

# SELLING THE SCANDINAVIAN ETHOS: PRINCIPAL MARKETING STRATEGIES OF NORDIC DESIGN BRANDS

Anna Wiśnicka

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

Scandinavian design, which derives from Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and to a slightly lesser extent, Norway and Iceland, is an artistic and cultural phenomenon whose origins date back to the early twentieth century. In the global discourse on the subject – in literature, academic journals, the popular press, blogs, and social media – there is a leading tendency to portray it as an entity functioning beyond political and national divisions (Halén & Wickman 2003). Despite clear information about the origin of given designers/objects/companies, it is customary to emphasise that they belong to the sphere of Scandinavian design, or less frequently, Northern or Nordic design. In the introduction to her book, Elizabeth Wilhide (Wilhide 2016: 6–15) writes about the system of unwritten rules and similarities defining Scandinavian design, which she accurately calls the “Scandinavian ethos.” High-quality materials, simplicity, and versatility define a design which arose in response to the natural resources available and to unfavourable climate conditions. The similarities, which are far more emphasised in the literature than the characteristics of each country’s own design style, have become the foundation for the phenomenon of Scandinavian design (Fallan et al. 2012: 13–33). How does this fact affect the promotion of Scandinavian companies (when marketing revolves around the idea of belonging)? Is the marketing an effect, or is it perhaps a cause, developed by copywriters from the North? The aim of this paper is to describe and

analyse the leading strategies of Danish, Swedish, and Finnish companies in promoting Scandinavian design and to determine what marketing statements are characteristic of Scandinavian design brands.

The methodology used in this paper is based on several case studies, which were selected to show the wide variety of marketing strategies utilised by leading Scandinavian/Nordic brands. The analysis intends to present the most significant of the diverse tools used to build the image of Northern design. The companies selected are internationally recognisable but vary in terms of their background, target audience, retail price point, and overall aesthetics. The model provided here thus reaches beyond one category and can be seen to represent a global tendency.

For clarity, the following were the main strategies used in the paper:

- use of onomastics; geographical connections as part of branding;
- use of Scandinavian terms;
- cross-branding and image collaboration between brands;
- design-related commercial and non-commercial events, that is, fairs, exhibitions, etc.;
- digital marketing (including social media presence, content marketing, product placement);
- the Royal Warrant of Appointment title used by royal purveyors;
- design immersion – design in film, television, and public spaces;
- promoting design in the context of Scandinavian culture in the broader sense (*hygge*, *lagom*);
- efforts of national tourism boards to present design as part of the cultural experience of the country.

As a preface to the main topic, the set of features that are identified as the core of Scandinavian design and are common to Swedish, Danish, and Finnish design in the global perception should be emphasised, as these features often appear in the branding of major companies. Although rooted in history and tradition, the current marketing-generated image has become synonymous with a variety of different design models advertised within the spectrum of Scandinavian design. They can be divided into several categories:

- simplicity, lack of ornament, functionalism (Teilmann-Lock 2022: 307–309);
- natural materials, eco-consciousness, use of wood (Fallan 2022: 61–96);
- innovation, utopias, and radical design (Garner 2008: 54–62);

- tradition and quality, in opposition to “cheap copies” which “undermine the value chains of original design” (Teilmann-Lock 2022: 320);
- versatility and longevity (Korvenmaa 2010: 159–170);
- a democratic and participatory approach (Gregory 2003: 62–74).

To begin with, whether Nordic or Scandinavian, most companies consistently use “Scandinavian” to describe their products, because in contrast to the broader term “Nordic,” it connotes exclusivity. “Scandinavian” is also the predominant adjective applied to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway in both academic and popular literature. With respect to Finland, “Scandinavian” appears as a matter of cultural rather than geopolitical affiliation; however, most scholars specialising in the culture and history of the Nordic countries liberally apply the term “Scandinavian” to Finland (Derry 2000: 220–248). In comparing Google search results over the period of May 2021 to May 2022 it was evident that the tendency to refer to Northern design as Scandinavian was the most common. The phrase “Nordic design” was less popular than search results for “Danish design” and “Finnish design” (Fig. 1). The enormous disproportion in the search results of Google Trends clearly demonstrates that the term “Scandinavian design” is in general use and has been popularised by the mass media, design companies, and commercial establishments. This tendency has been bolstered by such popular publications as *Scandinavian Design* (Fiell & Fiell 2002) and *Scandinavia Dreaming: Nordic Homes, Interiors and Design* (Trinidad 2016). Their international reach has allowed the term to spread and become the most commonly used in the discourse. Moreover, on the commercial side, the majority of authorised online distributors of Nordic design products use the term “Scandinavian,” for instance, Scandinavian Designs, Scandinavian Living, Skandium, and Scandinavian Design Center. Online articles encouraging potential customers to purchase goods may reach a broad international audience, for instance, as in a text published on *Elle Decor*: “Online Shopping: 5 Websites Dedicated to Scandinavian Design. A Selection of E-Commerce Platforms where to Browse the Best of Nordic Design Directly from Home” (sic) (Antonini 2016).

Recognising and promoting the term “Scandinavian” in opposition to “Nordic” has resulted in a different kind of overall marketing and branding, which in turn influenced the creation of new trends based on the primary idea. Even though the satellite trends of Scandi-chic and Japandi are based on the original design features of the Nordic classics, and even

though the promotion of the product design of the North as a whole succeeded, these names prove that the concept that gained international recognition is related to Scandinavia rather than to the Nordic countries. The Japandi style was created from the austere similarities of product design from Japan and Finland, but the name shows how a marketing strategy altered the principal message (which might otherwise have referred to the Nordic countries or directly to Finland, which had long been present on the Japanese market) (Serita & Pöntiskoski 2009: 66–88).

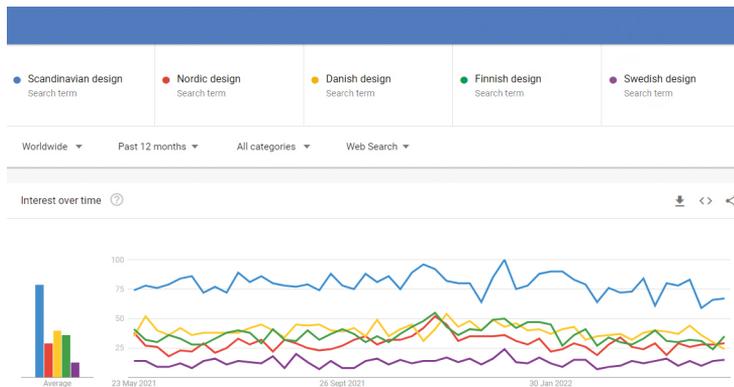


Figure 1. Interest over time – Google Trends search engine. Comparison of global search volumes for “Scandinavian design,” “Nordic design,” “Danish design,” “Finnish design,” and “Swedish design,” May 2022

One frequently applied marketing strategy is the use of place names in company names. This practice, both in its full and abbreviated forms, has become popular in Scandinavian countries. The place name may be complementary to the main name and may emphasise a strong tie between the company and its place of origin (or the place the company wishes to be associated with), as can be observed in the case of brands such as Normann Copenhagen, Ivana Helsinki, Vita Copenhagen (now Umage), Design House Stockholm, and by Lassen Copenhagen (Fig. 2). In this way, the customer directly identifies the brand with the Scandinavian market, which in the global discourse has become synonymous with quality and the ennoblement of simple design. The first formative moment of global recognition for the new design from the North can be directly linked with the 1939 New York World’s Fair. The Finnish Pavilion, which was designed by Alvar Aalto and was called “his crowning achievement” (Quantrill 1995: 63–80), presented a new approach to modernism, based on organic forms and natural materi-

als. Finland's participation was discussed in the press, and the uniqueness of both the pavilion and the pieces inside were emphasised. *The New York Times* remarked on the use of typically Finnish materials as the Pavilion's leading theme: "Finland's exhibit in the Hall of Nations at the World's Fair will be notable for the decorative use of many woods taken from the republic's forests" ("Finland to Stress Its Woods at Fair": 16). The distinctive character of the Finnish presentation at the Fair drew significant international attention to the features of Nordic modernism for the first time. Praise of Scandinavian design and, in the broader perspective, of the entire region, had a renaissance in the international press in the 1960s. This was closely related to the Design from Scandinavia travelling exhibition and the establishment of the Design Within Reach shop (Lange & Thompson 2010: 7–115), which broadly promoted goods manufactured by Nordic brands. The former in particular contributed to the international perception of Scandinavian design as an entity existing far beyond national stylistics and trends (Guldborg 2011: 41–58). Moreover, the somewhat reductive image of Scandinavian design as based on unity – rather than on national differences defining aesthetics and production ethos – is often considered to be a result of the 1960s exhibition (Marklund & Petersen 2013: 245–257). Today a similar tone can be found in the international press (O'Neill 2018) and in books (Williams 2015). The aim is to create an extensive term – undoubtedly with the desired set of connotations.



Figure 2. Logotypes of Scandinavian design brands – Normann Copenhagen, By Lassen Copenhagen, Skandinavisk

Source: <https://brandfetch.com/skandinavisk.com>; <https://brandfetch.com/normann-copenhagen.com>; <https://bylassen.presscloud.com/nr/#/frontpage>, accessed 25.07.2023.

Another naming variant referring directly to Scandinavia is the use of lexical forms taken from the Swedish, Danish, and Finnish languages; such forms undoubtedly evoke the expected association. This type of naming is used by the companies Swedese and Skandinavisk. One of the young Danish brands, Muuto New Nordic, has adopted a similar strategy. “Muuto” derives from the Finnish word for “new perspective” (*muutos*), so the name strongly refers to the modernist Finnish tradition, and thus emphasises the company’s branding. “New Nordic” in the name accentuates the contemporary character of the designs and their affiliation with the Nordic countries. An equally popular solution, highlighting a company’s Scandinavian connections from the very beginning, is the use of a city name as a company name. This indicates strong bonds with a definite place, which in a way becomes synonymous with the brand, allowing the company to be geolocated and evoking unquestionable associations with a specific region. For instance, this is the case with the Finnish brand Fiskars or the Danish brands Skagerak and Skagen. This type of geo-connotation can be found in the subtle form of an acronym: for instance, the name of the Swedish furniture giant IKEA is an abbreviation of the name of its founder, Ingvar Kamprad, the name of the town where he grew up, Elmtaryd, and the name of his hometown Agunnaryd (Ferrell & Hartline 2008: 513). This method, however, does not provide direct links to specific places, especially since the places are not commonly associated with Scandinavian design in the global consciousness. Nevertheless, the company makes widespread use of the Swedish flag or its colours to evoke associations with Sweden.

Furthermore, the names of IKEA’s products mostly derive from Scandinavian geographical names. This type of nomenclature forms a pattern through geo-marketing that contributes to the strong identification of Scandinavian locations with design. All things referring to Scandinavia or the capital cities of Scandinavian countries are automatically associated with brands that have been on the market since the beginning of the twentieth century. Combined with other promotional techniques, this creates a cross-marketing mechanism for local companies in the North (Power & Jansson 2011: 158–162). It should also be mentioned that the use of place names in the logos of companies has additional promotional value (Kolb 2006: 219) and allows them to be identified with the design legacy of a given country.

Another marketing strategy used by Scandinavian design manufacturers is image collaboration, which accentuates the core values of Scandinavian design. The main narrative within the discourse is to ensure that the image associated with the products is coherent with the global idea of time-

lessness, quality, and sophisticated simplicity. There are several techniques used by Scandinavian brands, depending on their product assortment, production profile, image, and retail position. The majority of companies, however, are focused on forwarding the message that they belong to the universe of Scandinavian cultural heritage, by accentuating the simplicity of their products as well as their functionality and the democratic values behind their production (Roncha 2008: 21–29).

Well-known companies with a certain position on the market willingly present their products along with those of other companies of equally high calibre. The idea is that these are brands that do not operate in the same sector, so they are not in direct competition. An example of such practices is the media image of a leading producer of lighting, Louis Poulsen, which design their products to accord with the classics of Danish furniture manufactured by companies such as Carl Hansen & Søn or Republic of Fritz Hansen.<sup>1</sup> More often, however, this technique is adopted by emerging design companies in launching their products. Designing items to match design-icon goods is intended to emphasise a company's membership in Scandinavia's design elite and thus to suggest a guarantee of quality. This procedure can take place at the level of social media and in the visual layer. In the latter context, a good example is the Danish company Umage. This young brand, which specialises in lighting, presents its products in interiors fully equipped with renowned Danish design elements, thus nobilitating its own products. When it introduced its own furniture collection in 2018, it replaced the products of its competitors, which it had previously presented.<sup>2</sup> Another way of achieving the same goal is through product launches accompanied by lectures on Scandinavian design, in order to accentuate the newly established company's direct links to the design legacy.<sup>3</sup> This type of activity has also been undertaken by the Swedish furniture giant IKEA, which invites well-known design companies to create joint collections. One such collaboration, for instance, resulted in the Ypperlig series designed by the Danish company HAY.<sup>4</sup> The initiative known as IKEA PS, launched in Milan in 1995 under the theme of Democratic Design,<sup>5</sup> initially promoted slow design and craftsmanship at an affordable price point.

<sup>1</sup> See [www.instagram.com/louispoulsen](https://www.instagram.com/louispoulsen), accessed: 22.05.2022.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.instagram.com/umagedesign](https://www.instagram.com/umagedesign), accessed: 22.05.2022.

<sup>3</sup> An example of such activities is the lecture and presentation given by the Danish brand Muuto in combination with an exhibition at the Northern Living Festival in Warsaw, February 2011.

<sup>4</sup> The official press communication regarding the collaboration between IKEA and Mette and Rolf Hay, [www.ikea.com/gb/en/doc/ikea-download-pdf-16.6-mb\\_\\_1364392461711.pdf](https://www.ikea.com/gb/en/doc/ikea-download-pdf-16.6-mb__1364392461711.pdf), accessed: 20.05.2022.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.ikeamuseum.com/en/digital/the-story-of-ikea/ikea-ps-collection](https://www.ikeamuseum.com/en/digital/the-story-of-ikea/ikea-ps-collection), accessed: 5.02.2023.

Over time it became a means of promoting international designers among pro-Scandinavian circles. Ezra Shales, who highlighted the neo-colonial approach of the company and the reductiveness of thinking of design as synonymous with modernism, demonstrated that this has not always been a successful endeavour. The case of the Sámi designer Maria Vinka, whose PS project “Gullholmen” was launched in 2003, revealed a lack of understanding on IKEA’s side regarding the ethnicity and origins of both the product and its designer (Shales 2020: 15–20).

Touching upon this question leads to a much deeper and more integral problem of the Swedish design industry, namely various forms of nationalism. The issue is particularly visible in regard to its leading manufacturer, IKEA, which accentuates national values while disregarding basic rules of transparency. The criticism relates to the anonymity of the non-Scandinavian designers who work for IKEA and the lack of clarity about all the production hubs involved in building the brand. Even the annual print catalogues, which were discontinued in 2021, did not always mention all the names behind the products advertised. The idyllic portrayal of the company based on an idea of Swedishness led to a highly distorted image. Ursula Lindqvist proved that

the act of endowing IKEA’s home furnishing products with Nordic names, accordingly, erases their non-Nordic history prior to the moment of naming – that is, erases the labor of thousands of people in non-Nordic countries. Although IKEA does not explicitly deny the work of its non-Nordic suppliers, subcontractors, and distributors (and in fact carries out much praised development programs in many of these countries), these workers’ labor is erased from the Showroom floor and from IKEA’s organized and progressive archival narrative of ingenious Swedish labor, inscribed via Nordic names. (Lindqvist 2009: 43–62)

In trying to open the closed circle of the Scandinavian narrative, which has often been a point of critique, Finnish design has regularly been aesthetically and philosophically linked to Japanese artistic sensitivity (Leikos & Villberg 2009: 55–60), as is visible in an ongoing history of collaborations between Finnish brands and Japanese designers. A vivid example of these practices was the 2019 ARTEK collection FIN/JPN launched at Salone del Mobile in Milan. The launch celebrated 100 years of diplomatic relations between the countries and focused on the similarities and creative differences

between them.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, companies such as Iittala<sup>7</sup> or Nikari collaborate with Japanese and international designers,<sup>8</sup> bringing a fresh approach to product design while still being in line with their iconic aesthetics. Certainly, this does not completely eliminate the elitist image of Scandinavian design, but it is a starting point and shows the possibility of further changes.

Another promotion method is collaboration with brands that have no connection with Scandinavian design but have international recognition and a different target audience. This enables the Scandinavian brands to expand their popularity and influence among consumers who are not their target audience. The Finnish textile brand Marimekko has been at the forefront in this respect, having worked with major companies such as Adidas, Converse, and Clinique. The popularity of these companies and their global marketing reach allows Marimekko to access a wide audience. The 2018 Marimekko x Clinique campaign was reflected in both social media and the daily press, which due to the wave of growing interest, devoted space in their pages to the Finnish company (Cochrane 2018).

Commercial events such as fairs and accompanying exhibitions are a very important mechanism for promoting Nordic design. All Nordic countries are, to a greater or lesser extent, involved in their organisation, but Denmark, Sweden, and Finland remain the leaders in this respect. Trade fairs combine the commercial sphere with conferences, meetings with designers, and exhibitions. Most companies present their products in arranged interiors, which makes the perception of design more attractive. Over the years, Finland has promoted its famous Habitare event and Helsinki Design Week (similar design weeks are held annually in all Nordic capitals). Habitare alone, held in September, attracts more than half a million visitors (Ahola 2007: 45). Norway organises design fairs under the banner of the Oslo Design Fair – Nordic Living; Sweden hosts the Stockholm Furniture and Lighting Fair (Fig. 3), and Denmark has been promoting design through Formland since 1987. These are only selected examples of commercial exhibition activities on the map of the North's design promotion. Their activities have a very wide reach and not only through hundreds of thousands of visitors – the large group of journalists, bloggers, and influencers who are invited to the fair by individual companies should not be overlooked. This group's coverage of the events and of product placement have a huge impact on the recognition of Scandinavian design.

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<sup>6</sup> See [www.artek.fi/en/collections/fin-jpn-friendship-collection](http://www.artek.fi/en/collections/fin-jpn-friendship-collection), accessed: 5.02.2023.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.iittala.com/en-pl/about-us/designers](http://www.iittala.com/en-pl/about-us/designers), accessed: 5.02.2023.

<sup>8</sup> See [www.nikari.fi/designers](http://www.nikari.fi/designers), accessed: 5.02.2023.



Figure 3. Stockholm Furniture and Light Fair 2019, photograph by Gustav Kaiser  
Source: <https://ifdm.design/2020/01/22/la-stockholm-furniture-light-fair-a-quota-70/>,  
accessed 25.07.2023.

Social media plays a very important role in the promotion of Scandinavian design. The enduring popularity of design from the North can be attributed to several factors. First, most of the companies' social media accounts are run with great care and commitment. Their content includes not only current products but often aims to educate the audience by popularising questions regarding design history, production methods, and applied craftsmanship. This type of narration accentuates the long tradition of the brand and its commitment to preserving the shared values of Scandinavian design. On the contemporary level, the leading firms are careful to update their visual content constantly; they interact with their audience, tag customers, and try to maintain relationships with their peers. Moreover, to broaden their scope and impact they are very keen to share photos of customers who have uploaded private content containing branded products.

However, the largest role in promotion is played by interior design bloggers, whose accounts show Scandinavian companies' products in the context of real-life household interiors. The posts contain links to the websites of the companies whose products appear in the photos. This is often

the result of collaboration with a particular brand, as is usually indicated. The products may be sent as a PR gift or are purchased by the blogger according to the 2019 rules of radical transparency, which in many countries have become mandatory practice within the sphere of digital marketing.<sup>9</sup> Most of the blogs that focus on Scandinavian design seamlessly combine products from Danish, Swedish, and Finnish brands. This presents potential customers with a huge spectrum of interior decorating possibilities using Scandinavian products. With each blogger representing a distinct style and different cultural background it has become possible to emphasise the universal nature of Nordic design items. The most influential domains,<sup>10</sup> which present both public and private spaces, include the Canadian website Nordic Design,<sup>11</sup> the British-Swedish blog My Scandinavian Home,<sup>12</sup> and the oldest Swedish design blog, Trendsetter.<sup>13</sup> Despite content diversity, all of these focus on the simplicity and versatility of the items featured and link them to the overall idea of a Nordic interior. It is worth mentioning that in the age of smartphones, the blogosphere is increasingly in decline. Studies reveal that most content creators and companies use Instagram as their main digital marketing tool. Initially there was some doubt as to whether other social media platforms could become the substitute of blogs as “tools such as Twitter or Instagram do not offer the key benefits that blogging allows” (Jacobsen & Barnes 2016: 9). Eventually, thanks to adaptive algorithms, so-called micro-blogging was able to target the most likely group of potential customers (Agung & Darma 2019: 743–747) and has become one of the most widely used means of digital marketing. Among the most popular accounts presenting pieces of Scandinavian design (not including the sub-profiles of the above-mentioned blogs) are SHNordic,<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Competition and Market Authority Rules on Social Media Endorsement, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-media-endorsements-guide-for-influencers/social-media-endorsements-being-transparent-with-your-followers](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-media-endorsements-guide-for-influencers/social-media-endorsements-being-transparent-with-your-followers), accessed: 15.05.2022.

<sup>10</sup> The selection serves to present the marketing strategy used by many Nordic design firms. More domains operating within the sphere of Scandinavian interior design can be found in compilations prepared by Rebecca Thandi Norman for the trendsetting website Scandinavia Standard, see: [www.scandinaviastandard.com/scandi-six-swedish-interior-design-blogs](http://www.scandinaviastandard.com/scandi-six-swedish-interior-design-blogs), [www.scandinaviastandard.com/scandi-six-danish-interior-design-blogs](http://www.scandinaviastandard.com/scandi-six-danish-interior-design-blogs), accessed: 3.02.2023.

<sup>11</sup> Since 2010, founder Catherine Lazure-Guinard, self-proclaimed traffic details: 325,000 followers on social media and over 1 million unique visitors a year, [www.nordicdesign.ca](http://www.nordicdesign.ca), accessed: 3.02.2023.

<sup>12</sup> Since 2011, founder Niki Brantmark, self-proclaimed traffic details: half a million page-views per month, [www.myscandinavianhome.com](http://www.myscandinavianhome.com), accessed: 3.02.2023.

<sup>13</sup> Since 2005, founder Frida Ramstedt, self-proclaimed traffic details: over 250,000 followers across Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest, [www.trendenser.se](http://www.trendenser.se), accessed: 3.02.2023.

<sup>14</sup> 703K followers, [www.instagram.com/shnordic](http://www.instagram.com/shnordic), accessed: 3.02.2023.

Scandinavian Interior,<sup>15</sup> Alexander Paar,<sup>16</sup> Seventeen-and-Five,<sup>17</sup> My Full House,<sup>18</sup> and Cate St. Hill.<sup>19</sup>

The promotion of Scandinavian brands through broadcast media, including TV series and films, must not be overlooked. In recent years, Scandinavian design has appeared in several high-budget films and series aimed at different age groups. This kind of promotion is not a classic marketing strategy but rather results from the popularity already achieved by a company, which leads to its wider presence. However, given the large viewership of many productions, the furniture and accessories depicted may become popular among people who were not previously interested in Scandinavian design. As a form of non-verbal communication, Scandinavian design pieces may also transmit various subliminal messages. In *Quantum of Solace*, Louis Poulsen pieces were used to evoke elegance and cold sophistication. In *Maggie's Plan* (Republic of Fritz Hansen) they were used to accentuate the protagonist's Danish ancestry, while in *The Orville* (Knoll) and in *Avengers: Endgame*, the Louis Poulsen pieces produced a retro-futuristic look that is gaining in popularity. However, when the same Louis Poulsen pieces were used in the set design of *Paddington*, they related to the 1960s concept of playful and colourful pieces addressed to a younger audience.

In TV commercials, Nordic-looking interiors are often styled to be both timeless and distinctive, and synonymous with an aspirational yet accessible life model. For Scandinavian design, an important role is played by a specific type of advertising that, apart from the product, sells a particular lifestyle to the viewer (Stothard 2012). It may be globally Scandinavian-oriented or more national-centred, underlining Danishness, Finnishness, or Swedishness – Volvo and IKEA visibly use the latter in their campaigns (Röcklinsberg 2018: 221–241). An example that includes all the elements identifiable with Scandinavia is the Carlsberg beer commercial launched in 2019 by the creative agency Fold7. In the commercial, the popular Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen rides the Danes' favourite means of transport – a bicycle – through the picturesque backstreets of Copenhagen. He rides past his compatriots, who are immersed in *hygge* activities, and enters a house whose interior is entirely furnished with classics of Danish design (Fig. 4). All the elements of the world presented in the ad

<sup>15</sup> 391K followers, [www.instagram.com/scandinavian.interior](https://www.instagram.com/scandinavian.interior), accessed: 3.02.2023.

<sup>16</sup> 138K followers, [www.instagram.com/alexanderpaar](https://www.instagram.com/alexanderpaar), accessed: 3.02.2023.

<sup>17</sup> 134K followers, [www.instagram.com/seventeenandfive](https://www.instagram.com/seventeenandfive), accessed: 3.02.2023.

<sup>18</sup> 110K followers, [www.instagram.com/my\\_full\\_house](https://www.instagram.com/my_full_house), accessed: 3.02.2023.

<sup>19</sup> 72.8K followers, [www.instagram.com/catesthill](https://www.instagram.com/catesthill), accessed: 3.02.2023.

are icons emphasising cultural belonging, and their accumulation in a short advertisement functions to overwhelm the potential consumer with stimuli, which function in the recipient's consciousness as conditions necessary to achieve the desired state of Danish bliss. This kind of message, accentuating the overall well-being that can be achieved through acquiring various goods, is indeed a very universal message. For this reason, the campaign has been broadcast both internationally and locally; it underlines the factors contributing to create the Scandinavian lifestyle, including design (Nielsen 2021: 295–313).



Figure 4. Still from Carlsberg beer advertisement, Fold7 agency 2019

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEKLwFdtPs>, accessed 25.07.2023.

It is also worth considering what role accentuation of a Royal Warrant of Appointment plays in the promotion and identification of Scandinavian brands, especially premium ones. Currently, the warrant is granted to companies that have been supplying products (both permanently available items and special, customised orders) to the royal court for many years. It should be stated that the firms receive remuneration for their services and the privilege does not entail a monopoly on a particular product. Typically, the status of royal purveyor is given for a period of several years, with the decision to renew being made by the court through the Lord Chamberlain. Depending on the royal house, only the reigning monarch (as in Denmark), or the monarch and his designees, can grant the warrant. Companies and institutions holding the warrant can display the coat of arms connected with the member of the royal family to whom they owe the privilege.

In Scandinavia, the tradition of warrant-holding purveyors is cultivated by the courts of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, and of these only Denmark and Sweden have warrant-holding design companies. Originally there was a division between the king's or queen's purveyors and the court's purveyors, but this no longer exists today. Given the very progressive nature of the Danish and Swedish monarchies and the design traditions in these countries, it is not surprising that among the more than 100 warrant-holding Danish companies a prominent place is occupied by leading manufacturers of furniture, lighting, and accessories, for instance, Carl Hansen & Søn, Bang & Olufsen, Kaj Bojesen, and Le Klint, and the jewellery designers A. Dragsted, A. Michelsen, A. Kösner, Georg Jensen, and Ole Lynggaard. In Sweden, warrant-holding companies include Bukowskis auction house, Volvo, IKEA, and Fjällräven. Among purveyors to the reigning house, only Ole Lynggaard fully accentuates the historical privilege by using the coat of arms in its logo.<sup>20</sup>

The monarchy, with its cultural connotations, can be perceived as a vital marketing factor. As Balmer's research team proved in their study, a monarchy is

a corporate brand that has accommodated and embraced change. It is a brand that still adds value and gives meaning to its key constituencies, an element that is for us a core tenet of branding. And it is a corporate brand with considerable financial value in terms of benefits to the country's businesses and general public. It is a brand that has remained a symbol of nationhood and people. (Balmer et al. 2005: 5–6)

This image is particularly strong in the case of the progressive, Scandinavian monarchies, who enjoy a very high level of social trust and approval – a positive rating among 70% of citizens in Sweden, for instance (Balmer et al. 2005: 4–5). Therefore, incorporating evidence of the royal household's approval in marketing has a positive impact by reinforcing the idea of the product's quality and the company's traditional values.

Even though choosing to emphasise the royal stamp of approval in branding might seem an obvious thing to do, most Scandinavian companies do not make prominent display of the fact of holding a warrant either on their website or social media channels, or in their official catalogues and brochures. This is a completely different approach than that of the British

<sup>20</sup> See [www.olelynggaard.com](http://www.olelynggaard.com), accessed: 5.06.2022.

market, where the privilege is strongly accentuated as an integral part of branding, as it conveys an element of exclusiveness, which is often desired by brands. The opposite approach of Scandinavian firms could be linked to the fact that Scandinavian design has grown out of an egalitarian, humble design tradition, and ideas of equality and the bridging of class differences are part of the culture. In such a situation, emphasising the elitism of products through monarchical messaging would somehow contradict the values with which Scandinavian companies want to be identified. Although they are often premium brands, their marketing is based on suggesting that their products' high prices are due to quality rather than to links to the ruling house.

Another aspect that is worth mentioning in the context of promoting design is the connection of design with the culture of Scandinavian countries in the broad sense. Currently, a lot of attention is being paid to the unwritten values that are part of the so-called national DNA of Danes, Swedes, and Finns. Characteristics that until recently were an integral part of the national lifestyle have been promoted as global trends. Although Scandinavian values are supposed to be the contrary of ubiquitous consumerism, these values are often used as marketing strategies by design companies. The main cultural phenomena are identified by the terms *hygge*, *fika*, and *lagom*. The first term in Danish means “comfort, bliss” and is associated with a philosophy of life consisting of celebrating small pleasures in the company of loved ones in an appropriate atmosphere; the second term refers to the Swedish celebration of an afternoon coffee; and the third literally means “the appropriate amount” and refers to a philosophy of harmony and moderation. A *hygge* atmosphere is created by softly lit interiors that provide a feeling of comfort. The right accessories are needed to achieve it: lamps, candlesticks, blankets, cushions, and so forth. Danish (or generally Scandinavian) design is not promoted literally, but such domestic design is strongly emphasised as a perfect complement to *hygge* interiors. The use of Le Klint and Louis Poulsen lighting, shown as design classics in the illustrations of Meik Wiking's book *The Little Book of Hygge* (Wiking 2017: 10), is an example. This juxtaposition sends a visual message: the simplest way to achieve a blissful atmosphere is through Danish lamps. Design and its role are mentioned in many of the popular Scandinavian publications (Kingsley 2014: 54–74) that focus on the theme of happiness in Scandinavia (Partanen 2016: 16–24); these publications mention specific brands and designs, and undoubtedly contribute to the popularisation of Scandinavian design (Russel 2015: 4–35). Moreover, “Visit Denmark also associates hygge with more easily graspable elements such as apple

slices, candles, interior design, restaurants, and accommodation, but do, to a larger extent than Visit Sweden, refer to the warm feeling of cosiness, which is the 'core' of *hygge*. [...] Simplification is necessary in the processes of re-presenting the destination in its branding campaigns" (Caprioli et al. 2021: 353–354). Often used to promote tourism, cultural traditions are shown as part of the Scandinavian lifestyle being advertised and play an important part in design recognition. As M. Breuning and S. Kallestrup observe, *hygge's* significance on both the national and international level has grown due to its comprehensive promotion and advertisement. "Applied cosiness" has grown beyond a psychological perception of mood and has become strictly product-related. Moreover, "marketing it as a utopian, national, Danish concept, cleverly linked to aspirational happiness, has allowed it to become, rather like Scandinavian Design, a global brand underpinned by mythologies" (Breuning & Kallestrup 2020: 161–163).

The marketing and popularisation of this cultural phenomenon (Scandinavian design), as a simplified idea, was vastly furthered by national tourism boards, whose efforts to promote it are yet another factor contributing to the process of design recognition. The tight bond linking design to the global idea of tourism ensures its constant presence in the global discourse. As noticed by Therkelsen and Halkier,

[a] design theme may also entail a certain degree of distinction from other destinations, though other Scandinavian places can boast similar design traditions, and as Scandinavian countries are often lumped together by basically all non-Scandinavians, a promotional strategy focusing on this element may turn out [to be] problematic. The positive side to the Scandinavian design theme is, on the other hand, that it may be recognisable and create further associations in the minds of potential tourists. (Therkelsen & Halkier 2004: 19)

Promoting design as an integral part of national heritage has become standard in Scandinavia and allows a direct connection between culture and retail business to be created. Every country has its own unique way of achieving this end. The general idea, though, is to incorporate the design image in different contexts in order to reach the broadest audience possible. Such so-called umbrella branding plays an important role in increasing design recognition (Therkelsen & Halkier 2008: 159–175) and also directly

influences a company's reach by providing retail possibilities in the most tourist-dense locations, such as airports and museums.

The question of the kind of Scandinavian design branding that aims at the recognition of that design as part of the cultural heritage of Scandinavia calls for an additional explanation. The majority of the above-mentioned brands promote themselves both globally, under the umbrella term of Scandinavian/Nordic design, and are equally focused on national values. Sweden, Denmark, and Finland have dedicated institutions that support design promotion and recognition as part of national cultural policies. Interestingly, some of the branding techniques strongly accentuate the national design heritage. For example, Finland has popularised the “Design from Finland” certificate. It marks “native Finnish products of impeccable quality and serves as a consumer guideline. The same means of promotion is often used by Finnish design companies, which use various iconic pieces of national design to underline their own inclusion in the design heritage” (Wiśnicka 2019: 277–278). Despite a seemingly narrowing perspective, such endeavours reassure the potential customer of the company's Scandinavian roots and induce a sense of belonging.

The above marketing strategies have focused on emphasising Scandinavian identity, quality, and timelessness. However, it is equally important to mention that some of the Scandinavian design brands needed to establish a new type of narration to face negative publicity from stories revealed by independent journalists. The two most significant cases concern Swedish design leaders – IKEA and Volvo. In 2011 the former, a well-established corporation based on transparency and the personal values of its founder Ingvar Kamprad, had to face the uncovering of Kamprad's dark past by the Swedish author Elisabeth Åsbrink. Kamprad's ties to the Swedish fascist party became a news story worldwide. Although the company did not seem to shy away from difficult questions, and Kamprad offered official apologies (Falkheimer & Heide 2023: 410–411), the topic was raised again in 2016, when IKEA opened its museum in Älmhult. The controversy did not go unnoticed by the press, which underlined the part of the exhibition dedicated to the IKEA founder's infamous youth. *The Straits Times* noticed that the explanation of the company's history (closely connected to Ingvar Kamprad's life) included “a small section titled ‘Learning from mistakes.’ The museum also addresses some of the controversies surrounding Ikea, including Mr Kamprad's ties to the Swedish Nazi party.”<sup>21</sup> The BBC also

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<sup>21</sup> [www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/home-design/ikea-museum-opens-addresses-founders-nazi-past](http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/home-design/ikea-museum-opens-addresses-founders-nazi-past), accessed: 31.01.2023.

mentioned the story in a piece regarding the opening of the IKEA museum<sup>22</sup> and *The Times of Israel* emphasised “that the museum displayed a copy of a handwritten letter by Kamprad to ‘the Ikea family’ detailing what he called his ‘biggest fiasco’ and outlining his links to Swedish fascist Per Engdahl.”<sup>23</sup> A *New York Times* piece by Älmhult, after Kamprad’s death, revisited this dark past and accentuated a lack of repentance and thus reconciliation. “Ingvar Kamprad’s image and Sweden’s continue to reflect each other: without shadows, without disgrace, and without any ambition to come to terms with their past” (Älmhult 2018).

As far as the 2011 news regarding Kamprad is concerned, IKEA’s marketing strategy was based on avoiding the topic. After the official letter was published, the company’s spokespeople underlined the link between Kamprad’s errors of youth and his grown-up understanding of the past. The advertisements directly following the revelations about the Nazi/fascist sympathies of IKEA’s founder continued to promote the previous model of easy living; however, the 2012 “Battery Icons” campaign by the creative studio Ogilvy indirectly referred to the question. The campaign’s advertising posters showed batteries with pictures of famous leaders and dictators in place of the plus/minus sign. One of the pairs included Adolf Hitler (as the negative) in opposition to Nelson Mandela. Moreover, the company became more sensitive to the content of websites where it advertised its products. In 2013, IKEA “removed ads from a Swedish anti-Semitic blog,” Gothic team, and announced a thorough review of its advertising environment (“Ikea Pulls Ad from Swedish Anti-Semitic Blog”). In addition, IKEA has focused on equality and the proper representation of sexual, ethnic, and societal groups in their campaigns. One vivid example is Forsman & Bodenfors ad film “What If?,” directed by Knucklehead’s Maceo Frost.

A very similar issue was experienced by the Swedish automobile leader Volvo, whose false claims regarding diesel engine emissions – a scandal commonly known as Dieselgate and involving other companies – put them in a fraudulent position in terms of eco-consciousness and sustainability. The scandal, which affected both the new and used car market (Campos et al. 2022: 4–5), was publicised to the extent that it created a worldwide lack of confidence in regard to any environmental claims the company might make in its advertising. It should be noted that from the marketing standpoint the impact of a scandal depends on the substitutability of the product,

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<sup>22</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36671489](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36671489), accessed: 31.01.2023.

<sup>23</sup> [www.timesofisrael.com/decades-of-design-on-display-as-ikea-opens-museum](http://www.timesofisrael.com/decades-of-design-on-display-as-ikea-opens-museum), accessed: 31.01.2023.

that is, the larger the number of substitutes for a product, the more costly a scandal will be for a firm (Campos et al. 2019: 28). Despite the global impact that Dieselgate had on the market, the only noticeable advertising change, beginning with the 2015 campaign, was the focus on questions of safety, including of children and elderly people (Única, 2015) and on air-quality control (Grey London, 2015), based on a strict connection with nature.

In conclusion, the promotion of Scandinavian brands in the design sector is guided by its own principles, which have been developed since the 1950s in order to create the mythologisation of Northern design that continues to this day (Davies 2003: 101–110). There is an unquestionable tendency to emphasise cultural belonging to the Scandinavian design legacy, which is associated with high-quality products accessible to a wide audience. Despite the frequency with which a product's national or local roots may be highlighted (either in the name or in descriptions), care is taken to stress the Nordic (or more often Scandinavian) character of the design and its place on the map of trends. The advertising of Scandinavian design contains an idea of inclusivity, which manifests itself in the presentation of products in simple surroundings, expressing their universality and lack of snobbery. For this reason, the title of royal purveyor, which is so eagerly displayed on British brands, is only sporadically used to promote Nordic companies. Egalitarianism is very much accentuated in design in the context of happiness and moderation – *hygge* and *lagom* – which are very popular notions on the international stage. In addition, continuous activities in the sphere of new media and the organisation of commercial and cultural events are conducive to the popularisation of Scandinavian design among a growing audience.

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### /// Abstract

This text presents and analyses the principal marketing strategies used by Danish, Swedish, and Finnish companies and describes the set of marketing messages characteristic of Scandinavian design brands. The most popular strategies involve geo-recognition, with sociolinguistic mechanisms that influence the names of companies and products and the self-description of brands. The contradictory issues of nobilitation and egalitarianism, which have a pivotal role in the advertising of specific products for different groups of recipients, are addressed. Co-branding, including image collaborations between brands operating in different sectors, and mass media influence (the leading tool of advertisement, through films, series, and TV commercials), are other strategies. Connections are established between design promotion and widely recognisable cultural phenomena, such as *hygge* or *lagom*. Analysis reveals that the main marketing strategies characteristic of the design brands of the North revolve around a multitude of connections to Scandinavian heritage and culture.

Keywords:

design, promotion, Scandinavian design, Nordic design, marketing, branding

/// **Anna Wiśnicka** – art and design historian specialising in Nordic design and the cultural and commercial connotations of design. Author of a book on Finnish design, *Simo Heikkilä: Designer's Life and Work*, and numerous scientific articles. Currently an assistant professor in the Department of Humanities of the UKSW University in Warsaw and an associate editor of the annual journal *Cultural Studies Appendix*.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6821-529X>

E-mail: [a.wisnicka@uksw.edu.pl](mailto:a.wisnicka@uksw.edu.pl)