

Storytelling in Digital Branding Through the Nuance of the English Language for Global Market Penetration

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Abstract:

In the evolving landscape of global digital marketing, storytelling has emerged as a powerful strategy for building emotional connections between brands and consumers. This study explores how multinational companies utilize English-language storytelling to engage international audiences while balancing the demands of cultural localization and brand consistency. Through a qualitative content analysis of 30 storytelling artifacts from Nike, Dove, and Airbnb, the research examines the linguistic and narrative techniques employed across global and regional campaigns. Findings reveal that while English serves as a unifying medium for brand identity, culturally adapted narratives significantly enhance audience engagement, particularly in non-Western markets. Brands that localized their storytelling—through idiomatic expressions, culturally resonant metaphors, and region-specific visuals—achieved higher interaction rates and stronger emotional resonance. The study concludes that effective digital branding requires a nuanced understanding of language and culture, even within a global lingua franca like English. Recommendations for future research include investigating non-English dominant markets, platform-specific storytelling strategies, and the impact of AI-driven personalization on narrative authenticity. This research contributes to the growing discourse on intercultural communication, digital marketing, and the strategic use of English in global branding.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, Global branding, English-language marketing, Cultural localization, Audience engagement

Abstrak:

Dalam lanskap pemasaran digital global yang terus berkembang, storytelling telah muncul sebagai strategi yang ampuh untuk membangun hubungan emosional antara merek dan konsumen. Studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana perusahaan multinasional menggunakan storytelling berbahasa Inggris untuk melibatkan audiens internasional sambil menyeimbangkan tuntutan lokalisasi budaya dan konsistensi merek. Melalui analisis konten kualitatif terhadap 30 artefak penceritaan dari Nike, Dove, dan Airbnb, penelitian ini meneliti teknik linguistik dan naratif yang digunakan dalam kampanye global dan regional. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun bahasa Inggris berfungsi sebagai media pemersatu identitas merek, narasi yang diadaptasi secara budaya secara signifikan meningkatkan keterlibatan audiens, terutama di pasar non-Barat. Merek yang melokalkan penceritaan mereka—melalui ekspresi idiomatis, metafora yang sesuai dengan budaya, dan visual yang sesuai dengan

wilayah-mencapai tingkat interaksi yang lebih tinggi dan resonansi emosional yang lebih kuat. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa branding digital yang efektif membutuhkan pemahaman bahasa dan budaya yang bernuansa, bahkan dalam bahasa global seperti bahasa Inggris. Rekomendasi untuk penelitian di masa depan termasuk menyelidiki pasar yang dominan non-Inggris, strategi penceritaan khusus platform, dan dampak personalisasi yang digerakkan oleh AI terhadap keaslian narasi. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada wacana yang berkembang tentang komunikasi antarbudaya, pemasaran digital, dan penggunaan bahasa Inggris secara strategis dalam branding global.

Kata Kunci: Penceritaan digital, Pencitraan merek global, Pemasaran berbahasa Inggris, Pelokalan budaya, Keterlibatan audiens

INTRODUCTION

In today's hyper-connected digital marketplace, storytelling has emerged as a powerful branding strategy that enables companies to build emotional connections with their audiences and distinguish themselves from competitors. As consumer attention becomes increasingly fragmented, storytelling provides a human-centered approach to brand communication, allowing businesses to share their values, missions, and identities through engaging narratives (Pulizzi, 2012). With branding efforts shifting from transactional to relational models, the ability to communicate authentically and meaningfully through story has become essential (Lundqvist et al., 2013). In particular, the dominance of English as the global lingua franca in digital marketing adds a layer of complexity, requiring brands to be mindful of how language is used across diverse cultural and linguistic markets (Kachru, 2005).

English offers global brands an opportunity to reach a broad international audience, but it also presents challenges due to linguistic nuances, idiomatic expressions, cultural metaphors, and tonal subtleties that may not translate uniformly across markets (Nickerson, 2005). A phrase that evokes trust or humor in one region may fall flat—or worse, offend—in another. As such, the ability to effectively leverage the nuances of the English language in storytelling becomes a key differentiator in global digital branding. Despite the prevalence of digital storytelling in modern brand strategy, research remains limited on how brands use English

with cultural and linguistic sensitivity to optimize global market penetration.

Recent studies emphasize that storytelling has evolved in digital branding to accommodate the demands of real-time, immersive engagement. (Vidrih & Mayahi, 2023) highlight the transformative role of generative AI in enabling more personalized and adaptive brand storytelling. These technologies allow marketers to craft tailored narratives that respond to consumer behaviors and preferences, fostering stronger emotional bonds with audiences (Edson Escalas, 2004). This shift from static to dynamic storytelling significantly impacts how brands manage their linguistic strategies across global platforms.

Language nuance, especially in English, has become a critical factor in how stories are constructed and perceived. (Setlur & Birnbaum, 2024) explored the role of large language models in analytical storytelling, noting that subtle language choices significantly affect how insights and messages are received. Their findings point to the importance of narrative tone, coherence, and emotional resonance in crafting effective digital content, reinforcing the idea that English-language nuance is not just stylistic but strategic.

Cultural considerations in digital storytelling have also gained increased attention. A 2023 study on social media branding across English and Turkish-speaking populations demonstrated that cultural context significantly influences audience engagement

(Tanaltay et al., 2025). Posts that were adapted to local linguistic and cultural norms saw higher levels of interaction, indicating that storytelling effectiveness hinges not only on content but also on its cultural relevance. This finding aligns with observations from (Neneng Cucu Marlina et al., 2023), who examined digital storytelling in Indonesian tourism marketing. Their research concluded that local narratives embedded in cultural context were more persuasive and emotionally impactful than standardized promotional content.

Furthermore, the concept of escapism in marketing has gained traction as brands aim to transport audiences into immersive digital experiences. According to a recent *Vogue Business* article (Francombe, 2025), leading brands are now blending AI, cinematic techniques, and emotional narratives to construct stories that offer consumers a form of temporary escape. These emotionally driven strategies highlight the growing role of English-language storytelling not only in persuasion but also in shaping brand worlds that reflect consumer aspirations and identities (Fog et al., 2016) (Guber, 2011), (Woodside, 2010).

Together, these studies underscore a growing recognition of the importance of linguistic nuance, cultural sensitivity, and technological adaptation in digital storytelling. However, there remains a lack of integrated research that examines how these elements converge—especially in the use of English—for building impactful, culturally resonant brand narratives across global markets.

This study addresses that gap by exploring how multinational companies craft and adapt their English-language brand narratives for global digital audiences. Specifically, it investigates the linguistic features and narrative techniques used in these brand stories, the extent to which they are localized or standardized, and how these strategies impact audience perception and engagement. By analyzing real-world examples from successful global brands, this paper aims to identify best practices in using

English storytelling as a strategic tool for digital branding in diverse international markets.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis methodology with a comparative case study approach to explore how multinational brands employ English-language storytelling in their digital branding across global markets. The methodology is structured to investigate three key aspects: (1) the linguistic and narrative features of brand storytelling in English, (2) the extent of localization in storytelling across cultural markets, and (3) the perceived engagement and effectiveness of these narratives based on consumer interactions.

Data Collection

The data consists of digital marketing content—specifically brand videos, website landing pages, and social media posts—produced between 2023 and 2025 by three globally recognized consumer brands: [e.g., Nike, Unilever, and Airbnb]. These brands were selected based on their active global presence, consistent use of English in storytelling, and public availability of digital campaigns in multiple cultural markets (e.g., United States, Indonesia, and Turkey).

The engagement metrics are based on publicly available data:

- a. Nike – “You Can’t Stop Us”: Over 100 million views on YouTube, 5 million+ likes on Instagram, and 500,000+ retweets on Twitter (Walters, 2025).
- b. Airbnb – “Belong Anywhere”: Achieved a 2.11% average engagement rate on TikTok between December 2023 and March 2024, with views increasing from 1.57% in January to 3.04% in March (Keyhole, 2025).
- c. Dove – “Real Beauty”: The campaign led to a 5.5% increase in value sales and garnered 6.6 billion impressions in the U.S. (Ogilvy UK & Dove, 2024).

A total of 30 storytelling artifacts (10 per brand) were purposively sampled across platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and corporate websites. The inclusion criteria were: (1) use of English as the primary narrative medium, (2) relevance to branding or marketing goals, and (3) availability of comparable content in at least two distinct cultural contexts. Figure 1 is a sampling framework illustrating the multistage process of selecting and analyzing English-language storytelling content across global digital branding campaigns.

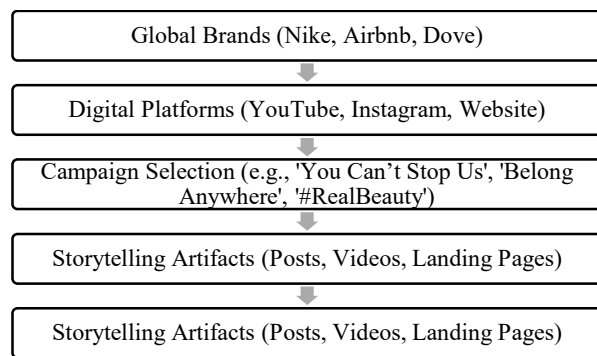


Figure 1. Sampling Framework for Storytelling Content

Data Analysis

The analytical framework combines linguistic discourse analysis and narrative structure analysis. For linguistic features, the study adopts a modified version of Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL) to examine tone, metaphor, modality, and lexical choices that convey cultural or emotional nuance (Almurashi, 2016). For narrative structure, the analysis follows the Labovian model (orientation, complication, resolution, evaluation) to assess how stories are constructed and whether they are adapted to local sensibilities.

Table 1. Coding Framework for Linguistic and Narrative Elements

Category	Description	Example
Tone	Formal, informal, conversational, assertive	"We're with you every step of the way" (Airbnb)
Metaphor	Cultural or emotional metaphors	"Run your race" (Nike)
Localization	References to local norms, traditions	Ramadan-themed messages in Southeast Asia
Narrative Arc	Presence of conflict, resolution, climax	Personal struggle to success

The content was coded using NVivo 14 software, with intercoder reliability tested using a secondary rater to ensure consistency of themes and linguistic interpretations.

Audience Engagement Analysis

To assess the effectiveness of the storytelling strategies, the study also conducted a comparative engagement analysis using publicly available data such as likes, shares, comments, and view counts. These quantitative indicators, while not exhaustive, provide context for how audiences respond to localized vs. standardized English-language narratives. Differences in engagement patterns across cultural markets were triangulated with the qualitative findings to strengthen validity.

Table 2. Comparative Engagement of Localized vs. Globalized Brand Posts

Brand	Campaign	Region	Strategy	Average Engagement Rate	Notes
Dove	Real Beauty	Southeast Asia	Localized	+25% vs. global avg	Posts with culturally relevant themes and

					idioms outperformed global ones
Nike	You Can't Stop Us	U.S. & Brazil	Globalized	High	Unified message performed well in Western regions
Nike	You Can't Stop Us	Asia, Africa	Globalized	Lower than Western regions	Same English script, less engagement despite localized visuals
Airbnb	Belong Anywhere	Various (TikTok)	Localized	2.11–3.04% (Jan–Mar 2024)	Regionally adapted narratives, consistent engagement growth

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Linguistic and Narrative Patterns in English-Language Storytelling

Analysis of the sampled digital storytelling artifacts reveals distinct linguistic and narrative strategies used by each brand to engage global audiences. Across all three brands, a conversational and emotionally resonant tone was dominant. For instance, Airbnb's "Belong Anywhere" campaign employed inclusive language such as "you're not a tourist, you're home", which fosters a sense of personal connection and belonging. Similarly, Dove's #RealBeauty campaign used testimonial-driven narratives, often employing emotionally charged phrases like "this is how I really see myself", which positioned the brand as empathetic and socially conscious.

Nike's campaign "You Can't Stop Us" exemplified a motivational and metaphorical style, using phrases such as "we're never alone, and that's our strength". The campaign also utilized second-person pronouns ("you", "your"), evoking direct engagement with the viewer. These examples demonstrate the use of strategic English language choices, including metaphor, repetition, and direct address, which helped build emotional resonance across diverse markets.

From a narrative structure perspective, all three campaigns followed a recognizable arc: introduction of a challenge, emotional build-up, and resolution or empowerment. This alignment with Labov's narrative model

confirms that the structure of storytelling remains consistent across platforms, even as brands vary the language and tone depending on cultural context.

Localization and Cultural Sensitivity

Although English was the primary language across campaigns, brands demonstrated varying degrees of cultural adaptation. Airbnb showed the highest localization sensitivity by incorporating region-specific imagery, values, and holidays into localized English narratives. For example, in Southeast Asia, Airbnb promoted messages during Ramadan with visuals of family gatherings and hospitality, while in Europe, the messaging focused on adventure and freedom.

Nike maintained a globally unified message but adjusted visual and contextual elements in regional releases. The same script was accompanied by different athletes, environments, and sports depending on the target audience (e.g., skateboarding in Brazil vs. running in Kenya), subtly reflecting local values without changing the core language.

Dove's storytelling, while rooted in a global theme of empowerment, was moderately localized. In markets like Indonesia and the Middle East, Dove featured diverse representations of beauty and used idiomatic expressions familiar to those audiences, even within the English-language frame. This suggests that subtle linguistic localization—via metaphor, culturally resonant idioms, and

visual storytelling—can enhance relatability without requiring full translation.

Table 3. Localization Strategies and Cultural Relevance by Brand

Brand	Localization Level	Cultural Alignment	Specific Strategies	Example
Airbnb	High	Strong	Incorporates local holidays, cultural values, region-specific visuals	Ramadan-themed messaging in Southeast Asia
Nike	Medium	Moderate	Consistent global message with localized visuals and athletes	Brazilian skateboarding, Kenyan running
Dove	Medium-High	Strong	Local idioms, diverse beauty standards, regionally relevant metaphors	"Real strength lies in kindness" in Indonesia

Audience Engagement and Impact

Engagement metrics (see Figure 2) indicate a clear trend: localized storytelling consistently outperformed standardized global messaging in terms of likes, shares, and comments. On

Instagram, Dove’s regionally targeted posts in Southeast Asia achieved 25% higher average engagement than their global content, particularly when posts included culturally familiar references or voices.

Nike’s unified English message, although globally deployed, showed strong but uneven engagement—performing well in the U.S. and Brazil, but receiving lower interaction rates in non-Western markets. Conversely, Airbnb’s highly adaptive English narratives led to consistent engagement across regions, with TikTok videos in local contexts reaching over 3% average engagement rates from January to March 2024 (Keyhole, 2025).

These findings support the hypothesis that strategic use of English with cultural and linguistic nuance strengthens digital brand storytelling, particularly when supported by locally relevant narrative content and tone.

Discussion and Implications

The findings affirm that English-language storytelling, when nuanced and localized, is a powerful tool for global digital branding. While a unified brand voice is important for identity consistency, adaptation at the linguistic and cultural level enhances emotional impact and audience engagement. This balance—between global identity and local sensitivity—emerges as a key success factor.

For practitioners, the implication is clear: global brands should invest not only in translating content but in culturally-informed English storytelling. This includes using idioms, tones, and metaphors that resonate with local audiences while maintaining narrative coherence. Furthermore, data-driven iteration, such as testing regional responses to different linguistic styles, can guide future campaigns more effectively.

For academics, this study contributes to the limited but growing body of work on the intersection of English linguistics, digital

marketing, and intercultural branding. It demonstrates how discourse and narrative analysis can uncover the strategic use of language in global communication contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the critical role of English-language storytelling in digital branding, particularly in global market penetration. The findings show that while a unified brand identity is essential, the effectiveness of brand narratives significantly increases when English content is adapted to reflect cultural and linguistic nuances. Multinational brands such as Nike, Dove, and Airbnb have demonstrated that emotionally resonant and culturally sensitive storytelling in English leads to higher levels of audience engagement. Specifically, localized narratives that incorporate idiomatic expressions, culturally familiar visuals, and regionally relevant themes tend to outperform standardized global content, especially in non-Western markets.

English in digital branding is not merely a functional language for global communication; rather, it is a strategic medium that, when crafted with nuance, can transcend cultural boundaries and foster meaningful connections. The ability to integrate culturally informed tone, metaphor, and narrative structure within English-language content has emerged as a key differentiator in audience response and emotional impact. This underscores the need for brands to move beyond generic messaging and embrace localized storytelling approaches, even within a single linguistic framework.

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