

HIGH-CONTEXT VERSUS LOW-CONTEXT COMMUNICATION IN ADVERTISING STRATEGIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI AND THE US ADVERTISEMENTS

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20698029>

Received	Accepted	Published
18 April 2026	29 May 2026	15 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effects of cultural context on advertising and communication strategies by comparing Pakistani and American advertisements. It uses Edward T. Hall's theory of high-context and low-context communication as the theoretical framework. For the study, ten advertisements were selected as primary data, including five Pakistani and five American advertisements. These advertisements were analyzed qualitatively. The findings reveal that Pakistani advertisements mainly follow a high-context communication style. Messages are conveyed indirectly through cultural traditions, religious values, family relationships, and emotional imagery. In contrast, American advertisements generally use a low-context communication style, characterized by clear language, direct messages, and a strong focus on the product. The study also shows that Pakistani advertisements rely more on emotional and relational appeals, whereas American advertisements emphasize clarity and rational persuasion. Overall, the research concludes that cultural context strongly influences the language, visuals, and persuasive techniques used in advertisements.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, Advertising communication, High-context culture, Low-context culture, Visual elements

Introduction

Culture is deemed as a set of beliefs, values and practices of a society and plays a significant role in interpretation of messages by individuals (Parveen & Akram, 2021). It influences the use of language, social norms and attitudes, which are the core areas in effective communication (Akram & Oteir, 2025; Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025). In advertising, the messages should be culturally aligned because the messages have to appeal to the expectations and sensibilities of the target audience (Kaur and Chawla, 2016). On the other hand, cultural ignorance can result into misunderstanding and decreased efficiency of conveying messages. Advertisements are one of

the ways to convey messages to the audience. In fact, advertisement does not just involve the use of verbal communication, but often conveys a meaning through the use of metaphors, symbols, and visual objects. Nonverbal messages and figurative language are significant to convey implicit thoughts. Nonetheless, these factors can have different meanings in different societies, which can be misinterpreted. Subsequently, ads that use exaggerated imagery or metaphor can be misconstrued by the audiences who are outsiders of the cultural context (Fraser, 1993).

In the modern international business environment, companies are facing stiff competition, and as such, they have to employ

the services of effective advertising to gain and maintain consumers' attention and preferences. Cultural differences in the international markets determine the consumer preferences and affect the way the adverts are interpreted (Ahmad et al., 2022; Amjad et al., 2021). Hence, the cultural adaptation of advertising strategies to local cultural contexts is crucial to effective communication and good presence in the market (Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). Culture affects advertisement in many aspects including language, images, themes, and media selection (Umar et al., 2024a, 2024b). The social values, traditions, and patterns of communication shape the ways in which the messages are perceived and reacted upon by the audience. Thus cultural sensitivity and insensitivity can result in misinterpretations or adverse response, which underscores the significance of culturally sensitive advertisement.

The high context and low-context communication theory by Edward T. Hall can be an effective way of interpreting cultural differences in advertisements. High context communication focuses on implicit meanings, common cultural knowledge and symbolism, whereas low context considers only the literal message (Javaid & Rmazan, 2026). Communication is concerned with explicit and direct information. These opposing styles influence the linguistic and visual aspects of adverts and are critical in the development of effective marketing strategies. Pakistan and the United States have different styles of communication in advertising. As a high-context culture, Pakistani adverts are based on emotional appeals, symbolism, and indirect communications. Conversely, the American advertisements, which are typical of the low-context culture, focus on clear, direct, and explicit communication. This paper aims to compare and contrast the language and imagery used in the advertisements in both nations and how these cultural variations impact the advertisement techniques and advertising success.

Statement of the Problem

Advertising is an influential tool that manipulates consumer behavior, but its impact depends on the closeness to the cultural communication style

of the audience. The High-Context and Low Context Communication Theory, given by Edward T. Hall states that in high-context cultures, communication is based on implicit messages and shared understanding, whereas in low-context cultures, communication is reliant on clear and direct communication. Pakistan is regarded as a high-context culture, the United States is a low-context culture. Nevertheless, there is a lack of literature in the advertisement strategies and communication styles of these countries. A lack of appropriate style of message and cultural anticipations can diminish both the impact of advertisements and the consumer interaction. Thus, this paper analyzes and compares the linguistic and visual aspects of ads in Pakistani TV ads and the United States with respect to high-context communication and low-context communication.

Significance of the Study

This paper discusses the culture and advertising relationship using a high context and low-context model of communication as proposed by Edward T. Hall. Theoretically, it illustrates how cultural pattern of communication determines the message design, visuals and how the audience interprets them. In practical terms, it offers precepts to the advertisers to come up with culturally acceptable ads. Comparing Pakistan and the United States, the research paper draws upon key differences in advertising practices, which helps to reduce the miscommunication, increase engagement with the audience, and enhance overall effectiveness and emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity in global marketing.

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are:

To examine linguistic and visual aspects of ads in Pakistan and the United States

To compare the advertisement strategies in Pakistan and the United States on the basis of the high-context and low-context communication style

Literature Review

According to Edward T. Hall (1976), cultures fall along a high-context to low context continuum

with respect to communication of meaning. In high-context cultures, implicit communication, shared context, and nonverbal expression are used whereas in low-context cultures, they use direct and explicit messages (Ramzan et al., 2020, 2023, 2025). Advertisement and marketing are also shaped by this difference where they have to reflect the cultural aspects of the audience (Hall and Hall, 1990). Both cultures, high and low, vary in the way they communicate. Asian and African cultures are considered highly and low-context cultures. This understanding of high context and low context cultures enhances the cross-cultural communication (Sheposh, 2025). Advertisements are cultural representations in values and norms (Ramzan & Khan, 2024a, 2024b). In low context cultures, like the United States, they are direct and information-driven whereas in the high context culture, such as China, they use implicit messages and symbolism. This is the way culture influences advertising strategies (Bai, 2016). The study that involved the Belgian (high-context) and Dutch (low-context) participants revealed that greater appreciation of complex advertisements was improved by the culture of high-context (Belgian). A study comparing the Belgian (high-context) and Dutch (low-context) participants showed that the high-context culture (Belgian) helped to appreciate complex advertisements more than the low-context culture (Dutch).

Advertising has results that are determined by cultural orientations such as individualism and collectivism (Chen & Ramzan, 2024). Individual benefits or group benefits appeals are more effective in collectivist or individualistic countries respectively. The type of product and social identities (gender) have additional impacts. Campaigns should be aligned with the cultural norms as this enhances brand perception, purchase intent and consumer consideration (Shaikh, 2008). Online advertising indicates the latent cultural orientations. Advertisements in Finland (individualistic, low-context) and India (collectivistic, high-context) have their differences and similarities in terms of explicit and direct messages, and indirect narrative message and musical integration. Other campaigns involve blended strategies that can be used to depict the Hofstede and Hall frameworks in cross-cultural

settings (Mahmud, 2024). Consumer behavior and marketing strategies are influenced by cultural elements like religion, language, history, education, and social practices (Gillespie et al., 2004). Global Advertising involves coordination between the headquarters and the local offices to ensure the consistency of the brand but adjusting to the local market (Gould et al., 1999). Digital media is also subject to cultural considerations with high-context culture enjoying visuals and implicit messages and low context culture enjoying explicit text and structured layouts (Wurzt, 2005). The research is based on the theory of High-Context and Low-Context Communication Theory developed by Edward T. Hall that forms the basis of the theory of cultural influence on communication and meaning. Hall underlines the key importance of context in communication, pointing out: "Context is the information that surrounds an event ; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event" (Hall & Hall, 1990, p. 6). This implies that the environmental, relational, and cultural factors affect the meaning. High context communication is defined as: A high-context (HC) communication or message is the one where most of the information is contained either in the physical context or within the person itself, and very little is in the coded explicit transmitted part of the message (Hall, 1976, p. 91). This communication is based on implicit meanings, shared cultural knowledge and nonverbal communication, which is usually apparent in emotional and symbolic advertising. As compared to low-context communication, it is defined as: A low-context communication (LC) is precisely the opposite i.e. the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code" (Hall, 1976, p. 91). It is based on direct and explicit messages which is frequently applied in fact based advertising. Hall also tells that the existence of cultures is on a continuum. High context cultures such as Pakistan have more emphasis in implicit meaning, whereas low context cultures such as the United States, have emphasis on explicit communication. This framework is used to examine the linguistic and visual elements of the advertisements of both countries.

Research Methodology

This paper used a comparative research design by employing qualitative content analysis as the primary method to investigate the undertaken problem. It compared advertisements in Pakistan and the United States to examine how high-context and low-context styles of communication, as suggested by Edward T. Hall, which are being reflected in advertisements. Furthermore, this is also a descriptive and interpretive study that tries to identify the patterns of communication instead of stating the cause and effect relationships. The data consisted of advertisements released between 2023 and 2025, including both their linguistic and visual elements for analysis. The data types include linguistic (slogans, dialogues and texts), visual (imagery, colors, symbols, setting and nonverbal) and contextual (brand names, class of products, source and time). Furthermore, the sources of data Advertisements were collected from the official website of the brands, electronic sources, and advertising archive. For collection of the

data, purposive sampling method was used to select relevant advertisements. Total ten advertisements were selected; out of which five were from Pakistan and five were from US. Hall's theory of High-Context and Low Context Communication was used for data analysis. Advertisements' language and persuasive messages were analyzed on the basis of contexts of Pakistan and US.

Results

This section presents an analysis of selected advertisements from Pakistan and the USA to examine how culture impacts the techniques used in advertising. The analysis is based on Hall's theory of high context and low context culture of communication. The comparison of both the TV advertisements has drawn in the following lines. First, Pakistani advertisements are given with its explanation, interpretation and analysis and then American advertisements are given for the same and eventually both are compared at end of this section.

Analysis of Selected Pakistani Advertisements

Advertisement 1: PepsiCo Pakistan – Khushi Ka Promise (Ramadan 2025)



Contextual Background

The commercial is part of a 2025 Ramadan campaign from PepsiCo Pakistan that includes Pepsi, 7Up, Lay's, and Aquafina products. It is situated in a typical Pakistani home during iftar, aimed at Muslims. This Ramadan campaign is culturally relevant to the occasion of Ramadan, which involves spending time in large family groups, sharing, and worship.

Linguistic Characteristics

The slogan "Khushi Ka Promise" ("Promise of Happiness") suggests a vague emotion as opposed to conveying facts regarding any of the products mentioned. This slogan does not attempt to persuade the consumer through direct linguistic persuasion but relies heavily on knowledge that is shared between the company and its target audience, namely the practices surrounding Ramadan and the importance of families.

Visual Features

Visual storytelling plays an important role in conveying the message about the product. Visualizing the scene involves showing a family seated around the table during iftar along with the things present in the scene that establish the environment. Relationship and bonding can be observed through the involvement of two generations in the activity related to food. This shows the presence of emotions and respect for

other generations. Product placement occurs in the story without being very much involved in the advertisement process. There are emotional visuals, although there aren't many informative visuals.

Persuasion Strategy

Relationship and emotion persuasion tactics have been adopted in this advertisement.

Advertisement 2: Peek Freans Sooper – Dil Se Yaqeen Ki Seedhi Saadi Khushi Hai Sooper (Ramadan 2025)



Cultural Context

Peek Freans Sooper is a biscuit company that has been integrated into the daily tea snacks of the Pakistani community over the years. The advertisement was created in the year 2025, addressing the Pakistani local community. It is important for one to know the culture within which the advertisement operates, as the linkage between the tea and the biscuits makes the message very clear, hence the presence of a high-context culture according to Hall's definition.

need to know some cultures like trust, simplicity, and happiness.

Language Features

The language used in the slogan "Dil Se Yaqeen Ki Seedhi Saadi Khushi Hai Sooper" depicts emotions and cultures in the message. Where an individual does not have enough information regarding the product, he or she will find the message to be very indirect, meaning there is a

Visual Features

Visuals in the advertisement represent non-verbal cultures. Some of the visuals depicted in this advertisement include tea cup, body posture, and smiling face of the individual.

Persuasive Strategy

It is necessary to mention that this technique does not need any logic and reasoning whatsoever. This approach focuses purely on the emotional connection towards the brand in question. Emotional branding implies making an emotional bond with the product as well as experiencing positive emotions such as joy and security..

Advertisement 3: Tapal Family Mixture – “Rishton Mein Hisaab” (2024)



Contextual Information

An example of advertisements that are aligned with the Pakistani sociocultural values like family bond, dependence on emotions, and hospitality is the Tapal Family Mixture ad. The inclusion of different generations of family members in the advertisement reflects the collectivist culture of Pakistan where the person's identity is formed based on his or her relationship with others as opposed to achievements of the individual. The ad which was run in the year 2024 uses the shared cultural knowledge through the phrase "Rishton Mein Hisaab" as per Edward T. Hall's High-Context Communication theory.

Language Features

The use of Urdu in this ad emphasizes the cultural and emotional ties. "Meri Family, Meri Strength" illustrates the family value rather than product value.

High-Contextual Language

As expected in high-context cultures, the language of this advertisement is metaphoric. It depends more on implication than on language as unlike other advertisements in the low-context

cultures like USA, this advertisement gives little information directly.

Visual Features

As for the analysis of the image elements used in this advertising, it should be said that there is presented an image of a Pakistani family generation that appeared in their family room illustrating their cultural traditions with regards to the family. In this connection, such elements as warm lighting, the balanced composition, and the absence of violent attitudes prove the existence of mutual respect and trust among the members of this family. Furthermore, Tapal tea cups and packaging were not spotlighted, but were included in the family scene by means of using high-context strategy.

Persuasive Strategy

In this regard, it should be stated that the primary persuasive strategy used in the discussed advertisement is not logical, but relational. In other words, the attributes of the product were not stressed, but the Tapal Family Mixture was promoted as the representation of the strong qualities of family.

Advertisement 4: National Foods – “Naye Zaiqay – Kya Khayal Hai?” (2025)



Contextual Information

The presented advertisement can be placed within the sociocultural context of Pakistan, where food is regarded as a part of family relations, cultural values, and home atmosphere. The presented advertisement refers to the brand name “National Foods” as a part of the tradition associated with cooking in households. It should be highlighted that the campaign introduced in 2025 focuses on the preferences for variety, however, remaining in the boundaries of traditional taste preferences. The advertisement relies on the high-context communication created by Edward T. Hall, which implies using culture and emotions instead of language to send a message.

Language Features

“Naye Zaiqay! Kya Khayal Hai?” The slogan of the presented advertisement is developed in Urdu language and implies individual approaches to cultural traditions. Besides, the slogan itself is based on the rhetorical question because no instructions are offered to the consumer; instead, reflection becomes the focus of his/her attention. Moreover, the language style used in the commercial can be defined as colloquial since the style used for everyday conversations is the same.

Thus, there is no call to make some purchasing decisions.

Visual Features

Taking everything stated above into account, the role of the visual context can be emphasized with respect to conveying the message through the ad. With respect to the images that can be seen in the kitchen, such factors as credibility, similarity, and realism related to the description of the quality of the food cooked privately can be mentioned. One more factor, which should be taken into account in this case with reference to the visual context, refers to diversity with respect to the products advertised in the advertisement. Lighting and the emphasis placed on particular pictures are of vital importance in forming the emotional context of the advertisement. As Hall says, the visual context is associated with the conveyance of meaning via nonverbal communication addressed to the Pakistani audience.

Persuasion Strategy

An emotional persuasion strategy seems to be more relevant for the chosen advertisement rather than the rational one. The innovation of the culture is associated with “new flavors” (“Naye Zaiqay”) used in cooking traditional food.

Analysis of Selected U.S. Advertisements

Advertisement 1: Dunkin’ – “DunKings” Super Bowl 2024 advertisement (2024)



Contextual Information

The advertisement of Dunkin’s “The DunKings” took place during Super Bowl 2024. The purpose of advertisements aired during the Super Bowl is to capture the viewer’s attention immediately and to address the audience that constitutes a culturally and socially heterogeneous environment. Consequently, in the presented

commercial, the element of entertainment prevails over the elaboration of the characteristics of the advertised product.

Linguistic Features

As far as linguistics is concerned, the advertised message does not employ any verbal codes. Meaning is constructed explicitly. For example,

the trademark logo is placed on the tracksuits of the entertainers, in the backdrop, and in the focus point of the advertisement. Textual repetition of the logo is used to identify the sponsor of the commercial clearly. Neither the advertisement makes use of allegory, metaphor, nor figurative language. To the contrary, everyone should understand the message of the commercial in the same manner. Thus, the approach to advertising falls under the category of low-contextual communication.

Visual Features

The use of visuals to communicate meanings in the advertisement is direct. The bright colors used in the brand logo, clothing, and the

performance of acts are used to create immediate associations with entertainment and branding on the part of the viewers. Unlike in other advertisements where the visuals require that the audience use cultural or social information to interpret them, the meanings of the visuals in the advertisement in question are conveyed directly. This makes the advertisement even more low-context.

Persuasive Strategy

The approach to persuasion in the advertisement involves the use of overt ways to get the viewer's attention. Through humor, performance, and frequent presence of the brand, a good brand image is created.

Advertisement 2: Gap - "Better in Denim" (2025)



Contextual Information

The ad originates from an environment of communication where the exchange of information takes place through visual cues alone, without recourse to any shared assumptions or presuppositions between the advertiser and the audience. As a global brand of American origin, GAP uses the visuals to promote cultural values like individuality, inclusiveness, and personal liberty. While not explicit in linguistic terms, such values can be easily inferred from the presence of diverse models and trendy fashion design.

Linguistic Features

In linguistic terms, the advertisement features very little text, amounting only to the logo, which is conspicuously displayed across the advertisement. There is no slogan or descriptive

text within the visual context of the advertisement. In this way, linguistic economy is achieved, shifting the burden of interpretation onto visual cues alone.

Visual Features

As for the visual features, the advertisement displays a minimalist visual arrangement with the neutral background giving prominence to the models wearing GAP clothing. Several cuts of fit and style of jeans are readily apparent, highlighting the practicality and wearability of the product. The posture of the models enhances the functional aspect of the clothes. The diversity of appearance and fashion styles conveys a sense of inclusiveness.

Persuasive Strategy

Visual Persuasion is used here since the advertisement includes the components of body language, the current trend, and simplicity in its

design, which can enhance the denim aspect of the clothing worn. The lack of any text ensures that all the attention lies on the appearance of the clothing.

Advertisement 3: “Maxwell Apartment” Viral Campaign (2025)



Contextual Information

This advertisement can be regarded as an instance of low context communication in America, according to Edward T. Hall. The picture shows the scene in a regular kitchen with the new cup of coffee that is familiar to many Americans. Information is communicated through the explicit use of language and visual elements, thereby reducing the need for shared culture.

nothing mysterious about the product use. The colors are rather warm, brown and light yellow, and it conveys warmth and freshness. The wooden backdrop is a neutral element that sets the product on it. Product emphasis occurs by placing it higher. Fonts used in the picture are bold. The colors of the product itself contrast sharply with the backdrop's color.

Linguistic Features

The language in this advertisement is clear and concise. By saying "Good to the Last Drop", the manufacturer explicitly informs the audience about the product's characteristics. Explicit communication occurs frequently in low context societies; such communication emphasizes clarity and straightforwardness.

Persuasive Strategy

This ad uses the product-based persuasion approach, which makes the act of drinking coffee easy, consistent, and repetitive. The persuasion takes place using the product to represent consistency and practicality as opposed to employing emotional storytelling or culturally symbolic meanings. It reduces the need for interpretation and relies on the product being consistent, reliable, and easy to use to persuade consumers to trust the brand. This type of persuasion represents the low-context persuasion model.

Visual Features

In the picture, the Maxwell Apartment Coffee Jar is shown with a new cup of coffee. There is

Advertisement 4: Uber Eats – “Football Is for Food” Super Bowl Campaign (2025)



Contextual Information

This advertorial appeals to individuals who are fans of the Super Bowl. Super Bowl is an event which brings many people together not only to compete but to socialize by engaging in meals. As a result, this advertorial employs the Super Bowl event as the basis for making the football match occasion the need for food.

Linguistic Features

"Football Is for Food" is a concise message that has no deeper meaning or any metaphorical representation; besides, it does not need any other process to make sense of the message. In essence, "Football Is for Food" is low context advertising because the message conveyed within it depends on language.

Visual Features

Images used in the advertorial also display certain characteristics in relation to football themes. Among some of these characteristics are logos of the brand, including the green delivery bag and packages containing food items. Comedy has been used to create a clear distinction between the passion generated from football matches and the casual nature of eating food. However, like language, images do not have any additional meaning in themselves.

Persuasive Strategy

The way that the promotion strategy works for Uber Eats is by using these two persuasive techniques together. Emotion persuasion includes the use of humor and fun, whereas rational persuasion centers on the convenience of the food delivery service within the hours of the sport event being held. The overall idea is to relate sports events to the consumption of food.

Discussion

This paper compared the advertisement of Pakistan and US while focusing on the advertising strategies in Pakistani ads and US ads with respect to high context and low context communication. First, advertisements in Pakistan generally adhere to a high context approach to communication, whereby meaning is implied through the cultural and social environment as opposed to stating it explicitly. According to Kaur & Chawla (2016) advertisements are a rich

source for cultural communication where cultural tendencies are depicted through ads. In the present paper, Pakistani advertisements include PepsiCo's Khushi Ka Promise, Tapal Family Mixture, National Foods, Peek Freans Sooper, and JazzCash that employ aspects of culture and tradition like Ramadan, Eid, tea time, and family gatherings. The messaging tends to be indirect and emotion-based as opposed to being product-focused. For instance, the messages highlight themes that bring out the importance of family cohesion, trust, and joy. The visual narrative plays an important role here, because it conveys messages through symbolism, where meaningful images portray family functions, interactions among generations, or celebrations, where the product is subtly integrated within the scene. The results are concurrent with the finding of Shaikh (2008), who argued that Pakistani ads are more implicit and indirect as compared to Australian ads. One notable reason is that Pakistani have shared knowledge about things and maintain family life mainly in the ads, which makes their strategy more implicit and leads towards high-context communication strategy in the advertisements.

However, the study revealed that some American advertisements like "Dunkin' (The DunKings)", "Gap", "Maxwell House", "Uber Eats (Football is for Food)", and "State Farm" reflect the low-context culture of communication. In this context, ads are characterized by the focus on clarity, conciseness, and directness. Low context culture are more direct, explicit and clear in their words and symbols as noted by Sheposh (2025), and findings revealed that American advertisements maintained these features. The messages presented in the ads are concise, literal, and clear; slogans such as "Good to the Last Drop" or "Football Is for Food" convey meanings without the need for any previous cultural information. The visuals in American ads depict their products or services directly, as evident in the use of logos and uniforms by Dunkin', integration of football with food delivery in Uber Eats, and depiction of different fashions in Gap ads. The study indicated that American ads were more explicit and direct due to the focus on the product and prices, rather than the family values and shared knowledge of the audience. Thus, the

major findings of the study are in line with Edward. T Hall's theory, where he stated that US is a low-context culture, and Asian countries are with high-context cultures. This study confirms the theory after the comparison between the two types of advertisements.

Conclusion

It is concluded from the advertisements made by the companies such as PepsiCo, Tapal, and National Foods of Pakistan that they make use of the high-context culture for conveying a message using emotionally charged words and visuals based on family settings along with traditions that include their products. However, low-context culture advertisements are made by the companies such as Dunkin', Gap, and Uber Eats. Moreover, among the issues which need to be resolved in future studies are those related to the effects of high-context and low-context communication on the efficiency of advertising in Pakistan and the USA by studying diverse products for distinct segments of consumers in both countries and taking into account the contrast between rural and urban settings as well as the difference in generations. In addition, the second point of concern is the function of the recently emerged electronic medium in the creation of language, images, and persuasive techniques as it can also be influential in shaping the attitude of consumers towards ads.

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