

<CN>Chapter 7

<CT>Brand IKEA in a Global Cultural Economy: A Case Study</CT>

<AU>Susie Khamis</AU>

<H1>Abstract

<NP>This chapter considers the global marketing of IKEA, the world's largest furniture and furnishings retailer, and an icon of contemporary global capitalism. Known primarily for its accessible, Swedish design, IKEA benefits from both the growing appeal of urban, apartment living, for which its design strengths are suited, as well as positive consumer perceptions of Swedish products. This chapter considers how IKEA sustains its brand image across increasingly diverse markets, particularly in regions that are culturally dissimilar to its main sales base – Western Europe. At stake is how, through marketing, IKEA articulates its brand identity to specific consumer groups, in ways that spotlight the brand's core values. Since IKEA does not adapt its product range for different markets, these more local initiatives are telling insights into how IKEA's consumers differ – even though IKEA's product range does not. This, in turn, highlights the degree to which global brands maintain their commercial dominance without necessarily bending to local conditions or preferences and tempers a tendency in consumer culture theory (CCT) to understate the extent to which brands successfully deal with consumer diversity.

<H1>Keywords

IKEA, branding, Swedish design, globalisation, marketing

<H1>Introduction

<NP>Since 1943 IKEA has grown into a multinational retail behemoth. With over 330 stores in 38 countries, IKEA is the world's largest furniture and furnishings retailer. Central to its marketing is the notion of accessible Swedish style, with innovative and functional design at low- to mid-range price points. These are achieved through various cost efficiencies – most famously, flat-packing and self-

assembly. As IKEA expands beyond Western Europe and North America though, and particularly in Middle Eastern and BRICs markets (Brazil, Russia, India and China), its operations have been tested. As IKEA enters regions that are culturally distinctive and/or politically volatile, certain challenges emerge. This chapter considers IKEA's marketing strategies within this context of global expansion, takes stock of how the brand benefits from specific contemporary phenomena, and identifies branding risks therein. By virtue of its size, scope and popularity, IKEA warrants such analysis: in the fiscal year 2010, in the middle of the global financial crisis, IKEA's sales grew by 7.7 per cent to 23.1 billion euros, and net profit increased by 6.1 per cent to 2.7 billion euros; 80 per cent of these sales were in crisis-hit Europe (Euromonitor International, 2011, p.4). Moreover, while IKEA continues to dominate the furniture sector in Europe, its expansion around the world points to a certain consonance between consumer groups in key global markets, and conveys dominant trends in contemporary popular marketing.

<TEXT>The challenge for IKEA is to address diverse markets in terms that are locally attractive, yet stay true to the brand's core identity. To this end, IKEA's marketing rests on two distinct features. First is shrewd appraisal and exploitation of several global trends. Specifically, and around the world, there is the growing number of people for whom the IKEA style has both aesthetic and pragmatic appeal, for reasons to be detailed shortly. Second though, and despite its presence in such geographically and culturally disparate markets, IKEA products are identical around the world; there is little variation in the IKEA range, or indeed the IKEA 'experience'. As such, IKEA appears an ostensibly global brand – standardised, predictable and bereft of local nuance. However, while several constants permeate the entire IKEA system, there is evidence of local inflection. This appears in IKEA's various promotional materials in different markets. While this does not disavowal the uniformity of the IKEA product – the range is fixed, from Sydney to Seoul, Bangkok to Brussels – it sheds light on how a global brand contrives local relevance. The brand's core identity does not bend (affordable and practical Swedish design), but the way IKEA frames and delivers this message does.

In its modest concessions to local interests, agendas or conditions, IKEA's marketing problematises one of the most salient aspects of consumer culture theory (CTT): the degree to which consumers are so often cast (and over-represented) as empowered, self-actualising agents, free to decode marketing messages and appropriate consumer goods in ways that are unpredictable, autonomous and inspired (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Thompson, Arnould and Giesler, 2013, p.155). As seminal as this 'cultural turn' in consumer research has been over the last twenty years (Fitchett, Patsiaouras and Davies, 2014, p.501) the IKEA case study implies a 'catching up' on the part of big business, insofar as diversity and difference in the global cultural economy is absorbed into the marketing arsenal and reconfigured as a postmodern branding resource.

<H1>Origins and Expansion: From Sweden to the World

<NP>The name IKEA is based on the initials of the company's founder, Ingvar Kamprad (b.1926), and those of the small farm village in Sweden where he grew up: Elmtaryd, Agunnaryd. Kamprad displayed entrepreneurial skill from a young age, and rode his bicycle to houses in his village selling matches, fish, pencils and Christmas-tree decorations. In 1943, with a cash gift from his father, Kamprad created IKEA. Initially selling small items like pens, picture frames and nylon stockings, Kamprad was drawn to the work of mid-century design luminaries like Charles Eames, Arne Jacobsen and Russel Wright (Sculley, 2004, p.16) – hence IKEA's move into furniture in 1948. Relying on manufacturers in forests close to his home, Kamprad was able to keep the prices relatively low so that, by 1951, and in the brand's first catalogue, IKEA was selling just furniture. In 1953 Kamprad opened the company's first showroom in Älmhult; in 1958 this became the site of the first store. At 6700 square feet, it was the largest furniture display in Scandinavia, and a hint of the 'big box' approach that would eventually characterise every IKEA store around the world.

<TEXT>According to Jonsson and Foss, the global expansion of IKEA is marked by three distinct phases (Jonsson and Foss, 2011, pp.1085–1089). First was a period of 'explorative internationalisation' and 'trial & error' as various markets

were tested between 1963 and the late 1970s. The second, between 1980 and the mid-1990s, was one of 'rigid replication', or 'exploitative internationalisation'. The third, since the mid-1990s, has been one of 'flexible replication'. This chapter is most concerned with this most recent phase. On the one hand, the 'flexibility' Jonsson and Foss identify acknowledges the pragmatics of multinational commerce, whereby staff in headquarters must liaise with counterparts and affiliates around the world and tiptoe around massive operational differences (legally, politically and so on). However, the 'flexibility' required at this logistical or bureaucratic level is a given, even in a post-GATT context. Less certain is 'flexibility' of product, or material adjustments for local preferences.

This inquiry surfaces when one considers IKEA's most recent forays into culturally distinctive regions. In terms of retail value, Western Europe remains IKEA's main region, and most of its sales (69 per cent) are there (Euromonitor International, 2011, p.11). However, its expansion into the Middle East, Eastern Europe, China, India, North America and Latin America raises pertinent and pressing questions. Specifically: to what extent does IKEA integrate differences in local customs, climates and living arrangements into its design process? Put simply, for almost five decades, IKEA's international expansion has involved the repetition of a format; there is a degree of local responsiveness to different conditions, but this manifests in mostly marketing, operational and/or managerial terms. The hallmarks of the IKEA brand, and in particular the premium placed on Scandinavian design at accessible prices, remain. For this reason, IKEA seems impervious to the sorts of pressures placed on other global brands, whereby local responsiveness entails some manipulation or amendment to the actual product: IKEA's range actually varies little across diverse regions. On the one hand, this reflects the general market appeal of Scandinavian design, as well as specific global trends that IKEA benefits from; on the other, it underscores pressures to maximise economies of scale and maintain the price-point advantage for which IKEA is famous. In this way, IKEA tests both the cultural and commercial logics of 'glocalisation' (Robertson, 1995), the process whereby globally distributed commodities are adapted for local markets.

<H1>Scandinavian Design

<NP>Central to the IKEA brand is the value of Scandinavian design – a concept based on real consumer perceptions. Ana Roncha found consumers regard Nordic (Scandinavian) brands like Bang & Olufsen, Voss and Lego as symbolic of good design, functionality and superior quality. Focusing specifically on H&M, BoConcept and IKEA, she identified a long-term association between the Scandinavian region and particular connotations that have translated favourably in retail terms. Roncha dates this phenomenon from the 1950s to the 1970s, when Scandinavian design was distinguished at world fairs and expos by an aesthetic of purity, simplicity and democratic principles (Roncha, 2008, pp.23–25). In the early twenty-first century, this image has hardened and strengthened – Scandinavian design is widely seen as modern, ergonomic and innovative, with efficient use of natural, appropriate materials.

<TEXT>IKEA not only benefits from the favourable associations of Scandinavian design, but makes its Swedish origin a key part of its marketing. This surfaces at almost every point of contact between IKEA and its customers. It also informs the set of 100 core practices – what IKEA terms ‘proven solutions’ – to which every store must strictly adhere. For instance, the blue and yellow of the Swedish national flag are used for the IKEA brand. This is seen most clearly in shop signage (unchanged since the mid-1970s) and the store’s shopping bags. The entire IKEA range of furniture and furnishings is designed in-house, and most often by Scandinavian designers, a point stressed by product names that are almost always in a Scandinavian language. These are showcased on a shop floor that must include four living-room styles: ‘Scandinavian’, ‘Country’, ‘Modern’ and ‘Young Swedish’. In turn, traffic flow is orchestrated to encourage customers to view IKEA products in these idealised settings. All stores also have a restaurant with virtually the same menu of traditional Swedish food, most famously Swedish meatballs. On the basis of this alone, IKEA is now Sweden’s second largest food exporter. So, and at almost every stage, the IKEA brand is overlaid with Swedish identity. One visitor to the 43,000-square metre IKEA store in Beijing even said: ‘It makes you feel like you’re abroad’, while another, a 22 year-

old student, added: 'I'm still living in a dorm, but I want my future home to look like this' (quoted in Euromonitor International, 2010, n.p.). In 2009, a theatre company in Hamburg even staged an opera in honour of IKEA called 'Wunder von Schweden' ('Miracle from Sweden'), a biography of the 'furniture messiah' – founder Ingvar Kampred – set to Swedish folk tunes. As it happens, Germany is IKEA's strongest market and accounts for 15 per cent of sales (*The Economist*, 2011, p.67).

<H1>Global Presence

<NP>As the prevalence, salience and market dominance of IKEA beyond European markets grows, the brand is a symbolic icon of global commerce. In 2009 the business news agency Bloomberg introduced the 'IKEA Index'. Following the logic of the 'Big Mac Index', created by *The Economist* magazine in 1986, the 'IKEA Index' measures the purchasing power of consumers around the world (or at least those countries where IKEA is sold) by comparing what they pay for IKEA's Billy bookcase: specifically, the white, flat-packed model that is 80cm by 202cm. A staple of the IKEA range for 30 years, with over 41 million units sold; here the Billy bookcase becomes a barometer of local currency strengths and exchange rates (Sorensen, 2011, p.44). If nothing else, this says more about the global presence of the IKEA brand than the design merits of the bookcase: as ubiquitous as the McDonald's Big Mac, it speaks to both the expansionary impulse of the IKEA brand, and the commercial logic of a generic product.

<TEXT>The fact that a similarly conceived 'Big Mac Index' preceded the 'IKEA Index' is telling. Few brands represent contemporary capitalism as emphatically as McDonalds, at least in terms of popular culture, or indeed academic literature. In his seminal work *The McDonaldization of Society* (1993), George Ritzer made a compelling case that McDonalds, as the archetypal global brand, embodies and enacts the dynamics of a thoroughly rationalised society. For Ritzer, a 'McDonaldized' society aims for streamlined management. It prioritises efficiency, calculability, predictability and control, but produces systems (from fast-food and fashion to education and health care) that are increasingly

disconnected from human agency, endeavour and emotion. Ritzer highlights the irrationality of these 'rational' systems: in the quest for order, they override the individual. While Ritzer's thesis critiqued not just one brand but also a widespread drift towards a particular style of management, McDonald's remains a convenient point of reference. With worldwide recognition of its 'Golden Arches', McDonald's is one of several brands that seemingly enjoy global dominance, and have triumphed on the rational/irrational terms described by Ritzer: KFC, Starbucks, Coca-Cola and so on.

As the world's most dominant brand of furniture and furnishings, IKEA is as emblematic of a homogenised, pre-fabricated society as McDonald's. In David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999), for example, the unnamed, disaffected protagonist, played by Edward Norton, walks through an apartment furnished almost entirely with IKEA items. The apartment, a facsimile of the IKEA catalogue, is the stylistic expression of his inner emptiness; the sub-text is that the IKEA experience only succeeds in folding consumers into an unvarying, uninspiring identikit. At stake here then is the globalisation of this IKEA system – and what it reveals about both IKEA's operations and consumers around the world. What emerges is a brand that exhibits the cultural geometry of global corporatism: loyal to a narrow set of practices and products, but also affected by differences between various consumer markets. Not unlike other global brands then, IKEA has had to negotiate these differences.

<H1>Dealing With Difference

<NP>As IKEA expands into more markets, its negotiation of either atypical or idiosyncratic conditions surfaces on three levels: its dealings with managerial and/or operational differences; through an image of 'global eclecticism' that celebrates the cultural diversity of its 'IKEA Family'; and through marketing initiatives in specific countries, especially television commercials (TVCs). As it will be shown, these three factors are highly interrelated.

<TEXT>The first point to note is IKEA's engagement with boardroom bulwarks, whereby potentially problematic laws, technicalities or 'backdoor' practices are

resolved. In June 2012, for instance, IKEA finally announced a 600million-euro investment in India, after several years of frustrated attempts to deal with the nation's foreign investment laws. For IKEA, this investment rests on plans to open 25 of its stores and double the share of global supplies sourced to India to \$1 billion. While this was due to some liberalisation of India's rules around direct foreign investment in retail, IKEA also pledged to honour an agreement that 30 per cent of its supplies would be sourced locally, but added that this would be difficult in the long term. Such legal manoeuvring is not just a matter of compliance but is also a function of public image. In 2010, the IKEA Group sacked two senior executives in Russia. Having campaigned against corruption and even frozen investments there at one point to protest against poor governance, IKEA was embarrassed to find these executives had ignored bribes that were paid by a subcontractor to secure electricity supplies for IKEA's stores in St Petersburg (Osipovich, 2010, pp.159–160). At the very least, IKEA's experiences in India and Russia speak to the lingering gaps in the rhetoric of free trade: 'open' markets are not uniform markets.

The literature and research around brand 'glocalisation' tends to focus less on these behind-the-scenes dealings than on how a brand presents to the buying public, and the extent to which it adapts or bends to different consumers. To return to McDonald's, for example: notwithstanding Ritzer's devastating critique, there is also evidence that global brands cannot ignore cultural nuance around the world. Indeed, and not to overstate the dent this has made to its operations overall, it is worth noting differences in the McDonald's menu across the globe. There are, for instance, vegetarian burgers in India, kosher restaurants in Israel, grilled McLaks (salmon burgers) in Norway, sweet red-bean pies in Hong Kong and beer in Germany – and this is an abridged list. The point is, local dietary preferences and/or requirements are acknowledged and accommodated. While there is a business imperative here as much as a public relations one, it nonetheless sees cultural diversity converted into (modest) product diversity.

For IKEA, with furniture and décor its core products, forays into dissimilar cultural markets also offer opportunities to adapt. In terms of dress, it is possible

that an IKEA customer that predominately wears the hijab or burqua has different wardrobe requirements than one that wears mostly suits or jeans; in terms of climatic differences, it makes sense that consumers in some regions would have greater need for outdoor furniture than others. However, such differences are not factored into the IKEA design process at all. Rather, over the past decade, and as IKEA stores spread globally, the number of IKEA products has actually decreased to around 9500, mostly ready-to-assemble furniture pieces. It is IKEA policy that *every* store must carry the core product range (such as the Billy bookcase). Beyond that, local store managers can, at their discretion, select other pieces from the overall product range – which is very different to adapting the product range to local markets, since the actual product range remains unchanged.

<H1>Global Eclecticism

<NP>Ironically, and in place of product differentiation, IKEA projects an image of ‘global eclecticism’ – which is sustained more by emerging similarities around the world than differences. That is, and insofar as the IKEA brand complements a certain mindset and milieu, it is aided by contemporary global trends in housing and lifestyle. IKEA’s specialty – fashionable, affordable, self-assembled pieces – is widely associated with urban, apartment living, and the people that gravitate towards this: students, young professionals and small-unit households (either singles or couples). Over the past decade, these groups have grown around the world, even in emerging and BRICs markets (Euromonitor International, 2008a, pp.1–9). In particular, there are a burgeoning number of consumers that live alone or with a partner, and a growing number that converge in urban centres – both of which opt for relatively small apartments rather than houses.

<TEXT>Both phenomena are fuelled by complex and long-term factors that exceed the scope of this chapter, but it will suffice to note two explanations. One is the growing acceptability of divorce, and the tendencies to either avoid or delay marriage (especially for women, which has implications for young children); the other is the growing appeal of and fashion for apartment city living, glamorised in international television hits such as *Seinfeld*, *Friends* and *Sex*

and the City. These television exports (all from the United States, with New York settings) are not credited with this trend, but they capture the ostensible freedom and individualism of cosmopolitan life in an atomised society (Euromonitor International, 2008b).

This trend is most apparent in the United States, IKEA's second largest market. There, between 2000 and 2010, the nation's 366 metropolitan areas absorbed 92.4 per cent of all population growth, and 84 per cent of these chose to live in or close to a city of 50,000 people or more (Morrison, 2011, p.32). Moreover, according to IKEA, these 'millennials' are often cost-conscious, style-conscious and environment-conscious. While *Fight Club* put a dystopian spin on this scene, it remains highly attractive, especially for young people. In the 2009 romantic-comedy film *500 Days of Summer* by Marc Webb, young lovers Tom and Summer (Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Zooey Deschanel, respectively) play a 'happy married couple' routine while shopping at IKEA. The routine is knowingly ironic – Summer is the flighty anti-wife – but the setting is not. IKEA suits this couple, aesthetically, pragmatically and (for Summer at least) philosophically.

The ascent of this ideal, particularly beyond Europe, works to IKEA's benefit. Much of its globally distributed promotional material pictures young, fashionable people in chic, fashionable apartments. This is seen most clearly in its two main print publications: the annual IKEA catalogue (which accounts for 20 per cent of the annual marketing budget and is published in 27 languages) and 'IKEA Family Live' (hereafter referred to as 'Live'), the quarterly magazine for members of the 'IKEA Family' (the store's loyalty-card programme), which is printed in thirteen languages. The catalogue showcases the core product range, including any new additions, with prices, dimensions and styling suggestions. 'Live' is more akin to a conventional lifestyle magazine, and features interviews with IKEA consumers from around the world. They relay not only their tastes in furniture and décor, but also more personal details – such as their travels, relationships, hobbies and ambitions. The magazine presents an idealised collage of IKEA's international clientele, and thus contrives an image of global eclecticism: despite the variety of people spotlighted in 'Live', by virtue of its breadth the IKEA range suffices in

meeting their décor needs.

In the Winter 2012 issue of 'Live', IKEA presents a highly attractive montage, with families in different regions, at different stages of life, creating beautiful homes in seemingly unique ways. They populate an idealised, postmodern world, of 'blended' families, fashionable philosophies and rakish style. Here, the IKEA tableau is inclusive and accommodating. Take Hanne for instance: she grew up in Norway, but now lives in Italy with her new partner and two sons. Describing her journey from 'house to home', she says:

<EXT>I find comfort in change – in being able to adapt and grow. The break-up of my marriage taught me this. I thought that the two of us would be here together forever. But over a lifetime you change, and that's normal. Where I am now is a good place. I run my own business, have gorgeous kids, a home we're always happy to come back to and a new man in my life.</EXT> <SRC>('IKEA Family Live', 2012, p.9)</SRC>

<NP>There is also Frank and Olivia, who live in Berlin with their two-year old daughter Matilda. Of their 'journey', Frank says:

<EXT>It would be silly to say having a child doesn't change your life! But we didn't really give up anything for Matilda ... We've realized that when you live in a grand old apartment like this, you can't be afraid to change it to fit your lifestyle and your personality. We both love changing things around, so who knows what this place will look like in a year's time!</EXT> <SRC>('IKEA Family Live', 2012, p.27)</SRC>

<NP>In Tokyo, 'Live' finds Shin, Hal and Meg. Shin says:

<EXT>When we bought this place it was a typical Japanese three-bedroom apartment, with a very narrow entrance, small rooms and ceilings. I didn't like the idea of fitting our lives into an existing home, so we decided to create an empty box that we could fit with the things we love.</EXT><SRC>('IKEA Family Live', 2012, p.49)</SRC>

<NP>In 'Live' then, IKEA becomes a conduit for personal expression, signposting seminal lifestyle shifts – both individual and collective. Swedish couple Mikael and Mia is a case in point. Mia says:

<EXT>Mikael and I exchanged a thousand messages online before we actually met – we shared so many stories it was like we were old friends ... When we decided to buy an apartment in Stockholm a year and a half later, we both knew we wanted somewhere old, somewhere with a story of its own. I think everything becomes more interesting when it ages. Even people.</EXT><SRC>('IKEA Family Live', 2012, p.57)</SRC>

<NP>In these vignettes, the IKEA brand does not so much ignore differences as celebrate them: the message appears that, for all the diversity, the IKEA range/system/experience meets consumers' needs. The premise is highly ambitious, even paradoxical: such is the brand's investment in 'Swedish design', a fixed product range is deemed sufficient for a growing clientele. As noted, several global trends bespeak a similarity of taste and need among key consumer demographics around the world. Insofar as key trends play to IKEA's strengths in décor and furniture (affordable and fashionable), IKEA's strategy makes sense. However, these similarities do not cancel out important cultural differences. In turn, IKEA is not immune from the fraught politics of micro-regions, nor is it oblivious to local sensitivities.

Prior to the opening of the first IKEA store in Israel in 2001, Israeli media was abuzz with news that IKEA had already opened stores in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Conservative Israeli commentators read IKEA's belated entry into Israel as proof that IKEA was implicitly anti-Israel – despite IKEA's public relations at the time boasting that the store in Netanya would be bigger than any other IKEA store in the Middle East. Despite the pre-launch anxiety, IKEA Israel was an immediate success (Ochs, 2011, pp.131–132). Moreover, while the IKEA furniture and décor products in Israel make no concession to Jewish festivities or rituals, there is one major difference. After a devastating fire at the store last year, IKEA Netanya reopened with an IKEA-first: a fully kosher kitchen for the IKEA restaurant. The Swedish meatballs are still on the menu – always at around \$5 for the medium size, what IKEA calls 'part of the IKEA experience' (Mangla, 2008, p.136) – but all food preparation is consistent with traditional kosher requirements. A decade after its launch, IKEA became

Israel's leading furniture brand, with an 8 per cent share of value sales (Euromonitor International, 2012a).

<H1>Targeted Marketing: TVCs

<NP>For IKEA, pricing remains the most expedient way to unite seemingly disparate consumers. In most capitalist societies, fashionable products at relatively low prices are broadly attractive. This is IKEA's key proposition, hence its prominence in the brand's marketing, especially its TVCs around the world. These are the most obvious examples of brand differentiation, whereby IKEA frames marketing in terms consistent with specific cultural contexts. In 2010 for instance, IKEA Austria released a TVC that reflected the liberal sexual politics of Western Europe (and in the wake of a similarly inspired TVC for McDonald's France). It featured the passionate tryst of an attractive young couple in a chic, IKEA-styled apartment. Their secret rendezvous is halted though by the unexpected arrival of 'the boyfriend' – who shares the apartment with the amorous male (named Florian). As the woman hides in the kitchen cupboard, Florian enjoys wine with the unsuspecting cuckold and the voice-over says: 'Florian has things to hide. IKEA has solutions'. While this connects to a larger discourse of the lucrative 'gay dollar' (Miller, 2005, p.115), here IKEA also pivots on a perceived affinity between its inclusive, egalitarian ethos, and the progressive politics of sexual freedom – an assumption that is commercially safe in the context of Austrian television. This can be contrasted with a TVC IKEA devised for Saudi Arabia in 2010. It sees two cars approach a traffic light, one with a middle-aged couple in traditional Islamic dress, the other with four young men in modern Western style clothing. The two drivers eye each other with barely concealed suspicion, but relax when they see the other's rooftop: both sport an identical IKEA couch – the 'Klippan' model. Here, IKEA papers over a potential clash in Saudi culture, between traditional mores and modern tendencies, with the unifying appeal of low-priced furniture. Clearly, the two TVCs, in Austria and Saudi Arabia, are not interchangeable, since they speak to very different worldviews. Like IKEA shoppers in Austria though, Saudis are attracted to the overall IKEA 'experience' (Euromonitor International, 2012b).

<TEXT>Despite these examples, there is a limit to just how much IKEA can acknowledge local custom without upsetting its brand identity. In the 2012 Saudi Arabian edition of the IKEA catalogue, women were completely airbrushed out of all imagery. In the traditional Islamic state, women rarely appear in advertisements, and almost never in anything other than modest Islamic dress (such as burqua or abaya). In this instance though, IKEA was widely criticised for the cultural compromise. According to Sweden's Equality minister, Nyamko Sabuni, IKEA was – despite its private company status – a cultural ambassador for Sweden, and as such was wrong to 'remove an important part of Sweden's image and an important part of its values in a country that more than any other needs to know about IKEA's principles and values' (quoted in Quinn, 2012, n.p). In response, the IKEA Group, which had produced the catalogue for a Saudi franchisee, concurred: 'We are now reviewing our routines to safeguard a correct content presentation from a values point-of-view in the different versions of the IKEA catalogue worldwide' (Quinn, 2012, n.p). For globally marketed brands, casting an address to consumers too broadly risks courting charges of hypocrisy, when the brand's 'content presentation' in one market undermines or ignores its 'content presentation' in another.

<H1>Conclusion

<NP>From Sweden to Saudi Arabia, the IKEA brand must meet the cultural diversity of patrons that span 38 countries. As IKEA's customer base diversifies then, so too has service needs and expectations. To this end, IKEA has practical mechanisms to manage. It has, for instance, developed an automated customer service representative named Anna. Anna retrieves relevant information from the IKEA website, in response to specific online enquiries, and as Johnson and Selnes explain: 'Anna helps IKEA to manage an increasingly heterogeneous portfolio of customers in a cost-effective fashion that is consistent with its strategy' (Johnson and Selnes, 2005, p.14). However, this acknowledgement of consumer diversity does not manifest in terms of product design: IKEA's product range has actually narrowed. Instead, IKEA wraps its core brand value – Swedish design at affordable prices – around various lifestyle settings. IKEA does not bend for local markets; rather, local markets find in IKEA the tools for

fashionable, affordable living. This, in turn, plays to another strategy that IKEA has folded into the marketing in recent years: growing recognition of how consumers adapt IKEA products through their own stylistic twists. In 2009 for instance, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Billy bookcase, IKEA Germany invited Billy owners to submit pictures of their bookcases to a specially created website; IKEA created the final TVC from over 1000 pictures uploaded. Similarly, 'Live' magazine regularly shows how customers have personalised IKEA pieces. Quite explicitly then, the use of consumers' bricolage here becomes a form of 'unpaid labour' that contributes to IKEA's brand value: IKEA constructs a branded community that sustains and strengthens its image and appeal (Arvidsson, 2005, p.247).

<TEXT>Growing emphasis on the versatility of the IKEA product, as something that can be upgraded through savvy appropriation, helps endear the brand to more consumer groups. Particularly in the United States, marketing has focused on how IKEA is not just for the young or thrifty, but also for older and more affluent consumers. In 2010, IKEA's tagline there became 'The Life Improvement Store', which launched a series of TVCs called 'Made by'. Each TVC showed people customising their homes with IKEA furniture and accessories, and ended with a line (like) 'Made by the Johnsons, Designed by IKEA' – with the focus on the family's personal touches (Vega, 2010, p.6). Services were added (including a pick-up and delivery service, and extended warranties), ranges were extended (with 'premium' \$500 rugs available as well as \$5 ones) and user-generated photo sites like Share Space became popular ways US consumers showed how they use IKEA in their homes. In the United States, these initiatives have shifted perceptions that IKEA is not for 'grown-ups', with surveys indicating growing trust in the brand's quality (Zmuda, 2011, p.14). Small adjustments in the home – such as a new vase or coffee table – are pitched as low-risk 'pick-me-ups'. This message was delivered with ironic aplomb in an award-winning TVC in 2002 for IKEA US, directed by Spike Jonze. In it, an old reading lamp is relegated to the curb for garbage collection, as its former owner is seen using her brand new IKEA replacement. The TVC ends with this piece to camera, in a Swedish accent: 'Many of you feel bad for this lamp. That is because you're crazy. It has no

feelings. And the new one is much better'. Here, a new lamp transforms both the apartment and its owner – and IKEA trades (almost unfashionably) on this tenet of modernist faith (Sayeau, 2009, p.494).

In terms of showcasing both the risks and rewards of global marketing, IKEA makes a compelling contribution to CCT: given CCT's over-identification with the self-directed, self-aware sovereign consumer, it would seem that a globally distributed product (like IKEA) would inspire more, not less, cultural differentiation, as diverse consumer groups author their own uses of the goods. Instead, IKEA advances an image of relevance and authenticity that transcends (and then flattens out) consumer difference. IKEA eschews the paternalistic overtone of twentieth-century marketing and champions the postmodern branding paradigm described by Douglas B. Holt, which 'is premised upon the idea that brands will be more valuable if they are offered not as cultural blueprints but as cultural resources, as useful ingredients to produce the self as one chooses' (Holt, 2002, p.83). Certainly, early CCT research was vital to highlight the cultural dimensions of consumption (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011, p.383), and seize some discursive recognition for what remains a marginal space in more business-oriented consumer research (Askegaard and Scott, 2013, p.145). Nonetheless, case studies such as this one underscore the market's amazing capacity to deal with consumer resistance and opposition (not to mention diversity) in commercially successful ways (Cova, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2013, p.216).

The IKEA brand therefore offers enough latitude for myriad marketing imperatives, in ways that conflate economic efficiency with other interests and considerations. Even the brand's signature reliance on flat-packed furniture, for example, has been reconfigured as environmentally sensible: when the three-seat 'Ektorp' sofa was 'repacked' in 2010, IKEA boasted that not only had it doubled the amount of sofa that could be crammed into a given space, and lowered the purchase price, but that it had also significantly reduced the carbon-emissions required for its transport. For IKEA, then, the growing attractiveness of a particular lifestyle – urban-oriented, fashionable and increasingly atomised –

becomes the optimum template for its own design strengths. Insofar as different markets require different modes of address, IKEA modifies the marketing approach – but not the core message: stylish products at affordable prices. In this way, IKEA's global presence is assured but – as the fallout from the Saudis' censored catalogue shows – not entirely unproblematic. As such, and while the catalogue remains the most famous aspect of IKEA's marketing, its smaller-scale initiatives in specific countries (especially TVCs) reveal its more nuanced and arguably more effective means by which consumer diversity is dealt with. This in turn relays the cultural logic of branding, as the TVCs convey the particularities of IKEA's target markets in ways that cannot be gleaned from any product differentiation – since the latter does not exist.

<H1>References

Arnould, E. J. and Thompson, C. J., 2005. Consumer culture theory (CCT): twenty years of research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31:4, pp.868–882.

Arvidsson, A., 2005. Brands: a critical perspective. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5:2, pp.235–258.

Askegaard, S. and Linnet, J. P., 2011. Towards an epistemology of consumer culture theory: phenomenology and the context of context. *Marketing Theory*, 11:4, pp.381–404.

Askegaard, S. and Scott, L., 2013. Consumer culture theory: the ironies of history. *Marketing Theory*, 13:2, pp.139–147.

Cova, B., Maclaran, P. and Bradshaw, A. , 2013. Rethinking consumer culture theory from the postmodern to the communist horizon. *Marketing Theory*, 13:2, pp.213–225.

Euromonitor International, 2008a. *Single living: how atomisation – the rise of singles and one-person households – is affecting consumer purchasing habits*. [Strategy Briefing] Available at: <www.warc.com>. Accessed 10 June 2012.

Euromonitor International, 2008b. *From "taxi driver" to "sex and the city": urban living's chic makeover and its implications for consumer demand*. Available at: www.warc.com. Accessed 15 June 2012.

Euromonitor International, 2010. *Buying into the experience: why are savvy brands enriching the purchasing feeling for their consumers?* Available at: www.warc.com. Accessed 15 June 2012.

Euromonitor International, 2011. *Inter IKEA systems BV in retailing (world)*, June. Available at: www.warc.com. Accessed 12 June 2012.

Euromonitor International, 2012a. *Furniture and furnishings stores in Israel*. Available at: www.warc.com. Accessed 12 June 2012.

Euromonitor International, 2012b. *Furniture and furnishings stores in Saudi Arabia*. Available at: www.warc.com. Accessed 12 June 2012.

Fitchett, J. A., Patsiaouras, G. and Davies, A., 2014. Myth and ideology in consumer culture theory. *Marketing Theory*, 14:4, pp.495–506.

Holt, D. B., 2002. Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, pp.70–90.

Johnson, M. D. and Selnes, F., 2005. Diversifying your customer portfolio. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Spring, pp.11–14.

Jonsson, A. and Foss, N. J., 2011. International expansion through flexible replication: learning from the internationalization experience of IKEA. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42, pp.1079–1102.

Mangla, I. S., 2008. An IKEA field guide. *Money*, 7:8, pp.136–137.

Miller, T., 2005. A metrosexual eye on queer guy. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 11:1, pp.112–117.

- Morrison, M., 2011. Living for the city: what “urban boom” means for marketers. *Advertising Age*, 82:37, p.32.
- Ochs, J., 2011. *Security and suspicion: an ethnography of everyday life in Israel*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Osipovich, A., 2010. Bed, bath & bribes. *Foreign Policy*, September–October, pp.159–160.
- Quinn, B., 2012. Ikea apologises over removal of women from Saudi Arabia catalogue. *The Guardian*, [online] 2 October. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/02/ikea-apologises-removing-women-saudi-arabia-catalogue>. Accessed 3 January 2013.
- Ritzer, G., 1993. *The McDonaldization of society: an investigation into the changing character of contemporary social life*. London: SAGE Publications
- Robertson, R., 1995. Glocalization: time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. In: M. Featherstone, S. Lash and R. Robertson, eds. 1995. *Global modernities*. London: SAGE Publications. pp.25–44.
- Roncha, A., 2008. Nordic brands towards a design-oriented concept. *Brand Management*, 16:1–2), pp.21–29.
- Sayeau, M., 2009. IKEA modernism and the perils of innovation. *Modernism/modernity*, 16:3, pp.493–495.
- Sculley, J., 2004. ‘IKEA’. *Time* [Style/Design Supplement], Summer, 163, pp.16–17
- Sorensen, C., 2011. Swedish for recession. *Maclean’s*, 124:38, p.44.
- The Economist*, 2011. The secret of IKEA’s success, 398:8722, pp.67–68.
- Thompson, C. J., Arnould, E. and Giesler, M., 2013. Discursivity, difference and disruption: genealogical reflections on the consumer cultural theory heteroglossia. *Marketing Theory*, 13:2, pp.149–174.

Vega, T., 2010. A focus on families (and furniture), *New York Times*, 13 Sep. p. 6

Zmuda, N., 2011. For IKEA, it's time to overhaul perceptions. *Advertising Age*, 82:43, p.14.