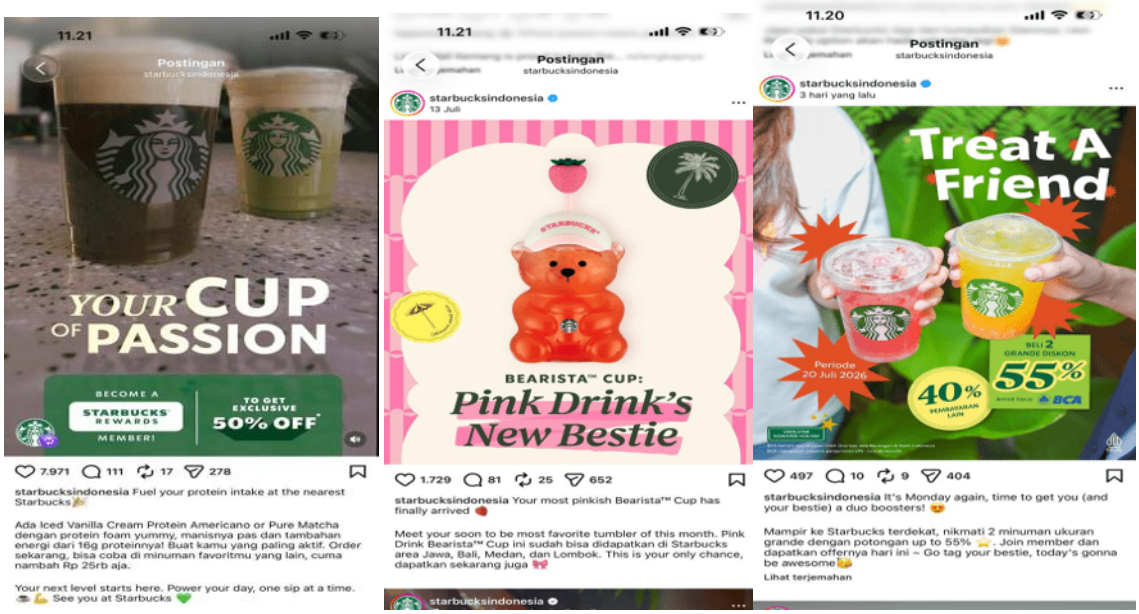


Figure 3. Instagram Content @starbucksindonesia
Source: Instagram @starbucksindonesia, 2026

The three Instagram content from the official @starbucksindonesia account show a digital marketing strategy that is very focused on building emotional closeness with local consumers, especially the urban young generation. The first content features functional product innovations in the form of energy-boosting drinks with high protein content (Iced Vanilla Cream Protein Americano and Pure Matcha), which are packaged with exclusive offers for Starbucks Rewards members. The meaning of this content is how the brand adapts to the

growing trend of wellness culture in urban society, while driving customer loyalty through membership incentives.

The second content introduces a unique merchandise product in the form of "Bearista Cup: Pink Drink's New Bestie", a bear-shaped drink container wrapped in pink shades that is released in limited editions in Java, Bali, Medan, and Lombok. The meaning behind this content is the use of collectible items and adorable visual aesthetic elements to create purchase urgency (FOMO). Through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), these two uploads consistently utilize peripheral lines. Starbucks does not require the audience to analyze the complicated production process, but rather directly attracts attention through visual appeal (heuristic cues), attractive discount offers, and dynamic lifestyle emotional bonds.

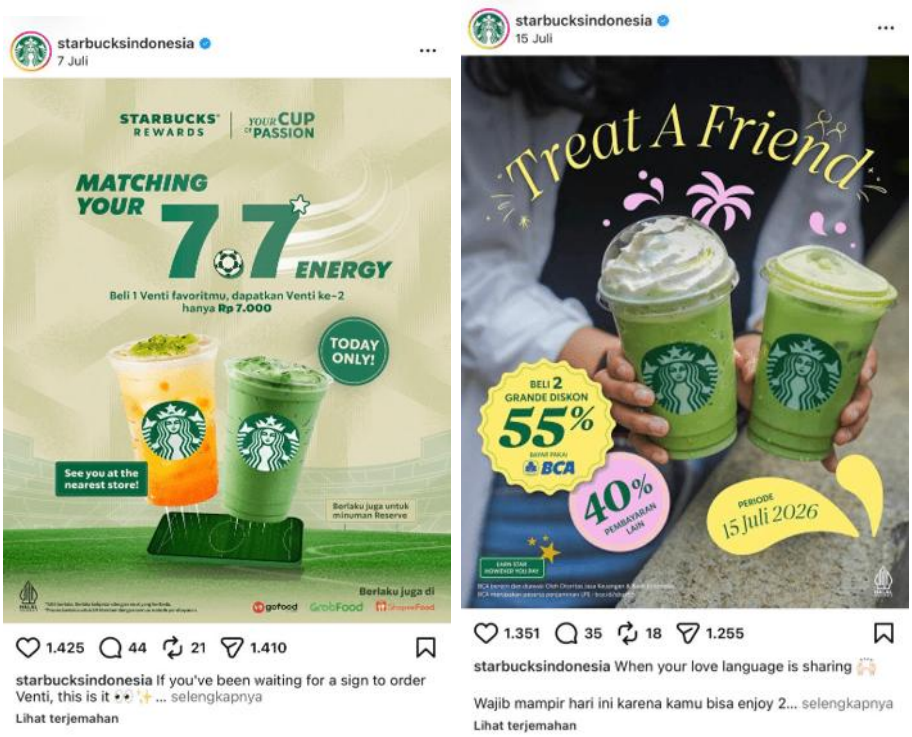


Figure 4. Instagram Content @starbucksindonesia
Source: Instagram @starbucksindonesia, 2026

Both uploads from the official account @starbucksindonesia focus their communication strategy on utilizing the momentum of twin dates (7.7) and social sharing campaigns through the "Treat A Friend" program. The first image highlights the flash promo on July 7 with an attractive offer "Buy 1 Venti of your favorite, get the 2nd Venti for only IDR 7,000". The meaning of this content is a promotion strategy based on time urgency (today only) designed to boost sales volume instantly by utilizing consumers' enthusiasm for unique numbers. The second image carries the theme of togetherness through the narrative "When your love language is sharing" with a special discount offer for the purchase of two Grande size drinks (55% discount using BCA payment or 40% for other payment methods). The meaning behind this content is an effort to strengthen emotional bonds and social relationships between consumers, where coffee products are presented as a medium to share happiness with relatives.

From the perspective of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), these two pieces of content consistently optimize the peripheral route. Starbucks captures the audience's attention

instantly through engaging visual cues, heuristic cues, and emotional associations that are close to urban lifestyles, without demanding a complicated process of cognitive analysis.

On the other hand, the analysis of 5 content from @starbucksindonesia account shows a drastic shift in focus towards cultural immersion. The strategy applied here is very far from just replicating global content. The main focus of the content of these local accounts can be seen in intensive collaboration with local Indonesian artists, the celebration of national holidays such as Ramadan, Eid, or Independence Day, as well as the promotion of special menu features that use local coffee raw materials from various regions in the archipelago.

The interpretation of these findings confirms that Starbucks Indonesia is running a very deep localization strategy. The use of relaxed, familiar, and communicative Indonesian in Instagram captions is not just a translation, but an effort to build a personal relationship with its followers. Narratively, these contents strongly highlight the collective nuance, namely togetherness in cafes as a space to chat, celebrate togetherness, and strengthen social ties. If the global account approach is individualistic, then Indonesian accounts are more communal oriented. The use of visuals that display a warm crowd, café decorations tailored to local themes, and the elevation of Indonesian hospitality values make these brands feel more "grounded" and socioculturally relevant than if they only relied on rigid global content.

Comparison and Synthesis of Theories

Through a comparison between the two accounts, this study draws the conclusion that Starbucks Indonesia consistently applies the concept of glocalization. Starbucks global acts as a guardian of "image consistency", ensuring that the brand's core values, aesthetics, and quality are not degraded. On the other hand, Indonesian accounts act as agents of "social relevance", which translates the global image into a language understood and perceived by local audiences.

This fundamental difference proves an important premise in international marketing communication: that in emerging markets, marketing communications cannot survive solely on the power of global imagery. In a market with strong cultural roots like Indonesia, communication must be much more inclusive and sensitive to the local context to build strong brand trust. If a global account focuses on what is sold (the product), then a local account focuses on why the product is important to the social life of its consumers.

This synthesis of this theory makes it clear that Starbucks' success in Indonesia is inseparable from their ability to adapt the concept of "the third place". In America, the "third place" may be a space to work quickly or just take a break. However, in Indonesia, the "third place" is adapted into a social space that is very thick with family values and community celebrations. This adaptation is the key that distinguishes Starbucks from other coffee shops.

The results of this study provide strategic implications for other global brands that local adaptation is not a threat to brand identity, but an absolute requirement for business sustainability. By combining a visual aesthetic that maintains its excellence with an authentic cultural narrative, Starbucks has succeeded in creating a dual loyalty: loyalty to a prestigious global brand as well as loyalty to a local brand that understands the cultural needs of its consumers. Therefore, brand trust in the digital age is no longer built through uniform one-way campaigns, but rather through a dialectic between qualified global standards and genuine local cultural resonance (Kotler et al., 2021). These findings confirm that the most effective international marketing strategy is one that is able to place brands as an integral part of the living narrative of local communities, wherever they are.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that Starbucks' ability to maintain a consistent global brand identity while responding to diverse cultural contexts is supported by its approach to communicative flexibility. Rather than imposing rigid and uniform communication standards across international markets, Starbucks allows local markets to adapt brand narratives dynamically to reflect their specific cultural characteristics. In particular, Starbucks Indonesia demonstrates the ability to translate a universal corporate brand identity into localized linguistic expressions and culturally relevant narratives that resonate with Indonesian audiences. By incorporating values that reflect local social practices and cultural preferences, Starbucks has strengthened its emotional connections with Indonesian consumers and positioned itself as a culturally relevant brand within their daily lives. This localization process extends beyond linguistic adaptation to encompass a deeper understanding of collectivist orientations, consumer behavior, and cultural values, highlighting the importance of balancing global brand consistency with local cultural responsiveness in international marketing communication.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author states that there are no conflicts of interest, whether personal, commercial, or financial, that can affect the implementation and results of this study.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Iyus Riyan contributes to research design, data collection and processing, system development, result analysis, and article manuscript preparation.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USAGE STATEMENT

In the process of compiling this article, the author uses generative artificial intelligence (AI) as a tool in language refinement, writing structure, and grammar improvement. The use of AI is carried out on a limited basis and remains under the supervision of the author. All data, analysis, interpretation, and scientific substance in this article have been checked and verified by the author. The author is solely responsible for the accuracy, authenticity, and final content of the manuscript.

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