

## High vs Low Context Communication in Cross-Cultural Celebrity Instagram Comments

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### *Abstract*

*This study explores high- and low-context communication patterns in Instagram comments on Western (Zendaya and Gigi Hadid) and Asian (IU and Mahalini) celebrity accounts using qualitative content analysis based on Hall's (1976) theory. The findings indicate that Western celebrity accounts received predominantly direct and simple comments (Zendaya: 8 direct; Gigi: 6 direct), while Asian celebrity accounts attracted more indirect and complex comments (IU: 7 indirect; Mahalini: 8 indirect). These results support Hall's theory that Western cultures favor low-context communication, whereas Asian cultures rely more on high-context communication in digital interactions. This study enhances the understanding of cross-cultural communication patterns on social media and offers practical insights for social media management strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Hall's theory, Instagram Account, Management strategies.*

### **A. Introduction**

Cross-cultural communication in the digital era has undergone a significant transformation with the presence of social media, especially Instagram, as one of the largest social media platforms in the world (Laestadius 2016). Instagram plays an important role in communicating between its users. One way to communicate or to get the feedback between Instagram users is through post comments. In line with Bruno & Santos (2010) who stated writing comments is one of form to get feedback or communicate. People from anywhere can freely comment on the intended Instagram account. Therefore, it is interesting for researchers to examine how cross-cultural communication patterns are used by people who comment on Instagram.

This research departs from one of the problems that arise how the characteristics of high and low context communication are reflected in digital interactions, especially in Instagram comments on celebrity accounts from different cultural backgrounds. This study aims to analyze fan communication patterns in Instagram comments on celebrity accounts from Western (Zendaya and Gigi Hadid) and Asian (IU and Mahalini) cultures, focusing on the aspects of direct/indirect and complex/simple communication. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of cross-cultural communication theory in the context of social media. Practically, the results of the study can help celebrity fans on the Instagram platform understand and manage interactions with fans from different cultural backgrounds.

Previous research by Arifin et al (2013) with the title *Typical Responses in Giving Evaluation: An Analysis of High and Low Context Culture Communication* The findings of this research indicate that university students give indirect and complex feedback to their friends' impromptu speeches to avoid a rift. This can be attributed to, high context communication has influence of group cohesiveness, languages that are indirectly spoken, extended emphasis on interpersonal affiliation, and more concentration on developing relationships. This indicates that in their communication style they choose good attitude.

Next research by (Saputri and Saraswati 2017) with the title *High-Low Context Communication in Business Communication of Indonesian* This research shows that Indonesia belongs to a high-context communication culture, characterized by the use of indirect communication, emphasis on interpersonal relationships and cultural values, dominance of non-verbal language, and flexible time orientation (polychronic). A strong culture of collectivism means that group cooperation is favored over individualism. This ancestral cultural heritage remains dominant despite the slight influence of low-context culture due to globalization. The findings highlight the importance of adapting communication styles in business and political contexts between countries

This study's literature review centres on the high/low context communication theory that was postulated by Edward T. Hall in 1976 in his work titled "Beyond Culture" Hall (1976) divided cultures based on the way people communicate into two main categories: low context culture and high context culture. Essentially, high-context culture is one in which messages are less explicit and more embedded within the content, signal and background; more non-verbal and more contained in-between understandings.

Hall (1976) added that in high context communication presumed to be common in Asian nations, messages may often be concealed and intricate. Communications are indirect and can contain multiple levels of message which are to be inferred from the social, organisational and interpersonal context. on the other hand, low-context cultures typical with the countries of the western civilization are characterized by a simple, direct approach of communication. Messages are coded, direct and unambiguous, with the emphasis being on the utmost effectiveness of the actual meaning transmitted.

Hall (1976) has pointed that such differences are due to the culture of the societies in the least developed and the most developed countries. High context culture: A cluster of values deems group cohesiveness, avoidance of confrontation, and retention of face or self-image as important; and, therefore, fosters high context communication. Whereas low-context culture is more diverse, open and personal, but efficient, communicating through direct and clear messages. Hall is keen to point out that none of these differences demonstrate that one culture is superior to the other, but what they do show is that there are different ways of getting the job done, of achieving the goal of successful intercultural communication in different cultural worlds.

The relevance of Hall's theory in the digital age is becoming increasingly interesting to study. Hall (1976) in his time observed face-to-face communication, but the principles he put forward about how culture influences communication styles remain relevant in the context of digital communication. Differences between high and low context communication can still be observed in the way people from different cultural backgrounds interact on social media, including in this case how fans comment on celebrities' Instagram. While digital platforms may tend to encourage a more direct and simple communication style, underlying cultural characteristics are still reflected in the choice of words, the manner of delivery, and the complexity of the messages conveyed by users. a influence on how fans interact with celebrities on digital platforms.

High-context communication is a form where meaning is primarily derived from contextual elements rather than explicit statements. In these cultures, people interpret messages by drawing on shared background knowledge, existing relationships, social status, and cultural or religious understanding. The actual verbal or written content contains minimal explicit information, as most of

the meaning is embedded in context and non-verbal cues. Decision-making in high-context environments tends to rely on intuition and feelings, with communication typically being indirect and implicit. Relationships are viewed as long-term commitments, and success in these cultures often depends on one's ability to "read between the lines" and understand unspoken meanings based on contextual factors and shared cultural knowledge.

It implies that a lot of information is exchanged explicitly through the message itself and rarely is anything implicit or hidden. In this culture, meanings are explicitly stated through language. Hall (1976) explains that in low level context most information is expected to be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context. Low level context is characterized by direct and linear communication and by the constant and sometimes never ending use of words, where the communication is direct, precise, dramatic, open, and based on true intentions (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

## **B. Method**

This research uses a qualitative approach with the content analysis method, as recommended by Krippendorff (2004) in text and communication studies. This method is effective for analyzing cross-cultural communication patterns seen in text comments on celebrities' Instagram accounts. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth study of textual data rich in contextual and symbolic meaning (Creswell and Creswell 2017). The analysis focused on the characteristics of high and low context communication as described by Hall (1976) which includes the dimensions of direct/indirect and complex/simple communication.

The data used in this study are comment text which is categorized as primary data. The selection of this data was based on the guidelines of Miles & Huberman (1994) who emphasized the importance of rich and relevant data to support qualitative analysis. Comments were taken from the posts of celebrities Zendaya and Gigi Hadid for representation of Western culture, and IU and Mahalini for representation of Asian culture. According to Hall (1976), Western cultures tend to use explicit low-context communication, whereas Asian cultures are more implicit. This data provides an empirical basis for comparing the communication patterns of two different cultural groups.

Data collection techniques were conducted through non-participant observation, as described by Flick in (Borg 2024) which is effective for understanding communicative behaviors in natural contexts without researcher intervention. Comments were systematically collected by screening comments that were relevant, authentic, and reflected aspects of cross-cultural communication. Analysis was conducted based on the thematic approach developed by Braun & Clarke (2006), by identifying patterns and themes that emerged from the data. In addition, Hall's (1976) theory of cross-cultural communication served as the main theoretical framework to analyze the differences in high and low context communication in the comments.

## **C. Findings and Discussion**

### **Finding**

In this section, the results of the analysis of high and low context communication patterns found in Instagram comments on Western (Zendaya and Gigi Hadid) and Asian (IU and Mahalini) celebrity accounts will be presented. The data analyzed are comments categorized based on direct/indirect and simple/complex communication characteristics according to Hall's (1976) theory. The results of the analysis are presented in a table that shows the frequency of occurrence of each communication category on each celebrity account. The discussion will focus on the comparison of communication patterns between Western and Asian celebrity followers, and how these findings support Hall's theory of cross-cultural communication.

This study analyzed Instagram comments on the accounts of four public figures: Zendaya, Gigi Hadid, IU, and Mahalini, focusing on their linguistic characteristics using Halliday's social semiotic approach. The comments were categorized based on their level of context (high or low), directness (direct or indirect), and complexity (complex or simple).

The analysis of comments on Zendaya's Instagram revealed a balance between high-context and low-context communication. Many comments were short and direct, often expressing admiration for her beauty and style. Indirect and complex comments were fewer, indicating that users mostly preferred straightforward praise rather than elaborate or nuanced expressions.

Gigi Hadid's comments showed a similar trend, with most being direct and simple. Compliments such as "your hair is gorgeous" and "Gigi is perfect" were common, reflecting a preference for explicit appreciation. However, a few comments carried a high-context meaning, including one referencing political issues, showing how social media interactions can merge personal admiration with broader societal concerns.

In contrast, comments on IU's Instagram displayed a higher frequency of high-context and complex language. Many fans expressed deep emotional connections with her, using poetic or metaphorical language. Some comments included personal reflections and gratitude, showcasing a strong parasocial relationship between IU and her audience. Additionally, some comments contained criticism and socio-political discussions, reflecting the diverse nature of her fan base.

Mahalini's Instagram comments had the highest number of high-context and complex expressions. Many users incorporated cultural and poetic language in their admiration, emphasizing deep appreciation beyond simple praise. Some comments included idiomatic expressions and humor, reflecting a stronger cultural influence in communication style. Compared to the other celebrities, Mahalini's comments had the most elaborate and emotionally expressive language.

The findings reveal different communication styles across fan interactions on social media. Western celebrities like Zendaya and Gigi Hadid received predominantly direct and simple comments, while Asian celebrities like IU and Mahalini had a higher number of high-context and complex expressions. This suggests that cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence how admiration and opinions are conveyed in digital interactions.

## Discussion

### *Direct vs Indirect*

According to Hall (1976), high and low context cultures can be identified by directness and indirectness. High-context cultures usually use indirect comments, while low-context cultures commonly use direct comments.

In the findings above, direct comments found on Zendaya's account are 8 pieces, 5 for positive direct comments and 3 for negative direct comments. Positive direct comments on Zendaya's Instagram account such as "Wow that dress is Amazing" or negative comments such as "Type Shit" indicate that in Zendaya's Instagram account her followers are more likely to use low context communication. Because it is direct and explicit.

Whereas on Gigi Hadid's Instagram account there were 6 positive direct comments and 0 for negative direct comments. Not much different from Zendaya's Instagram account, Gigi Hadid's account also has a lot of Direct comments, some examples of direct comments on Hadid's Instagram account such as "Gigi is perfect" or "angel" show that these comments fall into the Direct or direct category.

Meanwhile on IU's Instagram account, only 2 Direct comments were found, namely 2 for positive direct comments and 0 comments for negative direct. The last one is on Mahalini's account, in mahalini's Instagram account there is only 1 positive direct comment, while for negative direct comments 0.

### ***Simple vs Complex***

Simple responses usually contain one illocution and complex contains two illocutions, so it can be concluded that simple is usually bound with direct because they are a bond in characteristic low communication. In the simple responses on Zendaya's Instagram account, there are 8 simple responses found, 5 for positive simple responses and 3 for negative simple responses. Meanwhile, on Gigi Hadid's Instagram account, 6 positive simple responses were found and 0 for negative simple responses. Meanwhile on IU's Instagram account, only 2 simple responses were found, namely 2 for simple positive responses and 0 simple negative responses. The last one is on Mahalini's account, in mahalini's Instagram account there is only 1 positive simple response, while for a negative simple response 0.

For complex responses, Zendaya's account only found 1 complex response, 1 positive and 0 negative complex responses. While in Gigi hadid's Instagram account, 3 complex responses were found, 2 for the positive and 1 for the negative. Meanwhile, in IU's Instagram account, 7 complex responses were found, 5 for positive complex responses and 2 for negative complex responses. The last in mahalini's account there are 8 complex responses, 8 for positive complex responses and 0 for negative complex responses.

The main results of this study show that there are significant differences in communication patterns on Instagram accounts of celebrities from different cultural backgrounds. Zendaya and Gigi Hadid's accounts from Western cultures tend to have more direct and simple comments, with Zendaya getting 8 direct comments (5 positive, 3 negative) and Gigi Hadid getting 6 positive direct comments. In contrast, IU and Mahalini's Asian accounts showed a predominance of indirect and complex comments, with IU receiving 7 indirect comments (5 positive, 2 negative) and Mahalini getting 8 positive indirect comments.

From the perspective of Hall's (1976) cross-cultural communication, these results support the proposition that high context vs. low context cultures are manifested in fan interactions with celebrities on social media. The cultures associated with low context comment in particular come from the western parts of the world while those belonging to the high context comment come from Asia.

As an idea for development, this research can be extended by analyzing factors that influence these communication patterns, such as the influence of social media globalization on cross-cultural communication styles, the impact of platform algorithms on the visibility of certain types of comments, or how celebrities respond to these comments. In addition, it could also be studied how these communication patterns change over time or differ between different social media platforms.

The novelty of this research is found in the part of, analyzing the communication pattern on social media with reference to cultural context. Unlike most previous studies which may often assume one culture such as Indonesia culture to analyze the low and high context of communication, this study using several culture western and asian in social media. It offers new perspective into the nature of intercultural communication within social media and how social media transforms into a theater of any cultural difference in communication.

### **D. Conclusion**

The final results indicate that comments on Zendaya and Gigi Hadid's Instagram accounts reflect low-context communication, as they are explicit and direct. In contrast, comments on IU and Mahalini's accounts, both Asian celebrities, exhibit high-context communication, characterized by implicit and complex expressions. These findings align with Hall's theory, which suggests that

Westerners tend to engage in low-context communication, while Asians are more inclined toward high-context communication.

These results have significant implications for various stakeholders. Celebrity social media managers can use these insights to develop more effective and culturally appropriate engagement strategies. Intercultural communication researchers may find these findings valuable for further studies on digital communication behaviors across cultures. Additionally, social media users can benefit from a better understanding of cross-cultural communication patterns.

However, this study has some limitations. First, the dataset was limited to four celebrities and covered only one specific time period, which may not fully represent broader Instagram communication patterns. Second, factors such as followers' demographics, timing of posts, and the nature of celebrity content were not considered, which could influence comment styles. Lastly, the analysis primarily focused on English-language comments, with local languages translated, potentially leading to loss of cultural nuances in interpretation.

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