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Culture , Design : Two Distinct Approaches to the Marketing Management

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(Abstract)

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 accross 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.

Topics

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SCANDINAVIAN DESIGN

BACKGROUND

Scandinavians are exceptionally gifted in design. They are world famous for their inimitable, democratic designs which bridge the gap between crafts and industrial production.

- They share a common economic and cultural history and linguistic roots (except for Finland). They each possess a unique character that reflects their different geographies and environmental conditions. More than anywhere else in the world, designers in Scandinavia have instigated and nurtured a democratic approach to design that seeks a social ideal and the enhancement of the quality of life through appropriate and affordable products and technology.
- Scandinavian designers, in their pursuit of affordable, beautiful, yet useful household objects have historically adopted an approach to design where-by products are developed within a humanist interpretation of the formal, technical and aesthetic principles associated with Modernism. For the majority of Scandinavian people, design is recognized, not only as an integral part of daily life, but also as a means of effecting social change.
- In comparison to the rest of Western Europe and the United States, industrialization came relatively late to Scandinavia and, therefore, the handcraft traditions of each of the countries remained in a far better state of preservation. By marrying these age-old craft skills to modern design practice, Scandinavian designers were able to produce high-quality objects that were eminently suited to industrial manufacture. During the 20th century, Scandinavian craft skills and design sensibilities became a dominant influence on the development of modern design and came to epitomize the whole notion of “good design”.



- **Whether a Scandinavian object is mass-produced in a factory or lovingly handcrafted in a specialist workshop, it will almost certainly express the Scandinavian concept of ‘hygge’ – a Danish word that implies a very special charm, a tender and comfortable feeling. Hygge can apply to people, things, or surroundings that give a sense of joy and well-being.**
- **With the increasing complexities and acceleration of modern life, Scandinavian design continues to offer a haven of timeless simplicity that provides both physical comfort and emotional calm, while at the same time proffering an ethical approach to design that will become more and more pertinent as we face the increasingly worrying environmental and social challenges of the future. Spurred on by the pursuit of a social ideal, Scandinavian designers have consistently provided satisfying design solutions that fulfil both practical and aesthetic requirements, and which are tangible realizations of the five countries’ shared utopian dream.**

THE SCANDINAVIAN IDEAL IN DESIGN

SCANDINAVIAN DESIGN

- 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.
- 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 highquality 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.

SCANDINAVIAN DESIGN

The Principles of modern design

• 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.

- 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 handcraft 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.



FINLAND DESIGN

The Cultural and National Brands

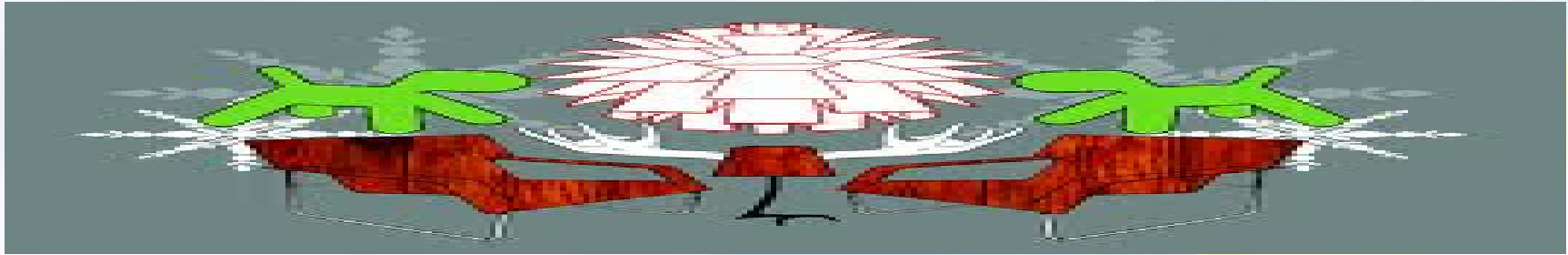
- The 'country-of-origin effect' describes the consequences that the national image of the producing country has upon the buyers' quality perception of the product. However, this notion has now developed towards the concept of 'country-of-brand'. A particular country's representation can contribute to 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.
- 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.**
- **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 business 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.**

The Business Philosophy and design for Danish wood 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.
- Secondly the industry invested in the supply chain and nurtured its relations with customers as opposed to simply trading with them.
- 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.
- 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 Business Philosophy and design for IKEA

- 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 .
- 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.
- 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)



Conclusions



- **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.

***Thank you for your
attention!!***