

The 'Scandinavian Ideal' in Design: Two Distinct Approaches to the Marketing of an Ideal

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The 'Scandinavian ideal' in design has, arguably, been established for over a century and has manifested itself in a variety of ways. In particular it has been associated with 'good design' in the domestic interior; whether relating to textiles, ceramics, glass or furniture. This paper investigates two apparently very different attempts to market this ideal across the world. The case studies are of the wholesale export Danish furniture industry in the period 1950-70 and of the 'Swedish' furniture retailers IKEA from the 1970s to date. This paper makes a contribution to the history of marketing through its research and analysis of the part played by these two approaches to the internationalising of the brand called Scandinavian design.

INTRODUCTION

The 'Scandinavian ideal' in design has, arguably, been established for over a century and has manifested itself in a variety of ways. This paper investigates two apparently very different attempts to market this ideal across the world. The case studies are of the wholesale export Danish furniture industry in the period 1950-70 and of the 'Swedish' furniture retailers IKEA from the 1970s to date.

It can be argued that 'Scandinavian design'¹ is like many other brands, in that it is the basis of an identity myth allowing individuals to personify the brand to fit their own biography and thus create a relationship. The particular Scandinavian ideal as a brand image has taken many years to develop and is an interesting mix of benign socialism, user-centred design, and elegant simplicity, delivered by an efficient business infrastructure with a global reach.

The interesting comparison of a group of manufacturers and a multi-national retail company may seem at first to be incongruous. However, this paper argues that they both have had a distinctive approach to the brand issue, have come to it somewhat differently, and with very diverse results, but the underlying tenets are remarkably similar to each other and to the original ideas that founded the values of Scandinavian design.

The issues associated with brand image and cultural branding, linked to marketing strategies across nations, are

two of the main planks of investigation. In the case of the Danish furniture industry, the brand was based on tradition, quality and brand exclusivity, sold through retailers who were design specialists in their own countries. The culture of design, although consumer-orientated and ergonomically considered, was based on a craft and industry approach that was heavily concerned with making medium and high-quality products for a growing market.

On the other hand, the democratisation that lay at the heart of the Scandinavian ideal may have been better served by IKEA. This was achieved through the globalization of the market place for home furnishings, by appealing to a mass market across a range of consumer profiles, and developing an organizational strategy that could deliver standardized products that were subtly adapted to local marketing conditions at very low prices. The selling of the 'Scandinavian ideal' to a worldwide market by the two case studies reveals a range of similarities and differences that reflect similar and differing marketing approaches. Both use the cultural brand idea of Scandinavia being the home of 'good design'. However, whereas the Danish image was of exclusivity and superior taste, IKEA has stressed democracy over elitism.

As a study of two business organisations this paper considers the impact of issues such as marketing and branding, consumer identity, the economics of change and the internationalisation of furniture selling.

Consumers' decisions to buy certain pieces of furniture depend not only on their physical function and appearance, but also on the more psychological and emotional connections attached to issues such as distinction, lifestyle, self-image, taste and fashion. These relate to the meanings that are attached to the furniture, the place of purchase, and the images they project. The marketing and branding of the furniture, which, at least to a certain degree, helps determine those meanings, supports them.

THE SCANDINAVIAN IDEAL

The social democratic parties that developed in the 1930s encouraged Swedes and Danes to transform their countries and their economies by creating wealth for the country and the individual therein through economic growth, social security systems and education. In terms of design this humanist approach was found in the conciliation

of design to peoples' needs. This was based on two approaches: for goods to be both fit for the people and goods that actually fitted the people. It is no surprise that the development of consumer ergonomics was a high priority for Scandinavian designers.

Sweden has had an interest in craft and design and its relation to people since the nineteenth century. As early as 1845 the *Svenska Slödföreningen* (Swedish Society of Craft and Industrial Design) established itself with the motto 'Swedish handicraft is the father of Swedish independence'. (Naylor 1990, 165) By the early twentieth century the intelligentsia had welcomed this attitude to a democratic but domestic ideal although manufacturers did not always immediately accept it.

Early definitions of the ideal came in 1919 when Gregor Paulson published an influential book entitled *More beautiful things for everyday use*, where he expressed the idea that well-designed and made goods should be available more widely.

Although Gregor Paulson promoted the benefits of standardisation and design for providing for the many, he saw that changes in social attitudes were the real key to providing a better everyday life for the majority. These attitudes were already noticed abroad. According to the English critic P. Morton Shand 'The Gothenburg Exhibition of 1923 revealed Sweden to an astonished world, not merely as an artistic nation but as almost the only one that really counted as far as design and craftsmanship was concerned'. (Naylor 1990, 171)

By 1930, the Stockholm Exhibition showed the world what Swedish design in particular was about- a restrained form of modernism linked to a variety of functionalism. Shand also wrote a review of the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930, extolling the virtues of Swedish grace. For him it meant '...austere, ice-clear neo-classical chastity ...simple charm...elegant...a line characterised by its slender, almost elfin grace...the very Swedish sweetness and light'. (Howe 1999, 99) In the same journal Sir Harold Werner wrote 'Two vigorous trends could now be seen in Swedish industrial art, which were to some extent in opposition to each other -one more traditional, emphasising handwork...the other a more modern style related to functionalism which concerned itself chiefly in the creation of quite new and good designs suitable for mass production and intended for a wider public....' (Naylor p. 182) 'Swedish grace'- whereby the everyday was made attractive and even graceful was soon commonplace in the applied arts.

The impact of these ideas was felt in the USA as well. Swedish Modern or a 'Movement towards sanity in design' was a term coined by a critic of the 1939 World's Fair in New York. The 1939 Fair introduced the style to the USA, but it was not until the 1950s that it reached wide popularity in the area of home furnishings. Indeed, later as a style it provided inspiration to many mass-production furniture designers in the USA and it established a furniture aesthetic,

which was embraced enthusiastically by the more fashion-conscious consumers. Whether called *Danish Modern*, *Swedish Modern* or *Scandinavian Modern*, the style is familiar to many American and European families who lived with it in the 1950s and 60s.

That this ideal was current and recognised was no coincidence. The characteristics of 'good design' that were defined by the then current thinking were reflected in the Scandinavian ideal. The definition of modern design in the 1950s was expressed by Edgar Kaufmann Jr who was responsible for the design collections at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In their booklet, *What is modern design?* Kaufmann wrote that 'modern design' should display the following principles:

- Fulfil the practical needs of modern life
- Express the spirit of our times
- Benefit from contemporary advances in the fine arts and pure sciences
- Take advantage of new materials and techniques and develop familiar ones
- Develop the forms, textures and colours that spring from the direct fulfilment of requirements in appropriate materials and techniques
- Express the purpose of an object, never making it seem to be what it is not
- Express the qualities and beauties of the materials used, never making the materials seem to be what they are not
- Express the methods used to make an object, not disguising mass production as handicraft or simulating a technique not used
- Blend the expression of utility, materials and process into a visually satisfactory whole
- It should be simple - its structure evident in its appearance, avoiding extraneous enrichment
- Master the machine for the service of people
- Serve as wide a public as possible, considering modest needs and limited costs no less challenging than the requirements of pomp and luxury

It should be no surprise that MoMa collected many Scandinavian objects for their permanent collection, as these precepts were very similar to the Scandinavian ideal.

It was not only design that was being sold. Elizabeth Gordon wrote an article in the 1954 issue of *House Beautiful* entitled 'Why the New Scandinavian Show is important to America'. The reason was both political and aesthetic. She asked 'Why are their home furnishings so well designed and so full of meaning for us? Because they are so well designed and so meaningful for the Scandinavians themselves. Aimed at Scandinavian home life, their designs have a natural beauty and usefulness for our own, for they are a deeply democratic people'. (Hawkins 1998,241) Although implicit in Kaufmann's analysis, here the political meaning of the ideal was expressed explicitly.

The first case study considers how Scandinavian countries educational establishments were set up to maintain a craft tradition that was linked to industrial production creating the so-called 'industrial arts'. The Danish furniture-making industry was perhaps the most successful of these. Their application of hand and machine work created an aesthetic that chimed with the humanistic results of collaborations between designers and craftspeople. Comfortable and homely, it linked a functional style with a craft tradition in a modern business, based on industrial production. However, by its very nature it had problems in democratising the production of high quality furniture and at the same time offering affordable products for the many. In contrast, the other case study considers the multi-national retailer IKEA, whose gospel of 'good design', which was developed in Sweden from the 1950s, has, since the 1970s, been preached across the world with the key being low prices and 'good design' for the masses.

MARKETING

Marketing activities are all those connected with recognizing the specific wants and needs of a particular market of customers, and then trying to satisfy those customers in a manner that is more than the competition offers. This process requires the sellers to undertake market research on their customers, to analyze their needs, and then make considered decisions about the product design, pricing, promotion and distribution

Another way of looking at marketing is the concept of variables in terms of price, product, promotion and place that produce a particular mix (Lilien, Kotler, Moorthy 1992). Price variables are self-evident but usually take one of four forms: profitability, volume, meeting competitors, and prestige. Promotion variables include advertising methods, sales promotion, selling and publicity. Place variables refer to channels of distribution and outlets. Finally, product variables include quality, range of models, packaging, service and brands. Although this paper will consider all these variables, it will focus on brands.

Brands

The definition of 'brand' that is used here is quite wide and embracing. Walter Landor says: simply put, a brand is a promise. By identifying and authenticating a product or service it delivers a pledge of satisfaction and quality (Aaker 1996). Taking this a bit further, David Aaker gives an explanation of brand equity as: 'a set of assets (or liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service' (Aaker 1996). This definition links the more tangible aspects of a brand such as its name, logo, or identifying visual marks, with the intangible ones such as embodied values. The issues associated with brand image

and cultural branding, linked to strategies across nations, are two of the main planks of investigation.

Brands can also fall into two categories; private and public. While private brands are the property of a business, public brands are part of the popular or traditional culture of a country or region. The brands investigated here cross this divide by representing both aspects.

Branding is therefore in part an identity system made up of the product, the organisation, the symbol and the embodied attributions or values.

Brand as Product

The brand as product offers an association with a product type that supplies benefits such as a particular function or an emotional support. It also offers particular quality and value assurances, which are often associated with particular uses and users. In addition the product may have links with its country of origin.

Brand as Symbol

The particular trademark of label that is associated with a brand is often crucial as a visual identifying mark. Elevating symbols to the status of being part of the identity reflects their potential power. Aaker highlights three types of symbols: visual imagery, metaphors and the brand heritage.

Brand as Person

The brand as 'person' is much more than the product's physical attributes. The identifying aspects such as trust, fun, casual, formal, intellectual offer an attitude that reflects the consumers' choice and reinforced their self image. Aaker cites three ways a brand personality can create a stronger brand: 1) create a self-expressive benefit that becomes a vehicle for customers to express their own personalities; 2) form the basis of a relationship between customers and the brand (in the same way that human personalities affect relationships between people), and 3) help communicate a product attribute and thus, contribute to a functional benefit.

Brand as Organisation

The brand is often the sum of the company's operations. The attributes and ethos of the company and its personification are reflected and supported by the internal structures of the company, the staff, and the operating systems they employ.

Put another way, in all brands there is a 'value proposition' that offers the consumer a range of benefits both tangible and intangible. These include functional

benefits and attributes, emotional benefits, feelings and the opportunity for self-expression.

Cultural and National Brands

The 'country-of-origin effect' describes the consequences that the national image of the producing country has upon the buyers' quality perception of the product. However, this notion has now developed towards the concept of 'country-of-brand'. A particular country's representation can contribute to the customers' perceptions of brands that originated from there. This image can be used by companies to represent their products even if they are not produced there. (Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2001).

Associations between industries and particular companies with their country of origin are a well-known feature of branding. Swiss watches, German auto engineering, and French fashions are all examples of this link. Definitions of brands link ideals and objects. For example, the importance of brands is that although they refer to goods and services they are really a symbolic construct that relies on intangible perceptions of the provided values. In the case studies here, the change from country of origin (Denmark) to country of brand (Sweden) can also be noted.

Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, and Murali (2005) have created a model where their conceptualisation of country image is as a multi-dimensional construct. They found that country image is a three-dimensional concept consisting of cognitive, affective, and conative components. In their model, product beliefs refer to consumers' beliefs about a product's intrinsic characteristics such as quality and reliability. Product evaluation, on the other hand, refers to consumers' attitudes toward the product and is considered in terms of pride of ownership, liking, and intention to purchase. Furthermore, the model hypothesizes a simultaneous processing of country image and product beliefs regardless of consumers' level of awareness. In addition, the particular country image is expected to influence product beliefs and hence to have an additional indirect effect on product evaluation. Overall, the results showed that when a country's image has a strong affective component, its direct influence on product evaluations is stronger than its influence on product beliefs. Alternatively, when a country's image has a strong cognitive component, its direct influence on product evaluations is smaller than its influence on product beliefs.

(Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, Murali, 2005)

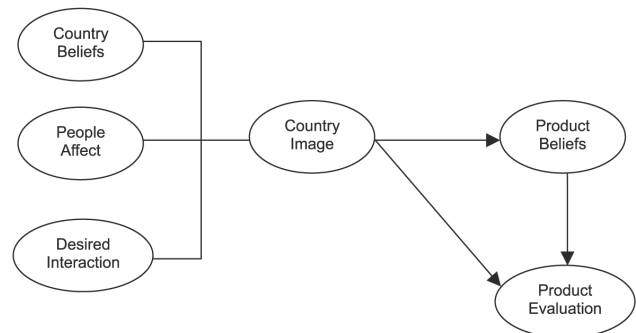


FIGURE 1. CATALOGUE COVER FOR 'DESIGN IN SCANDINAVIA' EXHIBITION 1954

The Danish furniture industry brand itself was rather nebulous as it was based on an idea that never had a particular trade mark, logo or brand image as such. It was based on an image of tradition, quality and exclusivity, which was sold by a range of manufacturers through a variety of retailers who were design specialists, though not particularly associated with each other. The Danish furniture products were based on a 'craft and industry' approach, which was concerned with making quality products for an exclusive market, thus bolstering product belief. In addition it represented an acceptance of intrinsic characteristics such as liking and self-reflection through purchase, so a high status was given to the affective nature of the product evaluation process.

In contrast, the democratisation that has been asserted to be at the core of the 'Scandinavian ideal' is also apparently key to IKEA's activities. The fact that IKEA have encouraged cognitive, affective and conative behavior has clearly resulted in great success. An awareness and understanding of IKEA's approach to marketing and buying furniture through the catalogue is the starting point of the process. Then through the effort to visit the store, select, take home and then assemble the furniture the affective and conative aspects engage product beliefs. The connections with Sweden and its country image then allow for a high degree of product belief.

The selling of the 'Scandinavian ideal' to a worldwide market by the two case studies reveals a range of similarities and differences that reflect similar and differing marketing approaches. Both promote the design elements of their products, both promote the culture of the country of origin, and both promote the respective values of their products. However, in terms of place and promotion, the IKEA catalogue, out-of-town warehouse-style display areas, and a major input by the customer into the purchasing process are compared to the Danish sales through selected high-street showrooms with prices and service levels that reflect superiority. The major distinction in the supply process is that the IKEA goods are packed for take away self-assembly, and the Danish furniture was fully assembled and serviced (although actually often shipped KD). The supply and origins of the merchandise in the case of the Danish industry was a source of pride and a marker of quality. In

many cases the goods were likely to become heirlooms. In contrast, IKEA source their products to suit the price point, subject to quality control, and are probably more fashion conscious.

However, both use the cultural/national brand idea of Scandinavia as being the home of good design, but IKEA stress democracy over elitism. This homogeneity or standardisation of taste as opposed to the selectiveness offered by the Danish example, perhaps demonstrates the price to be paid for a democratic ideal.

Danish Furniture Industry

The Danish wood furniture industry created a distinctive brand for itself linked to a wider design narrative called 'Danish modern'. This encompassed a range of household goods including kitchenware, textiles, floor coverings accessories, and furniture.

The brand was distinguished by a number of factors that were directly linked to the 'Scandinavian ideal' already mentioned. Firstly there was an investment in the brand and the stores that sold it. The Danish Society for Arts and Crafts began to consider export markets in early 1945. They decided to concentrate on the USA as there was an established interest in Scandinavian goods, and there was already a market for modern furniture and a demand for discernibly high-quality products. Exportation was assisted by the Danish Society of Arts and Crafts, the Danish Federation of Small and Medium sized enterprises, and Den Permanente (a permanent sales exhibition space in Copenhagen) in cooperation with the Confederation of Danish Industries and the Danish Foreign Ministry. (Hansen 2006) The Danish furniture brand as a symbol is nicely illustrated by the Federal Trade Commission's Ruling that terms such as 'Danish' and 'Danish modern' could only be applied to furniture made in Denmark (Hansen 2006).

Secondly the industry invested in the supply chain and nurtured its relations with customers as opposed to simply trading with them. There was often something of the idea of collecting pieces of furniture that reflected the individual as part of an interior decorating scheme. Thirdly they promoted the goods through advertising, cultural exhibitions and promotions. Fourthly they developed brand integrity through the idea of quality, heirloom etc. Finally the Danish industry promoted a brand culture around its internal organisation, production and distribution system.

The brand of Danish modern encompassed a particular way of thinking about design, which influenced its reception. This image included designs based on tradition; manufacture linked to craftsmanship, a limited quantity of production, and a sub-conscious link to the general principles of Scandinavian design and culture. In this regard it might be seen as a third way – a middle path between tradition and extreme modernity. The Danish historian Søren Mørch (1982) mentions how the rather poor raw materials have been optimized in a wealthy, agricultural

tradition “*with an overwhelming attention to home, family and everyday life*”, and established an understanding of designed objects as enrichments of common life far from luxury. (Lentz and Munch 2003)

The Danish furniture brand as product also had a number of benefits relating to function, quality and value. These related to the alliance between architects (designers) and cabinetmakers who were able to produce furniture that was the 'acceptable face of modernism'.

The branding of the Danish furniture industry had begun in the 1930s but it was not until the late 1940s that it really took off. A report on Danish design from 1950 in the British trade press noted that “[Danish] producers have risen to great heights of originality ... fine design, subtle detail, lightness and grace, fine craftsmanship and superfine finish are the dominating characteristics of the great mass of modern Danish furniture’. (Howe 1999, 99)

This ideal was promoted through advertisements and editorials in American magazines. For example, magazines such as *Interiors*, *Arts and Architecture*, *House Beautiful* and *House and Garden* all carried material that promoted Scandinavian designs. In 1961 an article in *Playboy* magazine described the Scandinavians as loving ‘the feel and look and warmth and weight of wood.... And the Scandinavians love the idea of hand craftsmanship; they exploit the joys of handwork in gently modulated, sculptured wood surfaces, the turns and joints made poignant by changes in grain markings’ (Hansen 2006). Interestingly, this brand ideal permeated across a range of products from relatively cheap furniture to high-cost limited productions

The idea of an original’ designed by an architect and made by a craftsman was a very alluring proposition to many. Lazette van Houten commented in 1954 that an increasing ‘number of young men and women [felt] drawn to the work of particular designers. They asked for them by name, taking a purely aesthetic pleasure in a silhouette, a construction detail, and a recognizable form. These [were] the middle-class young, the kids who recognize[d] a Gauguin or Matisse when they [saw] one but who could never hope to own an original. They [could] however own ...chairs and tables originating in the workshops of craftsmen artists’ (Hansen 2006).

The association with the user’s emotional and physical demands was clearly key to the success of the brand. By demonstrating that these products had a pedigree, were well crafted or engineered, reflected the human-centred design ideals of Scandinavia and were usually made from warm and attractive timbers, they made a bond between the product, the brand and the consumer.

The promotion of the ‘Scandinavian ideal’ as a brand was an important aspect of this in the USA and parts of Europe. One of the most successful promotions was through a travelling exhibition staged in museums. The link between the museum venue and the products on display was important to the perception of the ideal. This exhibition,

'Design in Scandinavia' toured twenty-two cities in the United States and two in Canada during 1954-1957. It is interesting to see that for the Danish contingent it was: 'essential that Danish Arts and Crafts be exhibited in a museum setting...because it can only have the beneficial effect of enhancing appreciation of the quality and originality of our products', products that 'could never compete with the American market in terms of prices'. (Davies 1999, 67)

The personification of a brand is created by more than the product's attributes. It is what the brand represents that becomes important. In the case of Danish furniture it is elements such as trustworthiness, solidity and strength but with warmth and a sense of security. In the introduction to the catalogue of the British 1968 exhibition 'Two Centuries of Danish Design', none other than the then Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, (the venue for the exhibition), John Pope-Hennessy, said: The Danish design reflects the fibres of a genuine national character. It is sober, rational and honest; it admires modest simplicity, just as it eschews either the sensational or the grossly luxurious'. (Danish Society of Arts and Crafts 1968, 7)

Finally, the identity of a brand is created as much through organisations, retailers and staff as other attributes. The Danish furniture industry was initially fortunate in this respect, but it was also a factor in their relative decline.

An article in the *Danish Foreign Office Journal* where Viggo Møller claimed that the Danish furniture in 1960 had: '... attained a level which places home furnishings of functional design and high aesthetic quality within the means of the average consumer. Such a "social-aesthetic" balance is an important asset to a people'. He concluded that Denmark with its social democratic welfare state was indeed contributing in making the democratic *folkemøbler* – people's furniture – such a huge success. (Sommer 2006) Despite this up-beat approach, other voices complained that 'The art of selling is valued higher than the art of creation'. (A. Karlsen in Hansen 2006)

In the long run, the inability to adapt to new post-modern design ideas meant that the industry changed and the brand lost value in the later 1960s. This did not mean the industry collapsed; rather it changed direction and in 1992 was ranked as the world's third largest exporter of wooden furniture (Maskell, 1998,105). Ironically, the most successful Danish furniture producer today is Tvilum-Scanbirk. The American Masco Corporation owns it, and it produces furniture where the price is the single, most important competitive parameter. It does not have a brand of its own but produces furniture to retail chains such as IKEA.

IKEA and Sweden

Unlike the Danish industry, which was a combination of manufacturers loosely working to the same goal, IKEA is the vision of one man- Ingvar Kamprad. This brand

narrative is based on the idea of a brand being a belief system which has a creation story; it has developed a creed and icons; it has rituals and special words, it also has a counter tradition and a leader (Hanlon 2006, 6) All these features identified by Hanlon make IKEA a super brand. IKEA has a creation story; the young founder and his mail order business run from the family farm in rural Sweden. IKEA has developed a creed 'a better everyday life for the majority of people' and icons such as their logo and the large blue shed; it has rituals that visitors perform in the store and special words that link Scandinavian names to products, and it also has a counter tradition of anti-IKEA web sites and a leader who is still spiritually very much in the business. In addition to these factors, the connection with Sweden and the associate design traditions mentioned above, have propelled IKEA to the forefront of home furnishings.

There was one particular development that was to have an impact far beyond its initial origins and was one of the keys to IKEA's success. This was the development of flat-pack production systems in Sweden and Denmark in the 1940s. This system produced economies of scale and transport but required careful engineering and design to ensure that the product could be simply and safely assembled in the home. Although flat pack and pre-fabricated furniture has a long history, the serious application of the principles to mass production were only applied in the 1950s, and of course became one of the key marketing tools of IKEA. The company have now enshrined a myth that they 'discovered' the flat-pack approach and have taken it on in their publicity as their own invention.

IKEA and the Swedish/Scandinavian Brand

The link to Sweden is of great importance to the IKEA brand. IKEA's corporate web site identifies the values that characterize the business alongside an image of a rustic stone wall:

'The stone wall is a powerful symbol for the grit and determination of the people of Småland, and it helps us at IKEA to remember our humble origins. The harsh conditions that Småland folk have traditionally had to struggle with – fields strewn with boulders and thin soil providing meagre yields for farmers – have forced the people in this part of Sweden to live on their wits. It has made them determined and tenacious, but also humble. These are qualities that live on in today's IKEA. We still use many local sayings and expressions in our day-to-day work: "Never say never" for example, is a rallying call not to give up – a positive determination to reach the goals we have set for ourselves.'

This apparently direct connection with the country of origin is also linked with one of the other key planks of IKEA's marketing approach, which is the idea of democratisation. This significant IKEA message has its

roots in the Swedish origins of IKEA. In 1976, Kamprad, the founder of IKEA wrote a manifesto entitled: A Furniture Dealer's Testament: 'To create a better everyday life for the many...by offering a wide range of well designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them'. (Torekull 1999) In the same place he wrote: 'A well-known Swedish industrialist politician has said that IKEA has meant more for the process of democratisation than many political measures put together.' There is a local proverb that says 'if it is true that the *folkhemmet* "the People's House" - in fact the Welfare State - was founded by Tage Erlander, Prime Minister from 1946 to 1969, it is IKEA that supplied it with furniture...'. Sweden and its social model is the core of the identity of the Group. To this extent it appears that IKEA has developed the brand of Sweden as much as Sweden has developed the IKEA brand.

This linking is achieved by obvious connections such as the national colours and serving food specialities but also through a subtle link that while creating goods for a mass market has apparent links with the traditions of good design and equality. The self-assembly concept is interesting, as it required input and creativity from the consumer. IKEA sell the ideas as the compliment to lower prices. They say 'we do our bit, you do your bit, together we lower prices. However, it is more than that: the creative aspects of self-assembly (even with its associated problems of reading instructions, missing parts etc) are encouraging the customer to actually make an investment of time and effort.

At the core of IKEA's business, there is a wide range of functional products, well designed and offered at low prices. Ingvar Kamprad called this product mix "our identity". It is composed of 10,000 objects that are sold everywhere in the world and must correspond to the concept of 'universal products answering to concrete needs'. For the design briefs, a price that is acceptable to the majority of people is the major determining factor. The second criterion is the style; the third, the type of client targeted; and the fourth is functionality.

Returning to Kaufmanns list of attributes of modern design made in 1950, it is remarkable how they are still in most cases reflected in IKEA's products. In particular, the goods fulfil the practical needs of modern life and serve as wide a public as possible.

Brand as product

The IKEA association with a particular product type has developed over the years it has been in business. Although as late as 1965 they were offering reproductions of eighteenth-century furniture, the main thrust has been for functional affordable furniture, which translates to a version of Scandinavian modernism. The goods are identified as Scandinavian by the names applied, although they are very often sourced elsewhere.

The retail stores run by IKEA also have links with Sweden as a brand and more broadly with Scandinavian lifestyles. The merchandise is often labelled with the tag 'IKEA of Sweden' and the ubiquitous meatballs for example are just one of a growing range of food products associated with Sweden. The naming of the products is also a similar link. Upholstered furniture has Swedish place names as model identifiers; Beds and wardrobes have Norwegian place names while carpets have Danish place names. Interestingly chairs have Scandinavian masculine personal names and textiles have feminine personal names.

In addition, and similar to the Danish industry, the designers are often identified with their products. Interestingly, these people are not usually famous architects or well-known names, but their photographs and statements are found in the catalogue.

Brand as Symbol

The IKEA trademark or label could hardly be more distinctive. The name is made up from the initials of the founder (IK), his farm (E) Elmtaryd and the county (A) Agunnaryd in South Sweden where he lived. The national colours of Sweden, yellow and blue, are exploited in the logo and publicity of the company. Apart from the logo, the brand is symbolised by its catalogue. With over 160 million copies produced annually this is the company's major promotional tool, and has been since the 1950s. It is an interesting part of the IKEA approach to retailing in as much as it is the invitation to the customer (or in IKEA parlance a visitor) to visit the store.

Brand as Person

The IKEA brand has developed its attributes of value, fun, and informality to create benefits that become vehicles for customers to express their own personalities. This works particularly well in bedroom, kitchen and office planning, where the consumer can design their own spaces based on their needs. This forms the basis of a relationship between customers and the brand which is reinforced in store when the plan is discussed with staff.

Ikea's brand image is often associated with youth and humour. In traditional media - and in particular in its TV and cinema spots - IKEA adopts on the one hand a humoristic and sometimes provoking style and, on the other, an aspect based on aesthetics and inspiration. With its 'stop being so English' campaign in Great Britain, 'stop being so snobbish' in Switzerland and 'America is a big country, someone has to furnish it, IKEA has positioned itself as a popular and well-known brand in its new markets.

Brand as Organisation

The core identity of IKEA can be associated with the Swedish ideals of the 1930s expressed by Werner above. In

the catalogues the company have consistently featured variations on the phrases: 'Functional design, good quality materials, and most important of all amazing low prices. 'We call it Democratic Design ... Democratic design is all about making well designed functional furniture that everyone can afford. It's one of IKEA's founding principles and its application can be found in every item we sell'.

Marketing the Scandinavian ideal as 'democratic design' has been very successful. (In addition, though the organisation has been run in a 'democratic' manner to a degree). The processes for achieving these goals are painstaking. At the product development stage, the price point is set to provide high value at affordable prices. To achieve this IKEA worked with their suppliers, who are usually long-term partners or subsidiary companies. Distribution is also a key factor in the organisation's success. Distribution centres have been established to ensure the route from supplier to customer is as direct, cost effective and environmentally friendly as possible. The store locations are 'out of town' and therefore offer cheaper rents, better parking and easier accessibility.

For IKEA the 'value proposition' is crucial to the business and to the marketing role in particular. The value proposition that IKEA offer is partly based on the customer creating their own value so that IKEA mobilises them to act for themselves. The organisation and its value creation is neatly analysed by Normann and Ramirez: 'Customers are also suppliers (of time, labor, information and transportation), suppliers are also customers (of IKEA's business and technical services), and IKEA itself is not so much a retailer as the central star in a constellation of services, goods, design, management, support and even entertainment'. (Normann and Ramirez, 1993)

The internationalisation of IKEA has not always been simply a matter of bringing the brand to town. The entry into the American market was made without much study of local taste or experience. The general feeling was that if it worked in Europe it should work in the USA. Problems encountered were based on a number of differences that eventually necessitated change. Americans like big beds; Swedish designs were narrow. American customers favoured matching suites; IKEA did not sell them. Glasses were too small for ice, and cupboards were not deep enough for pizza plates. Adaptation was necessary and resulted in over 30% of the product range being redesigned for the American market. IKEA changed some of the other parts of the marketing mix too. Goods were initially imported but this led to delays and higher costs, so half of the American market requirements are now made in the USA. Subtle change to store layout, delivery and returns policies indicate that even IKEA has to make concessions to local needs, while at the same time maintaining integrity with the original ideal.

CONCLUSION

The success of the marketing of IKEA is found in its ability to shift between various forms of class-associated signs. It can be considered as a lower-class thrift store due to its cheap self-assembly furniture. It exists as a sign of middle class consumption, driven by its image as a high street brand. Most importantly it carries signs of elite or high culture due to its repeated emphasis on design and its Scandinavian origins. (Rosenberg, 2005)

If brands are the basis of an identity myth that allows individuals to personify the brand to fit their own biography and create a relationship, then home furnishings are at the core of the process. It can be argued that IKEA have broadened the market share that was initially established by the Scandinavian furniture manufacturers, so that the IKEA slogan: 'To create a better everyday life for the majority of the people' truly reflects the original ideal of the pioneers in Scandinavian democracy through design.

NOTES

1. Scandinavian design encompasses work from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The case studies are from Denmark and Sweden, but they represent the wider 'ideal' that can be found in all four countries.

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