

# The KØS

Dispatch



Global Vibes, Local Hearts:  
The Art of Hyperlocalizing Cool

Issue 05

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# Letter from the Editor

I used to think *cool* was a universal language. Back when I was a teenager, I believed a pair of Nike sneakers or a can of Coke meant the same thing whether you were in New York or New Delhi. But experience has a way of shattering our naïveté. Last summer, wandering through the backstreets of Kyoto, I stepped into a Starbucks and found myself sitting on tatami mats, sipping a matcha latte in a century-old townhouse. The signage was subtle, the décor unmistakably Japanese. It hit me: even the biggest global brands win hearts **one neighborhood at a time**. Cool isn't one-size-fits-all; it's hyperlocal.

As the editor of KØS, I'm obsessed with how culture and commerce collide. And nothing embodies that collision better than the trend we're unpacking in this issue: *hyperlocalizing cool*. Why does this matter to us at KØS? Because we believe brands aren't just selling products – they're selling belonging. In a world where a streetwear drop in Seoul can spark a frenzy in LA, understanding local culture isn't a “nice-to-have” – it's the make-or-break difference between global fame and “meh” irrelevance. Our readers (that's you) are creatives, marketers, and change-makers who won't settle for cookie-cutter strategies. You want to build brands that **respect the block as much as they dominate the globe**. We're right there with you.

This letter isn't just an intro – consider it an invitation. In the pages that follow, we journey from Tokyo alleyways to African sports fields, from digital streaming platforms to mom-and-pop shops reinventing retail. We'll explore how *global vibes* can capture *local hearts*. Expect stories of brands that nailed the cultural code – and cautionary tales of those that flubbed it. My hope is that you'll see your own world in these stories. Maybe you'll recall the first time a brand *really* spoke your language (perhaps literally). Or maybe you'll get fired up to bring this hyperlocal mindset to your own work.

So grab a coffee (make it locally roasted), get comfortable, and let's dig in. The world is big, but the little details matter more than ever. By the end of this issue, "think global, act local" won't just be a catchy phrase – it'll be your *modus operandi*. Ready to redefine what *cool* means, one neighborhood at a time? Let's do this.

*Sincerely,*

**David Leuchter**

Founder & Strategic Designer, KØS

*What's the Future?*

# Introduction

Welcome to the intersection of everywhere and *right here*. “Global Vibes, Local Hearts” isn’t just a slogan – it’s a strategic mandate for brands in 2025 and beyond. We live in an era where a meme born in São Paulo goes viral in Seoul in minutes, yet a coffee shop around the corner still feels like a world of its own. The central theme of this issue is the art of hyperlocalizing cool: how globally ambitious brands can authentically resonate with local cultures. It’s about taking those worldwide trends and infusing them with the flavor, language, and attitude of the *neighborhood*. It’s about being the *cool kid* who speaks the local dialect – not an awkward tourist with a phrasebook.

Why does hyperlocalization matter so much now? For one, consumer expectations have skyrocketed. According to a 2024 Salesforce study, over 70% of global consumers expect brands to understand *their* unique needs and cultural nuances. We’re in the age of personalization; people can sniff out a generic, one-size-fits-all message from a mile away. In fact, there have been some cringe-worthy failures when brands got it wrong. Remember when Amazon launched its site in Sweden and accidentally littered it with embarrassing translation errors – even using

the wrong country's flag in its marketing? Ouch. The lesson was crystal clear: get local culture right, or don't bother showing up. In contrast, brands that nail the local vibes tend to reap the rewards. One extensive survey found that 76% of online shoppers prefer products marketed in their own language – and a huge chunk won't buy if the content isn't localized at all. Language is just the starting point; true hyperlocalization drills down to neighborhood slang, regional values, inside jokes, and deeply held traditions.

What exactly is “hyperlocalizing cool”? Think of it as “glocalization” on steroids. Traditional localization might tweak a product or translate an ad for a country. Hyperlocalization goes further – sometimes down to a city, a district, or even a single community. It's the difference between launching a pan-India ad campaign versus tailoring one just for Mumbai's Gen Z college kids hanging out in Bandra. It's not just about avoiding mistakes; it's about creating *magic* that only happens when a brand really, truly “gets” the local culture. Done right, it feels less like marketing and more like *belonging*. Done wrong, it's a bad punchline on social media.

The stakes have never been higher. Get it right, and you earn lifelong fans who feel seen and understood – the kind of loyalty money can't buy. Get it wrong, and you become an international punchline (and these days, the world

laughs in unison on Twitter and TikTok). The good news? Brands have more tools than ever – from data analytics pinpointing micro-trends, to local creative talent ready to bridge cultural gaps – to make hyperlocal magic happen. In the following pages, we spotlight several standout examples across industries and continents. These case studies showcase not just marketing tactics, but full-on cultural immersion. Each one is a story – of a brand learning, listening, and layering local cool onto global strategy.

By the end of this deep dive, you'll see a pattern emerge: whether you're slinging sneakers or streaming shows, *cool* truly thrives at the hyperlocal level. Global success in this era is a mosaic of local victories. Let's set the stage with those who've done it best.

# Case Studies: Global Brands with Local Soul

To really understand hyperlocalizing cool, let's explore how five very different brands cracked the code. From a coffee giant blending into historic Japanese neighborhoods, to a chocolate bar that speaks 50 languages (and counting), these case studies reveal the creative, strategic moves that turned global brands into local legends. Each example comes from a different industry and corner of the world – because hyperlocalization isn't one-size-fits-all. The common thread? **Authenticity and imagination**. These brands didn't just drop into a market and hope for the best; they dug deep, thought sideways, and earned their street cred.



# Chapter 1

## Starbucks: Brewing Local Flavor in Japan

If you wandered past it, you might not even realize it's a Starbucks. Tucked along a stone-paved slope in Kyoto is a Starbucks store that looks like a traditional machiya townhouse – complete with noren curtains, tatami mat seating, and a zen garden vibe. This isn't your cookie-cutter coffee shop. It's a perfect illustration of how Starbucks, one of the most globally recognized brands, has mastered the art of blending in without blending away.

When Starbucks first expanded to Japan, they knew that copy-pasting the American formula wouldn't cut it. So, they hired local architects and designers to infuse Japanese culture into their cafés' very walls. The result? Some Starbucks locations in Japan feature low-slung roofs inspired by Shinto shrine architecture, tranquil courtyards with stone lanterns and water features, and façades that harmonize with centuries-old neighborhood aesthetics. One striking example is the Kyoto Ninenzaka Yasaka Chaya store, set in a 100-year-old townhouse where the exterior is so traditional it could fool a time

traveler, save for the discrete siren logo on the noren. Inside, thousands of wooden sticks crisscross the ceiling in a pattern echoing the city's famed bamboo groves and temple carpentry.

This hyperlocal approach goes beyond looks. Starbucks in Japan also tweaks its menu for local tastes (matcha Frappuccino, anyone?). But the design is where the brand shows it's not just in Japan – it's of Japan. The strategic insight here is that architecture can be its own language. By using the visual vernacular of Kyoto's old neighborhoods, Starbucks sent an unspoken message: "We respect this place. We're part of this community." It's a savvy move. From day one, locals felt that this new café wasn't an invading alien Starbucks; it was their Starbucks. The cool factor of this approach is subtle but powerful – it's the cool of fitting in. In an age of loud billboard advertising, Starbucks won Kyoto's heart by whispering in a familiar architectural tongue.

The lesson? Making people feel at home with your brand sometimes means literally building your brand a home that fits the neighborhood. Sure, it's easier to roll out identical prefab stores worldwide, but Starbucks showed that investing in local authenticity pays off. The buzz around that Kyoto store was massive – tourists and locals alike line up not just for coffee, but to experience a space

that marries global brand comfort with local soul. Starbucks has over 32,000 stores globally , yet it's the ones like Kyoto's – where global meets hyperlocal – that truly stand out. Cool doesn't always announce itself; sometimes it bows respectfully and blends in.

# Chapter 2

## Netflix: Going Local to Go Global

What do a Spanish mastermind in a red jumpsuit, a South Korean deadly children's game, and a French gentleman thief have in common? They all became global obsessions thanks to Netflix's genius for hyperlocal content. Netflix might be a worldwide streaming behemoth, but it cracked the code for global cool by thinking local in its content strategy. In short, Netflix realized that the next big thing could come from anywhere – and they doubled down on that insight.

A few years back, if you asked someone in the U.S. or Europe to binge a Spanish heist drama with subtitles, you'd get side-eye. Then came *La Casa de Papel* (Money Heist) from Spain – Netflix picked it up, pumped resources into it, and suddenly millions of non-Spanish speakers were humming “Bella Ciao” and rooting for robbers in Salvador Dalí masks. Netflix did the same with South Korea's *Squid Game*, turning a dark, satirical series steeped in Korean social commentary into a worldwide watercooler topic. And let's not forget *Lupin* from France, which had viewers around the globe fantasizing about

gentleman thieves in Paris. These surprise megahits weren't flukes; they were the result of a deliberate strategy: invest locally to win globally.

Here's how Netflix pulled it off. Instead of solely pushing Hollywood content to the world, they started pouring serious money into local productions across continents. Netflix set up teams in places like Seoul, Madrid, and Mumbai to find stories that were resonating in those markets and produce them with local talent. By 2025, nearly half of Netflix's library is made up of foreign-language titles. They're not just translated; they're made by and for local audiences first. Netflix essentially turned each country into a creative R&D lab: if a show is a hit at home, chances are it'll find an audience abroad too. And if it doesn't? Well, at least it thrilled its local fanbase. It's a win-win.

The strategic insight: authentic local stories can carry global appeal when given a platform. People are drawn to the freshness of a perspective they haven't seen before, as long as the storytelling is top-notch. By embracing local cool – whether it's Spanish antiheroes or Korean childhood games turned lethal – Netflix made global coolness more diverse and interesting. It also earned street cred in each market: creators see Netflix as a champion of their culture, not a threat to it. While old-school media giants were busy

dubbing and rehashing the same old formulas, Netflix was out there turning a small Spanish TV show into a phenomenon streaming in 190 countries.

For the reader thinking about their own brand: the takeaway from Netflix is bold and clear. Your next big idea might not come from HQ – it might come from listening to a local scene or subculture and amplifying it. Netflix didn't enforce a global formula on these local productions; they let the locals lead, then brought those stories to the world stage. In doing so, Netflix wears the mantle of a tastemaker that's globally cool because it's locally authentic everywhere it goes. In the new era, going global means nurturing the local – even if that means subtitles and culture-specific plotlines. After all, cool has a million accents.

# Chapter 3

## IKEA: Speaking Penang's Language (Literally)

How do you say “Welcome to the neighborhood” without actually saying it? By cracking a joke in the local dialect. When IKEA opened a new store in Penang, Malaysia, they didn't just hang some generic “Hello Penang!” banner. Nope. They went full-on hyperlocal pun mode. The Swedish furniture giant launched an ad campaign in Penang's own Hokkien dialect – a Chinese dialect widely spoken in the region – and it was equal parts clever and charming.

Picture a billboard split in two. On one side, a photo of a chicken; on the other, IKEA's iconic wooden cabinet. The caption reads: “We are not kay kia. We are IKEA.” Here's the gag: “kay kia” in Hokkien means “chick” (a baby chicken), which sounds a lot like “IKEA.” In another ad, a tall local man is posed next to IKEA's tall Billy bookcase. Caption: “We are not lo kha kia. We are IKEA.” (In Hokkien, “lo kha kia” means “tall kid/guy”). These witty one-liners, steeped in local lingo, had Penangites laughing out loud. More importantly, it made them feel seen. IKEA's campaign essentially said, “We get your humor, we speak your

language – we’re your neighbor, not some foreign company.”

This approach was a masterstroke of hyperlocalizing cool. Penangites are proud of their culture and dialect, which isn’t always highlighted in national campaigns. By using Hokkien wordplay, IKEA tapped into local pride and nostalgia. It wasn’t without risk – get the dialect wrong, and it comes off gimmicky. But IKEA did their homework (with the help of local creatives, no doubt). The campaign rolled out across digital platforms, print, social media, and good old-fashioned billboards around town, ensuring that pretty much everyone in the city got the joke. The buzz was immediate. People were sharing the ads on WhatsApp and Facebook, tagging friends: “Have you seen this? So cute lah!” In one fell swoop, IKEA managed to sound like a friendly Penang native inviting you to shop, rather than a big global brand barging in with a hard sell.

Strategically, what IKEA did in Penang underscores a big point: to win local hearts, speak the local tongue – and a little humor never hurts. Language isn’t just a tool for communication; it’s a carrier of culture, inside jokes, and identity. By playing with local idioms and sounds, IKEA showed it’s not taking itself too seriously and that it respects the local culture enough to have fun with it. It’s the equivalent of learning a few phrases in the local



language when you travel – but in IKEA’s case, they practically wrote a comedy sketch.

The impact went beyond a few chuckles. When a brand makes the effort to hyperlocalize like this, it builds trust. It says, “We didn’t come here with a pre-packaged plan – we’re here to be part of your community.” For Penang’s shoppers, walking into that new IKEA already felt a bit like walking into a familiar friend’s home – one who just happens to have great furniture. The campaign likely helped drive hefty opening week traffic, but longer term, it solidified IKEA’s image in Malaysia as a brand that gets it. They’re global, sure, but they listen. And honestly, in today’s world, that’s pretty cool.

# Chapter 4

## Coca-Cola: Cheers to “Share a Coke” – The Chinese Way

Personalization is cool – but personalization that respects your culture? That’s next-level. One of the most iconic global marketing campaigns in the past decade has been Coca-Cola’s “Share a Coke,” where they put people’s first names on bottles. But in China, Coca-Cola pulled a brilliant twist on this campaign. Instead of first names, they printed affectionate nicknames and titles that Chinese people actually use in daily life. The result was a phenomenon that looked and felt totally home-grown, even though the idea was born half a world away.

Why no first names? Well, Chinese naming culture and social norms are a bit different. You’re less likely to call your buddy “John” or “Jane” – you might say “Old Wang” (if Wang is his last name) or a title like “Classmate” or “Boss.” Coca-Cola’s local marketing team understood this nuance deeply. So the bottles on shelves in China sported labels like “知心朋友” (close friend), “女神” (goddess, a term for one’s crush or admired woman), “学霸” (study-

holic, for the academic achiever friend) and so on. Each term was instantly relatable – these were the terms of endearment, respect, and camaraderie that Chinese youth actually use. Buying a Coke for your “bro” or “BFF” suddenly had literal meaning in Mandarin.

But Coca-Cola didn't stop at linguistics. They plugged this campaign right into China's digital heartbeat. They partnered with WeChat and QQ (the mega-popular messaging/social apps in China) to let people create virtual Coke bottles with custom nicknames to share online. This was 2017 – and it was viral before “viral” was a strategy. Suddenly, your WeChat feed was full of friends exchanging virtual Coke bottles saying things like “Soulmate” or “Roommate” or inside-joke nicknames, each one a tiny symbol of friendship. It was adorable. It was everywhere. And crucially for Coca-Cola, it sold a heck of a lot of soda.

How much, you ask? Coca-Cola's sales volume jumped by double digits during that campaign. In fact, the localized “Share a Coke” in China boosted sales by 19% compared to the previous summer – a staggering result for a market as large as China. Let that sink in: a global brand that's over a century old saw a near 20% bump because they spoke the culture's language – both literally and figuratively. The campaign also supercharged Coca-Cola's social media

engagement. Young consumers were effectively doing Coke's marketing for them by plastering these personalized bottles all over Weibo, WeChat moments, you name it.

The genius here lies in transcreation – not just translation. Coca-Cola didn't lazily transliterate "Share a Coke" into Chinese and call it a day. They reinvented the concept to suit local sentiments. It shows an understanding that "cool" in one culture (having your own first name on a bottle) might not be "cool" in another (where individual names are used differently). Instead of forcing the original idea, they asked, "How would sharing a Coke feel most meaningful among Chinese friends?" Then they went and did that. Importantly, they kept the core idea – sharing, friendship, connection – but localized the execution. It's a textbook case of keeping the global vibe (the joy of sharing a Coke) while capturing the local heart (using terms that actually resonate in daily life).

For brands reading this, take note: the persona of your campaign may need to change when it travels. Coca-Cola's name didn't even appear on some of these bottles – imagine that, a Coca-Cola without the word "Coke" on the front! But it worked because seeing "Bestie" on a bottle in someone's own language is a hundred times more emotionally engaging. The Chinese "Share a Coke" wasn't

just a marketing campaign; it became a part of pop culture that summer. And that's as cool as it gets for a soft drink.

# Chapter 5

## Snickers: One Global Slogan, Dozens of Local Twists

“You’re Not You When You’re Hungry.” By now, this Snickers slogan is basically in the advertising hall of fame. But here’s what many forget: the magic of this campaign was in its local adaptations. Snickers and its agency partners managed to run this global campaign for over six years across 50+ markets by continually refreshing it with hyperlocal flavors of humor and relevance. In doing so, they pulled off one of the greatest balancing acts in marketing: maintaining a consistent global brand message while making it feel tailor-made for each audience.

Let’s hopscotch around the globe to see this in action. In the United States, the campaign kicked off with an unforgettable Super Bowl ad featuring 88-year-old Betty White playing tackle football – and getting creamed. Why? She was “hungry” Betty, not her real self, until a Snickers turned her back into a trash-talking young guy. It was hilarious, unexpected, and became an instant classic. But they didn’t stop with Betty. In Australia, Snickers got techy

and cheeky: they created the Hungerithm, an algorithm that monitored the general mood on the internet and lowered Snickers bar prices at 7-Eleven stores whenever online anger spiked (because, you know, the angrier people are, the hungrier they must be). Aussies loved the tongue-in-cheek wit, and it drove foot traffic like crazy – who doesn't want a discounted candy bar when Twitter is on a rant?

Swing over to Puerto Rico, and the campaign took to the radio waves. Popular DJs started acting really out of character on their live shows – like a hip-hop DJ suddenly playing classical music, or a reggaeton station host talking in a bored monotone. Listeners were baffled (and amused). After a bit, an announcer would break in and reveal the gag: “Oops, DJ so-and-so hasn't had his Snickers yet!” Cue laughter, and presumably, a bunch of Puerto Ricans craving chocolate and peanuts. Meanwhile, in the UK, Snickers capitalized on a viral moment. When a certain TV host was caught in a scandal (hello, Jeremy Clarkson of Top Gear fame), Snickers UK tweeted at him something like “Hey @JeremyClarkson, you're not you when you're hungry. Better?” after he publicly apologized – tying it to the campaign's catchphrase. The tweet went viral, racking up thousands of retweets and a flood of media impressions. It was perfectly timed British cheekiness.

What's the common thread? Each execution was rooted in local humor, local media habits, local culture. But all were unmistakably Snickers. The candy bar and the slogan were the glue holding it together. The campaign's core insight – hunger makes you act crazy – is universal. But the expression of that insight was completely flexible. Snickers basically handed the keys to its creative teams in each market and said, "Here's the joke, now tell it in your language." And boy, did they ever. From Super Bowl ads to internet algorithms to radio pranks to tweet storms, "You're Not You..." spoke to people in a way they found funny and relevant right where they lived.

Strategically, Snickers exemplified a "global idea, local spin" approach. Rather than rigidly enforcing one ad everywhere, they nurtured a campaign as dynamic as the cultures it touched. This not only kept the campaign fresh year after year, it also made Snickers feel like a brand with its ear to the ground in every country. In the ad world, some called it arguably the best "glocal" campaign ever. The numbers back it up too – massive boosts in sales and engagement in multiple markets, and a shelf full of awards for Snickers' parent company Mars.

For anyone taking notes: having a strong central idea is great, but letting it breathe and adapt is what takes it from good to legendary. Snickers taught the world that you can



be goofy, daring, and hyperlocal, all while staying consistent globally. That's not easy to do, but when it works, it's the coolest thing ever – a joke that the whole world can laugh at, each for different reasons.

# Conclusion : The Local is the New Global

From Kyoto cafés to Penang billboards, from Parisian thieves to Chinese nicknames, one truth echoes: brands earn their cool not by shouting louder, but by listening closer. Hyperlocalizing isn't about translation or decoration. It's about humility—recognizing that culture is built in kitchens, street corners, slang, and rituals. It's about creativity—taking those fragments and weaving them into global stories that feel personal everywhere they land.

The irony? The more local a brand dares to go, the more global it becomes. Netflix proved it with Spanish heists and Korean games; Snickers did it by letting humor speak in dozens of dialects. Consumers don't reward ubiquity; they reward intimacy. In today's noisy marketplace, silence, subtlety, and specificity can be the boldest moves of all.

For leaders, the mandate is clear: stop thinking in continents and start thinking in corners. If your brand can belong to a street, it can belong to the world. That's the paradox, and the promise, of hyperlocal cool.

So the question isn't whether you can globalize your idea.  
The real question is: can you make it matter on your  
block?

# Key Takeaways

- Hyperlocalizing cool isn't just a marketing stunt – it's a mindset. Here are the big lessons from our exploration, boiled down into punchy takeaways you can act on:
- Be a Cultural Sponge: Before you try to be cool, understand what cool means here. Do your homework on the local culture, humor, values, and taboos. Whether it's hiring local designers or immersing in street slang, soak it all up. Authenticity starts with listening.
- Empower the Locals: Your brand might be global, but your execution should be local. Empower local teams or creatives to adapt (or even reinvent) your ideas. They have the on-the-ground insight into what their community cares about. Trust them to tweak the formula – that's how Netflix unearthed its foreign gems and how Snickers found its funniest local gags.
- Adapt Everything (Not Just Language): Translation isn't transformation. Hyperlocal means you might need to change visuals, packaging, product flavors, store design – the whole shebang – to fit local tastes. Remember McDonald's and its McAloo Tikki burger in India or shrimp burger in Japan? Different

markets, different menu. That principle applies to any business: adapt your offerings to truly reflect local preferences.

- **Maintain a Core, But Flex the Execution:** A strong global brand identity or slogan can give you consistency (like Snickers' universal truth about hunger). But don't be rigid – let the locals riff on it. Think of your brand as a song with a solid melody; let each country remix it in their own genre. The core message stays clear, and the locals feel a sense of ownership too.
- **Community Over Campaign:** The best hyperlocal strategies don't feel like marketing at all – they feel like community. Whether it's Starbucks blending into a neighborhood or a beer brand rallying a town festival, aim to become part of the local fabric. Solve a real problem, join a celebration, speak an inside joke. If people feel you're one of them, they'll wear your logo like a badge of honor.
- **In essence, hyperlocalizing cool is about respect and creativity colliding.** It's showing respect for each locale's uniqueness, and creativity in crafting something special for them. It's not the easiest route – it takes extra effort, openness, and sometimes a bold leap of faith. But as we've seen, the rewards can be tremendous: customer love, viral moments, and yes, business results (because when people love you, they buy you).