High-Context vs. Low-Context Communication in English: A Cross-Cultural Study of Indonesian and American Interaction in Puri Viera's Instagram Reels

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the manifestations of high-context and low-context communication styles within cross-cultural interactions between Indonesian and American speakers, as portrayed in Puri Viera's Instagram Reels as the lack of studies by using Indonesian and American as the participants. Utilizing Edward T. Hall's theory of context communication, the research employs a qualitative content analysis approach to identify and analyze verbal and non-verbal communication patterns. The analysis reveals distinct cultural markers: Indonesian speakers tend to favor indirectness, contextual reliance, and nonverbal cues (high-context), while American speakers exhibit directness, explicitness, and linear logic (low-context). These distinctions not only underscore cultural communication preferences but also demonstrate how digital platforms like Instagram facilitate intercultural dialogue. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of intercultural communication dynamics in digital spaces and provide practical implications for fostering effective, culturally aware interactions on social media.

I. Introduction

In the current era of globalization, intercultural communication has become a critical field of study as individuals increasingly interact across diverse cultural boundaries. Central to this discussion is the concept of high-context and low-context communication, a theory famously articulated by anthropologist Edward T. Hall, who asserts, "In high-context communication, most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message". Conversely, Hall describes low-context communication as one "where the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code" [1]. These distinctions are fundamental in understanding how meaning is constructed and exchanged in different cultures, particularly in the context of Indonesian and American communication styles. This research endeavors to examine these communication patterns as evidenced in Puri Viera's Instagram Reels, providing a modern cross-cultural perspective through a digital lens.

Numerous previous studies on high-context vs. low-context communication have emerged in the world of research, particularly in Dutch, Greek, and Japanese [2]. However, research that is focused on Indonesian and American is still limited. In order to fill the niche from the previous studies, the researcher in this present study is interested to conduct research on high-context and low-context communication by involving Indonesian and American as the participants.

The relevance of this study is underscored by the burgeoning role of social media platforms as sites of intercultural communication. As [3] emphasizes, "Communication is a process of sharing and negotiating meaning, and culture profoundly shapes how communicative acts are performed and interpreted" . Instagram, especially its Reel feature which promotes visual and audiovisual

communication, creates a unique convergence point for high-context and low-context communicators [4]. This paper seeks to investigate what types of high-context communication and low-context communication of Indonesian speaker, who traditionally employs high-context strategies, and American speakers, who generally prefer low-context communication, engage and interact with English through these Reels. Since digital communication is both visual and verbal, it offers a fertile ground to explore Hall's theory in practice and examine the ways in which implicit and explicit messages coexist and are interpreted in hybrid online spaces.

To contextualize the investigation, it becomes important to articulate what high-context and low-context communication entail within cultural frameworks. "In high-context cultures, communication tends to be indirect, with much left unsaid because meaning is embedded in the context, relationships, and nonverbal cues"[1]. In contrast, low-context cultures prioritize direct, unambiguous, and detailed verbal communication. "Low-context communication relies on clear, explicit messages that reduce uncertainty and misunderstandings by focusing on the spoken or written word"[5]. Indonesia, representing a high-context society, often uses shared cultural knowledge and nonverbal expressions to communicate meaning, whereas American culture, as a low-context example, tends to focus on explicit, precise language to convey information clearly [6]

The digital era has introduced new modes and challenges for intercultural communication. Social media platforms such as Instagram are not only reshaping traditional communication patterns but also fostering new intercultural dialogues. "Participatory media resonates with global network culture, enabling users to negotiate, remix, and reinterpret cultural meanings"[7]. Puri Viera, a notable content creator of mixed Indonesian and American cultural influences, leverages Instagram Reels a dynamic format that blends short video, sound, and text to engage a diverse audience. Analyzing her Reels provides an opportunity to study how high-context and low-context communication styles are expressed and interact within contemporary digital media [8].

The implications of this study extend beyond academic interest and hold practical relevance for diverse fields including intercultural communication, digital marketing, and social media strategy. "Competence in intercultural communication involves understanding and flexibly adapting communication styles to fit cultural contexts" [9]. Consequently, insights into how high- and low-context communication styles manifest on social media can inform strategies to improve intercultural dialogue, foster mutual understanding, and reduce miscommunication online. Especially as platforms transcend geographic and cultural barriers, users' ability to navigate different communication styles becomes vital to building inclusive, respectful digital communities [10].

In summary, this study investigates the distinct yet intersecting paradigms of high-context and low-context communication as they surface on Instagram via Puri Viera's Reels. By leveraging Edward Hall's seminal theory alongside contemporary communication research, the study aims to elucidate how Indonesian and American cultural communication styles coalesce and diverge in a digital medium[11]. This exploration contributes both theoretical and practical insights into cross-cultural communication dynamics in an age where social media profoundly shapes human interaction. "To understand communication, we must look beyond words and consider the culture, context, and context-specific cues that shape meaning" [1]. This research takes a vital step toward fulfilling that mandate in the context of globalized, digital communication.

II. Method

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative approach centered on content analysis of Puri Viera's Instagram Reels. Through a systematic examination of selected videos, the study will identify communication features indicative of high-context and low-context styles. "Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use"[12]. This framework will enable an in-depth understanding of cultural markers such as the reliance on implicit context, nonverbal cues, directness of verbal messages, and the interplay of language and visual elements. The data was

collected by selecting the reels of informal and formal situation from February 2024 to March 2025 in Puri Viera's Instagram Reels. After that, the videos were transcribed. Finally, The data are grouped by using [13] types of high-context and low-context communication. The results are expected to reveal how digital communication is influenced by cultural dimensions and possibly how hybrid or adaptive communication forms emerge in cross-cultural online interactions.

The data are analyzed by using thematic analysis to investigate the differences in high-context (Indonesian) and low-context (American) communication styles through English-language Instagram Reels by Puri Viera. Thematic analysis, a flexible yet systematic qualitative method, is ideal for identifying recurring patterns, implicit meanings, and cultural nuances in verbal and nonverbal interactions. The findings highlight how cultural background influences digital discourse, offering insights into cross-cultural communication dynamics between high-context (indirect, relational) and low-context (explicit, task-oriented) users. The method allows for an in-depth exploration of embedded cultural values, making it well-suited for uncovering subtle differences in online multilingual exchanges [14].

III. Results and Discussion

High-Context Analysis
1. Indirect Statements

"What should I get her?"[15]

The statement above serves as an indirect request for assistance. Instead of directly asking Jane for specific gift suggestions, Puri implies a need for help in navigating the often challenging task of gift selection. This indirectness is characteristic of high-context communication, where the meaning is often derived from the context and the relationship between the speakers rather than from explicit statements. Jane's response about the registry is also indirect; she provides information about the registry without explicitly stating what Puri should buy, allowing Puri to draw her own conclusions about suitable gifts.

"Um, I've never done that before". [15]

The statement above can be seen as an indirect way of expressing discomfort or hesitation about sharing food. Instead of directly stating that she does not want to share, Jane implies that sharing is not something she is accustomed to. This reliance on indirectness is characteristic of high-context communication, where the meaning is often conveyed through implication rather than explicit statements.

"Oh, she has a registry."[15]

The statement above serves as an indirect statement that conveys more than just the literal meaning. Jane does not explicitly explain what a registry is or why it is important. Instead, she assumes that Puri understands the concept and its relevance to the baby shower. This reliance on shared knowledge is a hallmark of high-context communication, where much of the meaning is derived from the context and the relationship between the speakers. The statement carries subtext that suggests Puri should consider looking at the registry for gift ideas. Jane's use of "Oh" indicates a casual, conversational tone, implying that this information is a helpful tip rather than a formal instruction. The indirect nature of the statement encourages Puri to engage further without feeling pressured. By mentioning the registry without elaboration, Jane indirectly encourages Puri to take the initiative to find out more. This approach fosters a sense of autonomy in Puri, allowing her to seek out the information herself, which is often valued in high-context communication. The indirectness of the statement also serves to build rapport between Jane and Puri. It reflects a level of familiarity and comfort in their relationship, where Jane can share information without needing to provide exhaustive details. This creates a friendly atmosphere conducive to open dialogue.

The concept of a registry is explained in a way that reflects the social norms surrounding gift-giving within their cultural context. Jane's explanation of the registry is based on a shared understanding of its purpose and function, which may not be universally known but is accepted

within their social circle. This reliance on circumstantial truth highlights how cultural practices shape their communication, as Jane assumes Puri is familiar with the concept of a registry, indicating a shared cultural background.

The tone and manner in which Jane explains the registry reflect a friendly and helpful attitude. Her use of humor, particularly when she quips, "It's not like you want a Ferrari, right?" adds a light-hearted touch to the conversation, indicating a shared cultural understanding of gift expectations. This playful banter not only makes the conversation more engaging but also reinforces their friendship, as it shows Jane's willingness to connect with Puri on a personal level.

The conversation flows in a spiral manner, where each statement builds on the previous one. Puri's inquiry about the registry leads to Jane's detailed explanation, which in turn prompts further questions from Puri, creating a layered understanding of the topic. This spiral logic allows for a deeper exploration of the subject matter, as Puri's curiosity drives the conversation forward, demonstrating how high-context communication often involves a more nuanced exchange of ideas.

"I mean, I would share, but, usually you know, my food is my food. Your food is your food."[15]

The statement above contains indirect elements, particularly in the way Jane expresses her reluctance to share. By saying *"I would share,"* she implies a willingness but then qualifies it with "but, usually you know," which suggests that there are unspoken rules or norms about food ownership that she expects Puri to understand. This indirectness is characteristic of high-context communication, where meaning is often conveyed through implication rather than direct statements.

2. Circumstantial Truth

"Yeah, pretty much, as long as the gifts are reasonable. I mean, it's not like you want a Ferrari, right?"[15]

The statement above serves as circumstantial truth as Jane's statement relies on the shared understanding of what is considered appropriate in the context of gift-giving for a baby shower. The phrase "as long as the gifts are reasonable" reflects a circumstantial truth that is understood within their social context. It implies that there are norms and expectations regarding the types of gifts that are suitable for such an occasion.

The mention of a Ferrari serves as an exaggerated example to highlight the idea of reasonable gifts. This circumstantial truth is rooted in cultural norms surrounding gift-giving, where extravagant or impractical gifts are generally frowned upon. Jane's use of this example assumes that both she and Puri share an understanding of these cultural expectations.

By stating that gifts should be reasonable, Jane indirectly communicates the social rules that govern gift-giving behavior. This circumstantial truth is not explicitly stated but is understood by both parties, reflecting the high-context nature of their communication. It emphasizes the importance of adhering to social conventions in their interactions.

The circumstantial truth in Jane's statement is also informed by their shared experiences and social circles. Both Jane and Puri likely have attended similar events and understand the unspoken guidelines that dictate appropriate gift choices. This shared background reinforces the circumstantial truth of what constitutes a reasonable gift.

"Um, I've never done that before".[15]

The statement above reflects a circumstantial truth about Jane's experiences. By saying she has never shared food before, she is conveying a personal truth that is context-dependent. This truth is shaped by her past experiences and cultural norms regarding food sharing, which may not be universally applicable.

"I mean, I would share, but, usually you know, my food is my food. Your food is your food."[15]

The statement above reflects a circumstantial truth about Jane's beliefs and experiences regarding food sharing. By asserting *"my food is my food. Your food is your food,"* she conveys a personal truth that is shaped by her cultural background and individual preferences. This truth is

context-dependent and may not apply universally, highlighting the high-context nature of her communication.

3. Non-Purposeful Communication

"Um, I've never done that before". [15]

The statement above does not serve a clear, purposeful function in the conversation. It does not provide a definitive answer to Puri's proposal but rather expresses Jane's personal experience. This lack of a direct purpose can be seen as a characteristic of high-context communication, where the focus may be more on the relational aspect than on delivering a specific message.

"I mean, I would share, but, usually you know, my food is my food. Your food is your food."[15]

While the statement above does serve a purpose in explaining Jane's perspective, it also reflects a level of non-purposefulness in that it does not provide a clear agreement or refusal. Instead, it elaborates on her personal philosophy regarding food, which may not directly advance the conversation. This can be seen as a high-context approach, where the relational aspect of communication is emphasized over straightforward transactional dialogue.

4. Focus on "How Said"

"Um, I've never done that before".[15]

The statement above indicates hesitation and uncertainty. The use of *"Um"* suggests that she is contemplating her response, which adds a layer of meaning to her statement. This focus on the manner of delivery is important in high-context communication, where tone and delivery can significantly influence interpretation.

"I mean, I would share, but, usually you know, my food is my food. Your food is your food."[15]

The way Jane phrases her statement, particularly with the use of "I mean" and "you know," indicates a conversational tone that seeks to establish common ground with Puri. This focus on the manner of delivery suggests that Jane is aware of the relational dynamics at play and is attempting to communicate her feelings in a way that is sensitive to Puri's perspective. The informal and somewhat hesitant tone adds depth to her message, which is a key aspect of high-context communication.

5. Spiral Logic

"Um, I've never done that before".[15]

The statement above does not particularly exemplify spiral logic, as it does not build upon previous statements in a circular or recursive manner. Instead, it stands alone as a reflection of Jane's feelings and experiences regarding food sharing.

"I mean, I would share, but, usually you know, my food is my food. Your food is your food."[15]

The statement above does not strongly exemplify spiral logic, as it does not build upon previous statements in a circular or recursive manner. Instead, it presents a clear rationale for her reluctance to share food, standing as a self-contained explanation of her viewpoint.

Low-Context Analysis

1. Direct Statements

"A registry is where you can list the things that you want for your special day, can be a wedding day, a birthday, or a baby shower, where you guests purchase them for you. So, as a guest, you don't have to think hard to figure out what gifts to get. It's very convenient." [15]

The statement above provides a clear and straightforward definition of what a registry is. Phrases like "A registry is where you can list the things that you want" and "where your guests purchase them for you" are explicit and leave little room for misinterpretation. This directness is a hallmark of low-context communication, where clarity is prioritized.

"Oh, there's such a thing? So, you can list anything that you want and your guests can purchase them for you?" [15]

The statement above provides that the speaker makes direct inquiries about the existence and functionality of a registry. The phrases *"there's such a thing?"* and "you can list anything that you want and your guests can purchase them for you?" are straightforward questions that seek clarification. This directness indicates a desire for clear information about the concept being discussed.

"So, do you want to order a few things and then share?"[15]

The statement above is a clear and straightforward question. Puri directly asks Jane if she wants to order food and share it, leaving no ambiguity about the intent. The use of *"do you want"* indicates a direct inquiry, which is a hallmark of low-context communication.

"Um, so, how about we order some chicken, some salad, some noodles or rice, and then we can share them?"[15]

The statement contains direct suggestions about what to order. Puri explicitly lists food options (chicken, salad, noodles, or rice) and proposes sharing them. This clarity and straightforwardness are characteristic of low-context communication, where the message is conveyed without ambiguity.

"Um, no, it's okay. I think I'll just order my own food. I'm very particular about my food." [15]

The statement above contains clear and direct refusals and preferences. Jane explicitly states, *"I think I'll just order my own food,"* which leaves no ambiguity about her decision. This straightforwardness is characteristic of low-context communication, where the message is conveyed clearly.

"Oh, okay, okay. Yes, I would like to order a steak, a big one, medium well. Just for myself."[15]

The statement above is a clear and direct expression of Puri's desire to order food. Puri explicitly states, "I would like to order a steak," which leaves no ambiguity about what they want. This straightforwardness is a hallmark of low-context communication.

2. Self-Discourse

"A registry is where you can list the things that you want for your special day, can be a wedding day, a birthday, or a baby shower, where you guests purchase them for you. So, as a guest, you don't have to think hard to figure out what gifts to get. It's very convenient." [15]

The statement above explains that the speaker engages in self-discourse by sharing their understanding of a registry and its purpose. By explaining how it functions and its benefits, the speaker reflects on their own experiences and knowledge, which helps to clarify the concept for the listener. This personal engagement enhances the communication by making it relatable.

"Oh, there's such a thing? So, you can list anything that you want and your guests can purchase them for you?"[15]

The speaker engages in self-discourse by expressing surprise and curiosity about the registry. The use of *"Oh"* suggests a personal reaction to new information, indicating that the speaker is processing their understanding of the concept. This self-reflective element adds a personal touch to the communication, making it more relatable.

"So, do you want to order a few things and then share?"[15]

The statement above does not involve self-discourse, as it does not reflect Puri's personal thoughts, feelings, or experiences. Instead, it focuses on the proposal to order food and share, without delving into Puri's own perspective or background.

"Um, so, how about we order some chicken, some salad, some noodles or rice, and then we can share them?"[15]

There is a slight element of self-discourse in the use of *"Um,"* which indicates Puri's thought process and hesitation. However, the primary focus is on the proposal rather than Puri's personal feelings or experiences. The statement does not delve deeply into Puri's own perspective, making self-discourse a minor aspect here.

"Um, no, it's okay. I think I'll just order my own food. I'm very particular about my food."[15]

There is a significant element of self-discourse in this statement. Jane shares her personal feelings and preferences by saying, "I'm very particular about my food." This reveals her

individual perspective and provides insight into her character, making it a more personal expression.

"Oh, okay, okay. Yes, I would like to order a steak, a big one, medium well. Just for myself." [15]

There is a minor element of self-discourse in the phrase *"Just for myself."* This indicates Puri's personal choice and preference, reflecting their individual decision-making process. However, the focus remains primarily on the order rather than on Puri's personal feelings or experiences.

3. Absolute Truth

"A registry is where you can list the things that you want for your special day, can be a wedding day, a birthday, or a baby shower, where you guests purchase them for you. So, as a guest, you don't have to think hard to figure out what gifts to get. It's very convenient." [15]

The statement above presents the information as factual and objective. The description of a registry and its purpose is framed as an absolute truth, as it outlines a widely accepted understanding of what a registry is. Phrases like "It's very convenient" assert a definitive perspective on the benefits of using a registry, reinforcing the idea that this is a common and accepted practice.

"Oh, there's such a thing? So, you can list anything that you want and your guests can purchase them for you?"[15]

The statement above provides information that while the speaker is asking questions, the phrasing implies an acceptance of the concept as a factual reality. The statement *"you can list anything that you want and your guests can purchase them for you"* suggests an understanding that this is how registries function, presenting it as an accepted truth. However, it is framed as a question, which leaves room for confirmation rather than asserting an absolute truth.

"So, do you want to order a few things and then share?"[15]

The statement above does not assert an absolute truth but rather poses a question. However, it implies a factual scenario: that ordering food and sharing is a possible action. While it does not present a definitive truth, it operates under the assumption that sharing food is a common practice, which can be seen as a generally accepted understanding.

"Um, so, how about we order some chicken, some salad, some noodles or rice, and then we can share them?"[15]

The statement above does not assert an absolute truth but rather presents a suggestion based on the context of ordering food. However, it operates under the assumption that sharing food is a common practice, which can be seen as a generally accepted understanding. The phrasing does not claim a definitive truth but rather proposes a scenario.

"Um, no, it's okay. I think I'll just order my own food. I'm very particular about my food."[15]

The statement above does not assert an absolute truth in a universal sense, but it does convey Jane's personal truth regarding her food preferences. By stating that she is "very particular about my food," she expresses a subjective truth that reflects her individual experiences and beliefs.

"Oh, okay, okay. Yes, I would like to order a steak, a big one, medium well. Just for myself." [15]

The statement does not assert an absolute truth in a universal sense, but it does convey a definitive choice regarding Puri's food order. By stating "I would like to order a steak, a big one, medium well," Puri expresses a clear preference that is true for them in that moment.

4. Linear Logic

"A registry is where you can list the things that you want for your special day, can be a wedding day, a birthday, or a baby shower, where you guests purchase them for you. So, as a guest, you don't have to think hard to figure out what gifts to get. It's very convenient."[15]

The structure of the statement above follows a logical progression. It begins with a definition of a registry, provides examples of occasions where it is used (wedding, birthday, baby shower), and concludes with the benefits for guests. This linear flow of information makes it easy

for the listener to follow and understand the concept, which is characteristic of low-context communication.

"Oh, there's such a thing? So, you can list anything that you want and your guests can purchase them for you?"[15]

The structure of the statement above follows a logical progression. The speaker first expresses surprise about the existence of a registry and then seeks to understand its functionality. The flow from curiosity to inquiry reflects a linear thought process, where the speaker is building on their understanding step by step.

"So, do you want to order a few things and then share?"[15]

The structure of the statement above follows a logical progression. Puri first suggests the idea of ordering food and then introduces the concept of sharing. This clear sequence of thought allows the listener to easily follow the proposal, which is characteristic of low-context communication.

"Um, so, how about we order some chicken, some salad, some noodles or rice, and then we can share them?"[15]

The structure of the statement above follows a logical progression. Puri first suggests specific food items and then connects them to the idea of sharing. This clear sequence allows the listener to easily follow the thought process, which is a hallmark of low-context communication.

"Um, no, it's okay. I think I'll just order my own food. I'm very particular about my food."[15]

The structure of the statement above follows a logical progression. Jane first declines the offer to share food, then states her intention to order her own food, and finally provides a reason for her decision. This clear sequence allows the listener to easily follow her reasoning, which is a hallmark of low-context communication.

"Oh, okay, okay. Yes, I would like to order a steak, a big one, medium well. Just for myself."[15]

The structure of the statement above follows a logical progression. Puri first acknowledges the conversation with *"Oh, okay, okay,"* then clearly states their food choice, and finally specifies that it is "Just for myself." This clear sequence allows the listener to easily follow Puri's thought process, which is characteristic of low-context communication.

5. Literal Mindedness

"A registry is where you can list the things that you want for your special day, can be a wedding day, a birthday, or a baby shower, where you guests purchase them for you. So, as a guest, you don't have to think hard to figure out what gifts to get. It's very convenient."[15]

The explanation of the statement above is presented in a literal manner, focusing on the explicit meaning of the words used. There are no metaphors, humor, or indirect references; instead, the speaker conveys the information straightforwardly. This literal approach ensures that the audience comprehends the message without ambiguity, aligning with the principles of low-context communication.

"Oh, there's such a thing? So, you can list anything that you want and your guests can purchase them for you?"[15]

The statement above is presented in a literal manner, focusing on the explicit meaning of the words. The speaker is not using metaphors or indirect language; instead, they are asking straightforward questions about the registry. This literal approach ensures that the inquiry is clear and unambiguous, aligning with the principles of low-context communication.

"So, do you want to order a few things and then share?"[15]

The statement is presented in a literal manner, focusing on the explicit meaning of the words. There are no metaphors, humor, or indirect references; Puri is straightforwardly asking Jane about her willingness to order and share food. This literal approach ensures clarity and reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding.

"Um, so, how about we order some chicken, some salad, some noodles or rice, and then we can share them?"[15]

The statement is presented in a literal manner, focusing on the explicit meaning of the words. Puri lists specific food items and proposes sharing them without using metaphors or indirect references. This literal approach ensures clarity and reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding.

"Um, no, it's okay. I think I'll just order my own food. I'm very particular about my food."[15]

The statement is presented in a literal manner, focusing on the explicit meaning of the words. Jane clearly communicates her decision and reasoning without using metaphors or indirect references. This literal approach ensures clarity and reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding.

"Oh, okay, okay. Yes, I would like to order a steak, a big one, medium well. Just for myself." [15]

The statement above is presented in a literal manner, focusing on the explicit meaning of the words. Puri clearly communicates their food order without using metaphors or indirect references. This literal approach ensures clarity and reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding.

IV. Conclusion

This study successfully demonstrates that high-context and low-context communication styles distinctly emerge in the digital interactions analyzed through Puri Viera's Instagram Reels. As anticipated, Indonesian speakers often employ indirect, relationally driven discourse with heavy reliance on context, while American speakers typically favor direct, explicit, and linear expression. These patterns align with Edward T. Hall's theoretical framework and validate its applicability to digital discourse. The interaction of these contrasting styles within a single communicative event highlights the adaptive nature of cross-cultural exchanges in online spaces. As social media becomes a primary arena for intercultural communication, understanding these differences can help reduce miscommunication and foster mutual respect. Future research may expand on this work by incorporating a wider range of social media platforms or examining real-time cross-cultural interactions to further explore the evolving nature of global digital communication.

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