Guest Editorial

Nordic brands

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Welcome to this special issue on Nordic Brands. We are delighted to bring together in this special issue a range of papers focusing upon many different dimensions of brand management and strategy within a Nordic context, with contributors drawn from Helsinki School of Economics, Copenhagen Business School, Lulea University of Technology, The Norwegian School of Management, Lund University, Kunde & Co and Millward Brown Denmark, among others. This broad and distinguished array of contributors provides a rich set of perspectives on current theory and practice involving Nordic brands.

The power and necessity of branding in a deregulated market are explored by Biune and Andersen in their study of a major company within Denmark's energy sector. The authors describe how the company transformed itself 'from being a closed organization to becoming an open organization, from a domestic view to an international perspective, from lumbering monopoly to free competition, from being an invisible supplier to becoming one of Denmark's strongest and most visible brands'. Deregulation of any market always signifies considerable upheaval and uncertainty for existing players, and Biune and Andersen demonstrate the relevance of the brand-building process as a means of implementing a strong concept to enable a former state monopoly to compete successfully with international rivals. In particular, the activation of an ideal sponsorship proved crucial to the company's brand strategy.

In his paper on the Finnish country-of-origin effect, Ryan discusses the ways

in which companies from Finland have emphasised their provenance as a value-adding strategy. Ryan shows how it is only relatively recently that Finnish firms have made explicit use of their country-of-origin. This trend has occurred as Finnish firms seek to communicate an image of innovation, quality and prestige, based heavily on Finland's tradition of excellence in design and further bolstered by the country's commitment to investment in education and research.

A focus on Nordic design is also adopted by Roncha, who employs a design-oriented analytic scheme to evaluate three Nordic brands: BoConcept, H&M and Ikea. Within an overarching brand image and brand identity perspective, Roncha attempts to elucidate the elements that define Nordic brands, and to show how Nordic country-of-origin is different from other country-of-origins. Drawing upon her previous experience as brand designer for brands such as Puma, L'Oreal and Moma NY, Roncha posits a number of conclusions pertaining to the role and influence of design within brand management.

In their paper, Rubin, Shultz and Hatch investigate the strategically important issue of whether Nordic brand values can translate successfully to the US market. They focus specifically upon the pharmaceuticals sector and the efforts of Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk to differentiate its brand in the US market through an ethical positioning founded upon the concepts of corporate social responsibility (CSR). The challenge faced by Novo Nordisk is that such an ethical, CSR-based brand positioning may be

successful in Northern European culture but it may face a more sceptical, bottom line-oriented environment within the US market. The authors present the results of a multi-year project involving two case studies with Novo Nordisk.

Recent years have seen a proliferation of interest in the concept and practice of internal branding, and Wallstrom, Karlsson and Salehi-Sangari ground their study of the internal brand-building process in Swedish service firms within this increasingly important sub-domain of brand management and strategy. The authors present the findings of a qualitative study comprising three case studies that show the impact of the internal brand-building process. The selected firm in each case had undergone its internal branding under different circumstances—due to a crisis, geographical expansion or strategic repositioning. Brand audit, brand identity and brand position statements were found to be common stages in the internal branding processes of the three firms studied.

The mobile phone market in Denmark is the locus of Jensen's study into installers' readiness to use mobile communications during the course of their work. Jensen notes that, according to the Information Society Index, Denmark ranks number one out of 53 countries evaluated on the four infrastructures: computer, the internet, telecom, and social. The empirical material presented by Jensen includes in-depth interviewing and ethnosemantic analysis as well as a survey among 119 installers followed by statistical analysis. The data were collected for the world's largest manufacturer of plumbing and heating pumps, Grundfos (www.grundfos.com), and the author therefore included questions about specific future services in this context.

A cross-category examination of brand preference and liking in the context of the

Swedish market for consumer packaged food is provided in the paper contributed by Anselmsson, Johansson and Persson. The authors of this paper attempt to obtain an overall view of differences in brand strength between international vs domestic brands, store brands vs manufacturer brands and single-category vs extended multi-category brands. In order to achieve this objective, the authors conducted a web survey with 4× 500 Swedish consumers, focusing upon brands in the highly dynamic Swedish retail market.

Taking as their case company a large, Finland-based, globally operating pulp and paper corporation, Aspara and Tikkanen investigate the previously neglected issue of what management practices of corporate branding the managers of B2B companies are actually motivated to adopt and what goals related to customers, on the one hand, and to other stakeholders, on the other, those practices are considered to serve. The authors propose a number of conclusions related to managing the brand hierarchy of the brand portfolio and defining and communicating aspirational corporate brand image values.

Lassen, Kunde and Gioia examine the specific brand-building challenges facing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), focusing specifically on the case of Montana A/S from Denmark. The authors contend that, if done correctly, corporate branding does work and that it can be achieved with the kind of limited marketing budget that SMEs normally have available. In a more conceptual rather than empirical paper, Thjomoe provides some reflections on the power of branding, what is included in the construct of a brand and how a brand is established. Gad and Moss continue this reflective vein by highlighting the importance of the sustainability concept, illustrating this

concern with reference to Swedish brands in particular.

We hope that this special issue on Nordic Brands will be stimulating and thought-provoking, and that it will act as a catalyst for further research into brand

management and strategy as it is practised in the Nordic nations.

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Guest Editors