

Exploring the Role and Operation Mode of Industrial Design in Public Diplomacy: Taking the Design of "IKEA" Representing Sweden's National Image (Nordic Image) as an Example

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ABSTRACT

The industrial products that permeate our lives do not only bring about the establishment and satisfaction of functional relationships, but more importantly, the self-determined construction of the audience's specific cognitive structure and thinking ideology, which is actively intervened by the audience and happens from the inside out unconsciously or subconsciously all the time. What people experience is not only a daily product but a country or region's culture and consciousness. This study was undertaken to explore the role of industrial design in public diplomacy and to present its important power in the construction of the national image and the construction of audiences in other countries. In the discussion, this study also used the "IKEA" design that represents Sweden's national image (Nordic image) and influences the world as a typical case to analyze and interpret.

Keywords: *Industrial design, Public diplomacy, National image construction, "IKEA" design, Sweden's national image (Nordic image).*

1. INTRODUCTION

Public diplomacy emphasizes that a country uses information and cultural exchanges to influence or construct another country's public understanding of its country, thereby enhancing its national image and realizing its national interests. In 1965, Edmund Gullion, a professor at Tufts University, gave the earliest academic definition of "public diplomacy", "the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy... including the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another... and the transnational flow of information and ideas". Public diplomacy creates a more favorable public image for the subject through the creation or role of certain specific media behaviors and actors in the "open concept and information exchange" (US

Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 1991), and then builds and realizes a better external benefit environment. Before the 21st century, the research on public diplomacy mostly focused on a single-dimensional study with government subjects as actors, emphasizing the national government's leading role in the implementation process. After the 21st century, especially after 9/11, Jan Melissen (2005) proposed the "New Public Diplomacy", which brought the study of public diplomacy into a new stage. Melissen identified the actors of public diplomacy should be diverse, that is, emphasize the important role of non-governmental actors such as enterprises, groups, organizations, and individuals in public diplomacy. He believed that diplomacy should not only be a country-centric hierarchical model but in a large network environment. At the same time, he also implied that public diplomacy should be two-way, and interaction with the people is very important. The favorable shaping of the national image and the environment is also a series of effects realized from the bottom up based on the

citizen as the object. Then, how to influence the "impression" of the thinking, value, and consciousness of the public of other countries and construct a true and beneficial image of the country is also a problem that is constantly being solved in public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy is one of the important ways to shape the image of the country. Through the construction and narration of information, signs, and symbols, it transfers and assimilates selected or specific knowledge, culture, and value consciousness to the public of other countries, forming an international image and impression under specific goals from the inside out. In this process, as a "cultural medium" for construction and narration, it plays an important role, and its selection and operation will directly affect the delivery results and effectiveness. The interactive carriers of information and culture such as film, literature, radio, performance, the Internet, and even well-known brands that are active in our lives are the main force of cultural media. Research on them has naturally become one of the main research directions in the field of public diplomacy. For example, the research on public diplomacy produced by Disney, with Mickey Mouse's good-neighborly policy and Donald Gets Drafted as the representative of the research object, research on the role model of global media in public diplomacy (Philip Seib, 1997, 2012), and paradigm study of national branding image for public diplomacy (Simon Anholt, 1996), etc.

However, we tend to overlook a medium that is closer to us, that is, products of daily life. They seem to have been integrated into our lives, constructing and regulating our knowledge and concepts invisibly. For a daily product with good industrial design, the exchange of information and culture contained in it will also be more direct and deeper. It can realize the self in the audience's subconscious or unconscious state, which is the self-determined construction of the specific cognitive structure and thinking ideology from the inside to the outside actively involved by the audience. What people experience is not only a work product, but also a country or region's culture and consciousness. "Every object tells a story if you know how to read it" (Henry Ford, 2009), and "the best design is no design" (Kenya Hara, 2003). However, to the best of our knowledge, few researchers have addressed this area. Even as far as the entire discipline of design is concerned, it is very rare to use cross-study perspectives of public diplomacy in research. At present, it is only slightly

involved in the field of public diplomacy based on animation and fashion brands, but this kind of involvement does not come from the perspective of design research.

Therefore, this study is to explore the important role and operation mode of industrial design in public diplomacy, and present its important power in the construction of the national image and the construction of audiences in other countries. In the discussion, this paper takes the design of "IKEA" that represents Sweden's national image (Nordic image) and influences the world as a typical case to analyze and interpret.

2. INDUSTRIAL DESIGN AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The role of design is not simply to solve problems such as function and form, but to construct and deal with relationships. It's just that the former is directly presented in the form of entities or sense organs, while the latter is more hidden in the interaction. Therefore, people often seldom realize or even ignore the two-way effect in interaction. But in fact, people have been in it all the time, and new specific constructions and conventions have been formed in this interaction. In the completion and operation of the relationship, cultural thinking and value consciousness are also passed through the interaction between the two parties, and its construction is quickly started from the inside out. After all, the design itself is also a kind of culture, which essentially carries the thinking and cultural characteristics of different nations. When a design product interacts with the audience, it not only satisfies basic physical, physiological, and other functional requirements, but also contains another parallel and more important series of actions, namely, the transmission and influence of cultural thinking and value consciousness as information. The operation of the whole process is precisely the construction and self-completion of the relationship. At this time, while the audience is covering the functional purpose of the object, a new relationship and structure are also being constructed and acting, starting from the audience's internal to external actions, which includes all levels from the metaphysical to the physical.

"The entire process of processing the information that people come into contact with during the interaction will be initiated and guided by the pervasive emotional state. Through this influence on cognitive activities, emotion implants

emotional valence into people's judgment of mutual relationships." (Ling LI, 2015) When people interact with the design, they have been changed invisibly. The new emotions and cognitive definitions have accumulated and occurred in this bit by bit. Its narrative is no longer limited to official or folk, internal or external, comprehensive or single, description or inference in the traditional sense, nor is it restricted by signs or symbols. Its occurrence and operation are more like a new construction, realizing penetration¹ in the design and interaction of the relationship with people. Eventually, an original symbolic order will be formed in the active participation of the audience. At this time, the acting relationship and structure are constantly being newly defined and integrated in the interaction, realizing that "attraction and persuasion are socially constructed" (Joseph Nye, 2011). The information transmission and cultural exchange contained in the design are continuously realized in the active participation of the audience. It is a construction process that starts from the inside as nature, confirming that "culture is a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Alexander Wendt, 1999). It is different from other well-known "cultural media" which is the transmission and function of the medium as the core subject, but the generation and realization of a primitive relationship and cognitive structure. It is the generation and realization of a primitive relationship and cognitive structure. Therefore, its influential effect will also produce more profound and far-reaching effects due to the active integration with the audience from the inside out.

Design plays its unique role and value in information transmission and cultural exchanges, which has an important influence and significance on the spread and construction of national culture and image. And it is also one of the paradigms that urgently need to be studied in public diplomacy. As an industrial design that is closely related to our daily life, it bears the brunt. A good daily product design often immerses us in the natural experience because of its strong fusion, which makes us often overlook the conscious potential information reading process as an independent identity. But in fact, the communication of information and the construction of cognition have injected people's consciousness and ideas into the interaction. One of the main reasons for the "IKEA" case selected in

this article is that its products are home products. As a home product, it is surrounded people in a more close-to-life form, and it has continuously affected people's ideas and behaviors unconsciously.

3. IKEA AND SWEDEN'S NATIONAL IMAGE (NORDIC IMAGE)

A person can have never been to Northern Europe and don't know Sweden, but he/she probably knows "IKEA". A person may not know the appearance of the Swedish flag, but he/she will probably know the classic blue and yellow, perhaps because of the widespread IKEA logo. As of August 31, 2018, IKEA, as a global large-scale home furnishing retailer, operates 367 stores in 30 markets around the world. In the fiscal year 2018, IKEA stores received a total of 838 million visitors, and the IKEA website (IKEA.com) received a total of 2.35 billion visits.

People are beginning to know Northern Europe, perhaps starting from "IKEA". IKEA's product design represents the "Nordic style" which we often call today. It is characterized by simplicity and nature, humanity and practicality, mainly wood, and the use of white and black series. The formation and display of these characteristics are all closely related to the natural geographical environment, myths, national traditions, and national policies of Northern Europe. These are also used unconsciously to build the audience's first impression of Northern Europe and Sweden. This impression has evolved into a collective or group concept and cognitive modality precisely because of the life attributes of the product itself and the huge scope of its application. Let's look at its characteristics one by one below.

3.1 IKEA's "Democratic Design": Humanistic Functionalism

IKEA calls its own design "democratic design", that is, "it's made up of five elements: form, function, quality, sustainability and a low price". The final formation of its design style must first be traced back to the classical Scandinavian style. IKEA's products are developed with the evolution of Scandinavian style, and then merged with modern style and Swedish characteristics. In the early days of IKEA's establishment, under the influence of Bauhaus's "function-first" design trend, the Scandinavian design showed that functionalism was the primary essence. Among them, Sweden is particularly affected by it. In the influence of

1. It has a certain meaning of "penetration mode". The "penetration model" is one of the five modes of public diplomacy. For details, please refer to the article written by Qingan ZHOU (2011).

functionalism, practicality and rationality are ranked first. Although both are the pursuit of function and practicality, there are still obvious differences between the Bauhaus design style and the Scandinavian style (Nordic style). In the design of Bauhaus, the function exists as a dogma and guides the production of products. Products are often present in geometric forms with a bit of coldness or rigidity. However, the Nordic design is simple and natural, giving people a comfortable visual and applicable experience. Products are mostly present in natural and organic forms with arcs as the basic unit, giving people a strong sense of simplicity and application, presenting a functional design with a "human touch", that is, humanistic functionalism. This kind of centripetal towards nature and society also comes from Scandinavian tradition.

The Nordic people have the values and thinking consciousness of the "Zhandai's Law". Their anti-exaggerated appearance and simple internality have formed values that emphasize introversion and self-restraint, as well as the principles of life that are prudent in words and deeds, and equal humanity. This also makes them attach great importance to the attribute of practicality, but this kind of practicality is more accurately applicable, because there is also a natural and essential humanism and democracy in it. This unique value orientation of the Nordic people also makes their products show a bit "cute" in the application of functions.

At the same time, under the modern democratic political concept of Sweden's "people's homeland", it is the development and change of a warm welfare society. This top-down democratic concept and social environment are also melted into the Swedish

humanistic functionalist design, giving people a soft and applicable experience.

3.2 A Natural Design Style: the Use of Wood

Of course, the Nordic people's extreme admiration of nature is also indispensable in the embodiment of human functionalism, but it will be more emphasized in the use of wood, so this article combines the two into one. In the Nordic style represented by IKEA, we can see the use of a large amount of wood that retains its natural texture and color. Timber is the main raw material for products. On the one hand, the Nordic region is rich in natural forest resources, and its main temperate maritime climate is also conducive to the growth of coniferous forests. Pine and other log materials are abundant. Sweden's forest coverage rate is as high as 54%. The selection and application of the main materials of the product is also a reflection of the local natural and geographical features.

Another big reason why the Nordic people love wood is also because of their reverence for nature since ancient times. In Norse mythology, the universe is composed of the Yggdrasil, which is divided into three main regions and nine main countries. The specific structure is shown in the following figure drawn by the author. The Nordic people have their special affection for trees. They are close to trees and love nature. This kind of thinking and consciousness is also subtly acting and revealing in their design, affecting the formation of the Nordic style we see now. ("Figure 1")

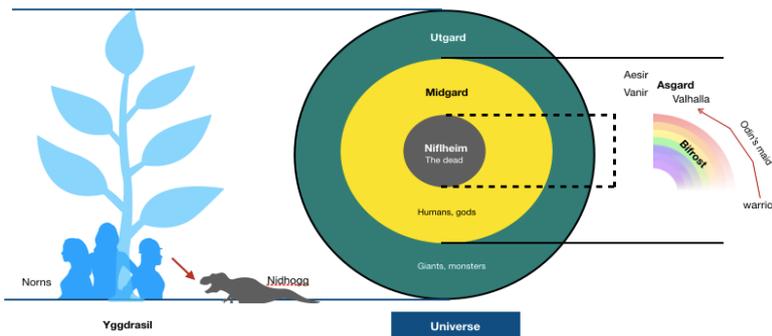


Figure 1 A schematic diagram describing the composition of the belief system of the Nordic gods.

a The picture is drawn by the author.

3.3 Color Selection: the Formation of White and Black Series

"IKEA" products have also left a deep impression on the color. It does not have the colorful beating caused by the large chromatic aberration of the United States, nor the golden luxury of Italy, but the extremely pure chromatic aberration experience produced under the main colors of wood and white. On the one hand, it is mainly due to the geographical location of the extreme north of Northern Europe. They need more light perception to change the lack of nature, and the use of white can increase daylighting and give people a sense of brightness. And because of the climate restrictions, Nordic people are more prone to depression. So we can also see the appearance of the color system in the monochrome system. On the other hand, the use of pure colors such as white and black gives people the kind of natural and quiet experience and low-key and introverted feelings that the Nordic people pursue, highlighting their natural concept and character orientation.

"IKEA" brings Nordic and Swedish styles to people in the form of home products. It affects people's cognition and establishes the image of the country at every moment when people use it in daily life. People often know the general Nordic style without knowing Nordic and Sweden, because of the use of "IKEA" products, or even just rough insights, and they have a preliminary sketch of the Nordic image (Sweden's national image) in their hearts. The democratic design of "IKEA" (humanistic functionalist design) not only interprets the company's pursuit of creating "a better everyday life for the many people", but also shows the Scandinavian tradition, the value system of the Nordic "Zhandai's Law", and the Swedish democratic political concept of building a "people's homeland". Their natural design style represented by the use of wood is not only a manifestation of Nordic design, but also vividly presents their characteristic natural geography and mythological stories about advocating nature. The use of their monochromatic pure colors reveals their life and personality characteristics in a clear and warm atmosphere. When people use products, they have unconsciously or subconsciously received this information, and they have begun to construct their cognitive system and image consciousness. In 1998, the BBC commented that "it is more than a store, it is a religion".

4. CONCLUSION

While "IKEA" home products are integrated into the lives of the audience, they are also an immersion of Sweden's national image (Nordic image). In the process of the product interacting with the audience, it is not just the establishment and satisfaction of functional relationships. What's more important is the self-determined construction of the specific cognitive structure and thinking ideology from the inside out that has been happening unconsciously or subconsciously, and actively intervened by the audience. When people use products, they are also invisibly receiving, self-fulfilling, and being regulated in this relationship mode, realizing the self-determined construction of cognition, consciousness, and value impression. And this natural transmission of information and culture also brings a more far-reaching and in-depth effect in life and interaction, just like the "IKEA" mentioned above. Industrial design, in an extremely natural and routine state, buried the seeds of the national image in the audience, and took root in every bit. The transmission and construction of information under this influence model have a broader, lasting, and profound effect than other direct, externally-operated, or special-shaped (non-routine, non-universal) media. It even has a purely subversive effect under a certain constructive nature in its internal reaction. This is also the important role and significance of industrial design in public diplomacy.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Bojun Hou.

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