

# **Empirical Study of Space Localization Approach on** Brand Attitude: The Case of Starbucks in South Korea

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#### **Abstract**

Background The competitive landscape of global companies seeking to build a favorable and relatable brand image in countries not native to their origin is becoming ever more dynamic. One notable trend has been the use of space localization approaches to address the cultural and emotional needs of local consumers. Considering the expanding role of coffee shops, a localized space identity may act as a powerful advantage to directly connect with local consumers. This study explores the effect of localization efforts in space identity and its relation to actual consumer attitude toward the space and the brand itself, focusing on the case of Starbucks in South Korea.

Methods This study includes field and survey research. Field research was conducted at five Starbucks locations in the metropolitan area, selected for their clear usage of localized space design. Survey research subjects were the customers visiting those five research sites. Factor analysis, regression analyses, and frequency analysis were used to validate research hypotheses.

Results Three common factors were extracted from the space images shaped by consumers experiencing localized space identity-namely, stylishness, comfort, and uniqueness. These images were found to positively affect consumer attitude toward the space and ultimately the brand itself.

**Conclusions** This study verified that localized space identity is evidently and effectively being delivered to consumer perception to induce positive brand attitude. Such finding provides the grounds for global companies seeking to differentiate their strategy by tailoring their approach to better suit the needs of local consumers.

Keywords Localization Approach, Space Identity, Brand Attitude

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Citation: Jun, Y., Ma, Y., & Lee, H. (2019). Empirical Study of Space Localization Approach on Brand Attitude: The Case of Starbucks in South Korea. Archives of Design Research, 32(4), 27-37.

http://dx.doi.org/10.15187/adr.2019.11.32.4.27

Received: Jul. 26. 2019; Reviewed: Sep. 08. 2019; Accepted: Sep. 09. 2019 pISSN 1226-8046 eISSN 2288-2987

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#### 1. Introduction

The current trend of coffee shops in South Korea is not merely that of a beverage consumption but of a cultural propensity. The role of coffee shops has expanded to include providing a cultural space for relaxation and social interactions. Consumers no longer settle for just quality or price but seek to be satisfied on a higher level of their cultural and emotional needs. Thus, the value of coffee consumption has evolved to place significant importance in cultural identity as well as in space experience that complement such value. In light of such change in consumer expectations, a notable trend amongst global companies seeking to build a meaningful relationship with local consumers has been the use of space localization approach. Companies are increasingly adopting cultural marketing strategies to directly relate with their local consumers and to ultimately enhance their brand image and brand awareness (Noh & Jang, 2011). This study explores the effect of localized space identity on brand attitude, focusing on the case of Starbucks in South Korea as Starbucks actively utilizes such localization strategy amongst coffee shops and is a leader in its industry.

#### 2. Literature review

#### 2. 1. Localization strategy

Amidst the rapidly growing global market, it is important for global companies to simultaneously pursue both standardization and localization strategies (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989) and to find and deliver an optimal level of both (Buzzell, 1967; Fayerweather, 1969). From the perspectives of companies seeking to globalize, standardization and localization are opposite ends of the strategic spectrum. Standardization strategy is based on the concept of the universal global market, proposed by Levitt (1983), and allows a greater possibility to reach an economy of scale through a unified approach (Kim, 2009) and gives the benefit of cost reduction for the company (Ryans Jr. & Ratz, 1987). On the contrary, localization strategy is based on the view that one communication style cannot satisfy diverse consumers due to geographical and cultural differences (Jeong, 2009). It gives global companies a competitive advantage through tailored efforts that address the specific needs and preferences of local consumers. In discussions of standardization-localization issue, a lopsided strategy has been criticized for its limitations and the universal understanding is that global companies are at best to strive for an optimized equilibrium of both strategies that effectively respond to the situation of the local market and the company itself (Buzzell, 1967; Fayerweather, 1969, Douglas & Wind 1987).

#### 2. 2. Space identity

In the context of a corporation, its identity can be categorized into a corporate identity, a brand identity, and a space identity, according to its scope and nature. Corporate identity embraces the overall image of the company that integrates the company's personality, skills, products, markets, businesses, mission and vision into one consistent image (e.g., Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). Brand identity is a combined image of brand associations that companies wish to deliver to their target consumers. Its purpose is to induce ideal associations in the minds of their consumers to ultimately enhance their brand image (e.g., Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996). Space identity is the consistent and unified expression of a brand's image in threedimensional spaces, whose purpose is to yield intended brand attitude through positive brand experiences that differ from competitors through various elements within a space (e.g., Kwon & Chang, 2012). Corporate identity includes brand identity, which includes space identity.

Today, the role of space identity has evolved from merely a place that provides services and products to a place that delivers a brand's image (Lee, 2013). In particular, the importance of space design and the resulting space identity is growing as a key marketing strategy to cope with the diversifying and segmenting consumer needs in response to the changing societal environment. In building an ideal space identity, brand image needs to effectively be integrated in the space to induce a desired brand attitude (Lee, 2013; Budelann, Kim, & Wozniak, 2010).

#### 2. 3. Brand attitude

What consumers associate with when they recall a brand is a critical factor that determines the long-term relationship between the consumer and the brand (Fournier, 1998). Keller (1993, 1998) defined brand image as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory." Brand associations, as defined by Aaker (1991, 1996), are anything that is connected to the brand in the memory. Among the elements that make up brand associations, brand attitude influences consumers' purchasing behavior and loyalty, and is defined as the general evaluation a person has of the brand (e.g., Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1998).

#### 3. Research

This study is in two parts: field and survey research. Field research was conducted at five Starbucks locations in the metropolitan area of Seoul-Leema Building, Anguk, Samcheongdong, Sogongdong, and Bukchonro—that most clearly applied localization strategy in their space design. These locations were analyzed based on the analysis table of space identity components formulated in 3.1. The survey research was conducted over three days-the 27th of May, and the 1st and the 2nd of June, 2019-to the customers visiting the five preselected research locations. A total of 170 survey samples were collected. SPSS Statistics 25.0 was used to analyze the data.

### 3. 1. Field research

As discussed, the ultimate goal of a space identity is to build a positive brand image. Successful application of localization strategy in the visual elements of a space will increase familiarity and favorability of the brand in the minds of consumers. This study classified the elements of space identity in accordance to the purpose and the nature of the research, with reference to preceding research on culturally adapted visual expressions in the formative features of spaces (Jang & Choi, 2010; Oh & Lee, 2007; Lee & Choi, 2006; Jun & Nam, 2005).

Space was analyzed on two dimensions-physical and visual elements-to see "where" and "how" localization strategy was applied in building a space identity. More specifically, physical elements were divided into structural elements, which include walls, partitions, floor, and ceiling, and object elements, which include furnishings and decorative objects.

To see how each localized spatial component was visually expressed, its traditionality of the visual form was analyzed on three grounds-motif & pattern, material, and color. These three variables were adopted and modified from a preceding study (Jun & Nam, 2005) that researched on the expressive tendency of Korean traditionality in contemporary interior spaces. First, Korean traditional motifs and patterns are forms that represent Korea's traditional appeal, sentiments, humor and elegance. In this particular field research, traditional motifs and patterns are mostly portrayed as the ribs of doors and partitions or as actual photographs or paintings of ancient Korea. Traditional materials are mainly wood, stone, Korean paper, traditional roof tile and metal, and traditional colors include brown, taupe, off-white and gray, the natural unpainted colors of those traditional materials. Of course, the colors of Dancheong are traditional colors of Korea, but within the scope of the research sites of this study, those colors were not observed in their space design. Table 1 summarizes the components of the field research analysis and Table 2 shows an example of field research result for the case of Starbucks Anguk branch.

Table 1 Analysis table of space components

		Physical elements						
		Structural elements				Object elements		
		Wall	Screen	Floor	Ceiling	Furnishing	Decorative object	
Visual	Motifs & pattern							
elements	Material							
	Color							

Table 2 Example - Starbucks Anguk

	auto 2 Example Octavatatio / ingan									
		Physical elements								
		Structural elem	ents			Object elemen	ts			
		Wall	Screen	Floor	Ceiling	Furnishing	Decorative object			
	otifs & ttern					None				
		Large mural depicting Bukchon Hanok Village	Latticed screens for space partitioning	Stone way leading up to counter	Rafted ceiling design		Korean pots			
Ma	aterial	Printed wallpaper	Wood and traditional Korean paper	Stone	Wood	-	Ceramic			
Col	lor	Black and white	Brown and off-white	Shades of dark gray	Brown	-	White, taupe, jade green			

# 3. 2. Survey research

Survey questionnaires were constructed to investigate four broad categories: image associations induced by localized space identity, consumer attitude toward localized space identity, brand attitude, and demographic statistics. The specifics of the questionnaires are described in Table 3.

Table 3 Survey variables

Variable	Measure	Coding Category	Method	No. of Questionnaires
Brand Attitude	Preference, favorability, and loyalty toward brand	V1	Five-point Likert scale	5
Space Image	Emotional adjectives associated to space image	V2	Five-point Likert scale	16
Space Attitude	Preference, favorability, and loyalty toward space	V3	Five-point Likert scale	5
Association Touchpoint	Elements that best deliver space localization strategy	V4	Ranked multiple response	1
Decisive Factor	Factors that determine purchasing decision	V5	Ranked multiple response	1
Demographics	Sex, age, occupation, etc.	DV	Nominal scale	6
		<u> </u>	Total	34

#### 3. 3. Research model

This study, which explores the effects of localized space identity on consumer attitude, consists of two stages. First, the study extracts the specific image associations induced by localized spaces by conducting a factor analysis on emotional adjectives evaluated by visiting consumers. Then regression analyses are carried out to verify the hypotheses that the image associations induced by localized spaces positively affects consumer attitude toward the brand space, which in turn positively affects consumer attitude toward the brand itself. The research model is diagrammed as in Figure 1.

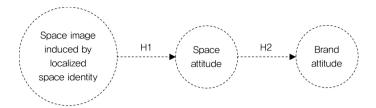


Figure 1 Research model

H1. Space image induced by localized space identity positively affects consumer attitude toward the space. H2. Consumer attitude positively affects consumer attitude toward the brand.

### 3. 4. Demographic characteristics

Table 4 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. Regarding gender distribution, 44.1% were male and 55.9% were female. Regarding age distribution, 20 to 29 make up the largest portion of 60.0%, 30 to 39 make up 20.6%, 40 to 49 make up 13.5%, and 50 and up make up the remaining 5.9%.

Table 4 D	Demographic	characteristic	CS
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		Frequency (n=170)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Sex	Male	75	44.1	44.1	44.1
	Female	95	55.9	55.9	100.0
Age	20~29	102	60.0	60.0	60.0
	30~39	35	20.6	20.6	80.6
	40~49	23	13.5	13.5	94.1
	50+	10	5.9	5.9	100.0
	Total	170	100.0	100.0	

## 3. 5. Reliability analyses

The average Cronbach's alpha of the five items that measure brand attitude was 0.920, so the items were overall reliable. Also, the Cronbach's alphas when each of the five items were deleted all slightly reduced so we can deduce that all five items are appropriate to be used in statistical analysis.

The average Cronbach's alpha of the five items that measure space attitude was 0.877, so the items were overall reliable. However, the Cronbach's alpha increases to 0.894 when the item "I prefer to come to this particular Starbucks even when there is another Starbucks nearby" is deleted. Hence, only four items excluding the item of consumer loyalty toward a specific store were used in statistical analysis.

The average Cronbach's alpha of the sixteen items that measure space image was 0.901, so the items were overall reliable. However, the Cronbach's alpha when the items "I feel accustomed to this space" and "This space feels oriental" are deleted increases to 0.908 and 0.903, respectively. Thus, it is reasonable to use the remaining fourteen items in measuring space image.

Table 5 Cronbach's alphas of brand attitude, space attitude, and space image

		Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Cronbach's Alpha (Average)
Brand	Like	0.888	0.920
Attitude	Satisfied	0.906	-
	Patron	0.912	-
	Preference	0.899	_
	Willing to Recommend	0.906	_
Space	Satisfied	0.842	0.877
Attitude	Like	0.840	-
	Willing to Revisit	0.847	-
	Willing to Recommend	0.831	_
	Preference	0.894	-
Space	Comfortable	0.897	0.901
Image	Warm	0.895	-
	Peaceful	0.894	-
	Familiar	0.901	_
	Fond	0.895	-
	Accustomed	0.908	-
	Unique	0.894	-
	Amusing	0.891	_
	Interesting	0.892	_
	Luxurious	0.891	-
	Stylish	0.890	-
	Attractive	0.891	_
	Sophisticated	0.894	_
	Oriental	0.903	_
	Exotic	0.901	_
	Classy	0.890	-

# 4. Result

#### 4. 1. Field research result and cases of localized space identity

In observing the five research sites that most prominently incorporated localization strategy in their space identity, the frequency of using walls and screens were much higher than that of using floors and ceilings amongst structural elements. This may be due to the fact that walls and screens cover larger areas and are more visible and thus give the advantage of efficiently inducing positive space experience through differentiated approaches despite where customers seat themselves within the space. Between the two object elements, the frequency of using decorative objects were higher than that of using furnishings. Considering that all Starbucks stores are not franchised but are directly managed, preparing decorative objects that well represent the traditional history of the local area may be far more cost effective than furnishing a particular store with, say, chairs and tables that differ from other stores. Such is also reflected in the unique case of Samcheongdong where furnishing was used in localization approach as additional furnishing such as cabinets and shelves were added instead of replacing on a large scale.

Regarding the visual elements, in most cases of the observed localized approaches, wood was by far most widely used as ribs of walls and screens or as rafters. Metal was fairly often used but mostly in small scales as hinges or handles of wooden components. Usage of roof tiles and stones were also observed in few cases. Most of the traditional materials used were left unpainted to reveal its natural colors. The warm natural woody colors, the hints of golden metallic decorations, and the solemnity of the dark grey tone of roof tiles work in harmony to create a rather cozy, peaceful, yet luxurious aura in comparison to the ordinary store identity of Starbucks stores.

Table 6 Field research result summary

	Structura	Structural elements				Object elements	
	Wall	Screen	Floor	Ceiling	Furnishing	Decorative object	
Samcheongdong	•				•	•	
Anguk	•	•	•	•		•	
Leema Building	•	•				•	
Sogongdong	•	•				•	
Bukchonro	•	•				•	
Observed Total Frequency	5	4	1	1	1	5	

#### 4. 2. Factor analysis on space image

In result of the factor analysis done on the fourteen adjectives to measure space associations induced by localized space identity, three common factors were extracted. The first factor includes 'sophisticated', 'stylish', 'luxurious', 'attractive', and 'classy'. The second factor includes 'familiar', 'comfortable', 'fond', 'warm', and 'peaceful', The third factor includes 'amusing', 'unique', 'interesting', and 'exotic'. In this light, the space images formed by consumer perception from experiencing localized space identity can be categorized into three factors-stylish, comfortable, and unique.

It is also interesting to place these images deduced from localized Starbucks locations directly alongside the general images consumers have of Starbucks found in preceding researches. In comparison of space images of brand coffee shops, Starbucks and its space design were found to be associated with the images of luxury, relaxation, and modernism (e.g., Yoo & Jin, 2010; Lee & Park, 2012; Han, Oh, & Choi, 2014). As the images of stylishness and luxury may be considered to belong to the same category, as well as comfort and relaxation, then we can deduce that the key difference between the images consumers have of localized and standardized Starbucks spaces lies in the images of uniqueness and modernity. This is rather plausible considering that the localized strategy adopted by these Starbucks locations was to incorporate the traditional values of Korea into their space design, which would indeed reduce the associations of modernism and give rise to the impression of uniqueness.

Table 7 Rotated component matrix of space image variables

	Components						
	Stylish	Comfortable	Unique				
Sophisticated	.853	.141	.177				
Stylish	.837	.147	.331				
Luxurious	.799	.155	.322				
Attractive	.717	.292	.273				
Classy	.670	.217	.454				
Familiar	022	.832	.050				
Comfortable	.286	.796	.003				
Fond	.097	.780	.262				
Warm	.219	.743	.191				
Peaceful	.367	.635	.213				
Amusing	.281	.191	.834				
Unique	.248	.104	.830				
Interesting	.303	.140	.822				
Exotic	.210	.126	.556				
KMO=0.887, Chi-Squared=1493(df=91, Sig.=0.000)							

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

#### 4. 3. Regression analyses

The three space images of stylishness, comfort, and uniqueness induced by localization approach were all found to positively affect consumer attitude toward the space. In analyzing individual significance levels, the image of comfort was found to most strongly affect consumers' space attitude with the value of beta 0.524, followed by the image of stylishness with beta 0.300 and the image of uniqueness with beta 0.225. Thus, space attitude is most significantly and positively affected by the consumers feeling peaceful and at home when experiencing localized space identity.

Table 8 Regression result of space image on space attitude

	Space Attitude (Beta)	t	Sig.	df	F	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
Stylish	0.300	5.054	0.000	3	39.298	0.000	0.644
Comfortable	0.524	8.832	0.000				
Unique	0.225	3.788	0.000	_			

Next, consumer attitude toward localized space identity was found to positively affect consumer attitude toward the brand itself with the value of beta 0.354. Thus, when global companies successfully induce positive space attitude through effective localization approach, the consumer attitude toward the brand itself will also enhance positively.

Table 9 Regression result of space attitude on brand attitude

	Brand Attitude (Beta)	t	Sig.	df	F	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
Space Attitude	0.354	4.905	0.000	1	24.061	0.000	0.354

#### 4. 4. Further analysis

Survey respondents were additionally asked to rank the top three touchpoints that they feel most strongly deliver Korean traditionality from a list that included the structural and object elements of spatial components. When weighted frequency analysis was conducted on the responses, consumers were found to feel and experience traditionality from the walls, the decorative objects, the screens, the ceiling, the furnishing, and the floor, in that order.

Table 10 Frequency table of elements that induce Korean image

	1st choice N(%), Weighted Value	2nd choice N(%), Weighted Value	3rd choice N(%), Weighted Value	Total
Wall	61(36.1), 183	34(20.2), 68	17(10.2), 17	268
Screen	44(26.0), 132	31(18.5), 62	27(16.2), 27	221
Floor	3(1.8), 9	11(6.5), 22	21(12.6), 21	52
Ceiling	8(4.7), 72	22(13.1), 44	23(13.8), 23	139
Furniture	13(7.7), 39	30(17.9), 60	37(22.2), 37	136
Decorative Object	40(23.7), 120	40(23.8), 80	42(25.1), 42	242
Missing	1	2	3	
Total	170(100.0)	170(100.0)	170(100.0)	

Recalling from 4.1, the field study of the five research sites revealed that the frequency of cases in which localization approach was applied in space design was the highest for the walls and decorative objects, in equal frequency, followed by the screens, then the ceiling, furnishings, and floor were observed the least in equal frequency, Table 10 implies that the touchpoints where consumers actually feel Korean traditionality parallel the actual localization applications in their order of frequency. That is, when global companies apply localization approach in their spatial components using traditional motifs and patterns, materials, and colors, consumers in reality enjoy and feel their effects fairly evidently, which ultimately induce positive attitude toward the space and the brand itself, as statistically proved in 4.3.

#### 5. Conclusion

As the competitive landscape of coffee shops is becoming more and more dynamic, many companies are diversifying in their efforts to differentiate their strategy to gain an effective competitive edge. A notable trend in such efforts is the use of localization strategies by global companies to enhance their brand image through adaptive approaches that address to the cultural and emotional needs of local consumers (Jang, 2010). In consideration of the expanding role of coffee shops to providing a place for relaxation and social interactions, a differentiated space identity through localized approach is likely to result in a powerful space experience. This study verified that effectively localized space identity is evidently being delivered to consumer perception to induce positive space images of stylishness, comfort, and uniqueness. These space images directly affect their space attitude to ultimately result in positive brand attitude. Such finding provides the grounds for global companies seeking to differentiate their strategy by tailoring their approach to better suit the needs of local consumers.

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