Consumers’ Accounts Re-Producing the Cultural Contradiction of Global Shopping Brands- a Socio-Cultural Level of Analysis

Sofia Ulver, Ph.D candidate, Lund University, Sweden

Oppositional discourses create cultural contradiction and consequently anxiety in consumer society (Holt, 2003abc; forthcoming). In this investigation, the cultural contradiction of global shopping brands is explored on its socio-cultural level through inter-textual analysis of texts written by twenty-two university students of ten different nationalities. As part of a larger cross-cultural research project, the aim of this paper is to begin conceptualizing the contradiction by identifying ideological themes in the oppositional discourses. The detected themes were not only inherently contradictory, but also consisting of the same content and form as the oppositional discourse, by Foucault (1978) called tactical polyvalence of discourses.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/13798/eacr/vol7/E-07

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Consumers’ Accounts Re-producing the Cultural Contradiction of Global Shopping Brands—
A Socio-Cultural Level of Analysis

Sofia Ulver, Lund University, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Oppositional discourses create cultural contradiction and consequently anxiety in consumer society (Holt, 2003abc; 2004). In this investigation, the cultural contradiction of global shopping brands is explored on its socio-cultural level through inter-textual analysis of texts written by twenty-four university students of ten different nationalities. As part of a larger cross-cultural research project, the aim of this paper is to begin conceptualizing the contradiction by identifying ideological themes in the oppositional discourses. The detected themes were not only inherently contradictory, but also consisting of the same content and form as the oppositional discourse, by Foucault (1978) called “tactical polyvalence of discourses”.

INTRODUCTION

We seem to love and hate them at the same time- the large global brands. Global brands are evidently profitable and popular enough to spread their wings wider and globally, but unpopular enough to get the full and non-misinterpretable attention from anti-consumerists (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Thompson & Arsel, 2004). As an example of popularity one can spot Zara’s fashion logo in urban areas stretching from Abu Dhabi to Santa Domingo to Stockholm, or IKEA’s home furnishing logo in suburban areas all the way from Beijing, Jeddah, Netanya, San Fransisco, to Copenhagen. But, like mentioned above, they are not the only ones spreading their wings, so are anti-brand products (i.e. Klein’s (2000) book “No logo”, Schlosser’s (2002) book “Fast-food nation”, Blythman’s, (2004) book “Shopped”, and Spurlock’s (2004) movie “Supersize me”). Consequently, not only are consumers today more literate (Holt, 2002) and informed about consumer society’s and branding strategies’ diverse consequences for cultural diversity, environment and locality, preached by the anti-globalization advocates, but paradoxically enough also about the notion that the anti-brand preachers use the exact same branding strategies they are criticising, to market their opinions (Higgins & Tadajewski, 2002).

Global brands as an academic topic has during the last decade emerged within different research domains. Although often empirically investigated amongst consumer, most marketing research on global brands takes the perspective of brand management, i.e. by studying the benefit from positioning the brand as global (Steenkamp, et al., 2003; Holt, et.al. 2004; Kapferer, 2002), the difference between local and global brand image (Alden, et. al. 1999), the effect on brand image of certain global brand dimensions such as country-of-origin of the brand or of ethnocentrism amongst consumers (Pereira, et al., 2005; Brodowsky et al., 2004; Wang & Chen, 2004; Insch & McBride, 2004; Kaynak & Kara, 2002; Moon & Jain, 2002), etc. In contrast, in the literature on consumer culture (anthropology, ethnography, sociology, and marketing) the analytical categories of “the local” and “the global” are often used in order to make possible to analyse the complexities of globalization in relation to consumer culture (i.e. Belk, 1996; Wilk, 1995; Miller, 1995; Campbell, 1995; Appadurai, 1990). Hence, the scope there is more on a macro level of societal forces, where the meso- or micro level of the consumer “meeting” the brand is left for future micro research. Although substantial consumer cultural research regarding “the global” and “the local” has been done (i.e. Askegaard & Csaba, 2000; Askegaard & Madsen, 1998; Ger & Belk, 1996), very little research, to my knowledge, with one exception (Thompson & Arsel, 2004), has aimed to define and conceptualize the global brand’s inherent cultural contradiction, per se, as experienced by consumers.

On top of this scarcity of consumer research regarding the inherent complexities of the global brand contradiction as part of the predisposed discourses circulating in local and global consumer arenas, a detection of maybe the most provocative and at the same time provoked type of brand there is, namely the shopping brand, in all its nude street presence (think of the new social movement “reclaim the streets”), its homogenizing effects of globally disparate city scenes, and its carrying of globally standardized products (very often manufactured in third world countries, adding extra sensitivity to the infected matter), has not been a priority. Shops cannot be ignored. They govern what is suggested you buy; they are the law-enforcing politicians in a consumer society of mandatory choice, the guarantee givers for what is “in” and what is “out”, what is cool and what is not cool. They serve as hotels for mingling guests, where the latter are both visiting brands (sometimes) and visiting consumers. They are the rule-makers in the democracy of differentiation and in the totalitarian ruling of sameness. They give consumer society its options- and they are right there in the street in front of us.

As part of a larger, cross-cultural research project on globalizing shopping brands, in this paper I will start the exploration of the complexities that characterize the global shopping brand contradiction. Approaching the contradiction on three different levels of analysis and interest, namely; (1) a socio-cultural level, (2) a brand-political level, and (3) a market offer level, I will, by drawing from the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) research brand (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), in this specific paper begin exploring the socio-cultural level, using inter-textual analysis of texts written by twenty-four University students from a variety of countries in order to find dominant discourses constituting the contradiction I aim to conceptualize.

METHOD

In terms of epistemological choices, containing the one between a priori or emergent approaches to theory, I will lean on the basic ideas of Grant McCracken’s (1988) “four-part method of inquiry”, which originally is developed for long qualitative interviews. However, the iterative mode of the method lends itself specifically well for these written accounts as both analytical, and cultural categories need to be reviewed in previous theory and discovered in extant data following upon each other, in order to find emergent discoveries in individual cases but also in between (relationships) the different accounts. Hence, this method suggests an emic and etic approach to research data, where previous theory doesn’t function as an absolute a priori lens but where the data and previous theory instead “talk” to one another and constitute templates for each other iteratively.

On the methodological level, in order to see how the sociopolitical cultural contradiction contributes to forming the large
global shopping brand culture, a structural text analysis (Hellspong, 2001) was used on, by the respondents, written texts. The structural text analysis as defined by Hellspong (ibid.), has as purpose to describe a text’s multi-layered language-, content-, and social-structure in light of its context. The analytical questions to be asked concern its situational, inter-textual, and cultural context, its textual structure, its ideological structure, its inter-personal structure, and its general contextual relationships. For the sake of this specific investigation, the main focus will be on inter-textual and cultural context as well as on the ideological structure in terms of themes, propositions and perspectives. This way I should be able to see which the different texts are that interplay to create the discursive contradiction.

Data Collection

The sample and questionnaire

Drawing upon an investigation on “green consumer” marginalization by Moisander & Pesonen (2002), I generated accounts in written text from respondents by asking them to imagine themselves being pro- or against global brands (see questions below). This way the stereotypical discourses, as experienced by the respondent, used by each “side” are probable to emerge. The twenty-four respondents (n=22; age 20-30; n=2; age>30), came from ten different countries (Singapore, China (Hong Kong), Canada, USA, France, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Estonia, Sweden, and Denmark), and were all doing their Master’s degree in business administration at different universities around the world, temporarily joined at a large Swedish University for a short, international course in retail Marketing. The fact that the respondents had some knowledge in retail marketing was rather considered as an advantage than a biasing disadvantage, as it is probable that they incorporate a higher sensitivity to the topic at hand (yet without being pre-occupied like a researcher of the topic), and therefore more likely to have picked up stereotypical discourses from each “side”. The purpose of choosing respondents with different nationalities was not to trace differences to national cultures (unless there were emergent obvious reasons to do so) but rather to search for the similarities in dominant discourses as we here are talking about global brands, and wanting to do this with nationally spread respondents to not have an immediate national bias. This not to say that differences between national cultures wouldn’t have any relationship to differences in dominant discourses, quite the opposite; dominant, stereotypical discourses are of course often springing from the discourses active in national media, as well as from social class belonging and gender. Although these differences are very interesting and important to investigate, that is not the purpose of this specific paper. Rather, researching the cross-national similarities in dominant discourses characterising the polarities within this electrical field of tension, should be seen as a starting-point in understanding the cultural contradiction of global shopping brand better, thereby not saying they work on a higher level of scientific importance than differences do.

The following questions were given to the respondents:

(1) Imagine that you are an anti-global-brands/corporation consumer. What do you value, what do you search for in life, what is important to you in your life, society and the world? Please, describe you values, beliefs, and feelings as thoroughly as possible,

(2) Imagine that you are a pro-global-brands/corporation consumer. What do you value, what do you search for in life, what is important to you in your life, society and the world? Please, describe you values, beliefs, and feelings as thoroughly as possible,

(3) If you personally had to choose to speak for or against (or both), a large, “global” retailer, say IKEA, what arguments would you use?

The students were asked to look at one question (one whole white page to write on per question) at a time and to take about ten minutes per question. They were also asked to fill in a fourth page with direct personal data consisting of gender, age, country of residence (and how long time it had been and would be), home country, parents’ country of residence, as the last step. The actual analysis of the text was made by reading the 66 pages many times after the other in random order during a three-week period of time, trying to see patterns emerging after the many repetitive readings. When themes seemed to “jump out” at me I would go to relevant literature and look for further understanding or explanations. I would then go back to reading the texts, and follow the same procedure iteratively. When presenting extracts in the analysis below, no changes of the respondents’ formulations were made, that is: grammatical errors were not corrected or changed.

The choice of IKEA

The choice of including IKEA as a case in the third question was based on the following reasons:

(1) IKEA is one of the world’s 40 “most valuable global brands” (Businessweek, 2004),
(2) IKEA is a retailer, taking a lot of public space (although often in “less attractive” neighbourhoods),
(3) IKEA exists in the form of 186 stores in 31 countries/territories across the globe,
(4) IKEA has in its mission statement the duty to grow further in order to “create a better everyday life for the many people”,
(5) in an ideal IKEA-world all its stores (up to almost 40 000 m² large) should look exactly like the standardized guidelines, that are provided by Inter IKEA Systems, state they should,
(6) IKEA is large also in turn-over: $ 11,3 billion 2003,
(7) IKEA has stores on four continents: Asia, North America, Europe, Australia,
(8) IKEA is predominantly consumer oriented,
(9) IKEA has a highly standardized (homogenized) store and range concept (with small variances like bigger furniture in the US, or odd bed sizes in Switzerland), but adapted (heterogenized) market communications (TV-commercials, advertising in magazines and newspapers, store communications etc.), apart from the IKEA-catalogues which are more like hybrids (i.e. having different front-covers, structures and product category sales-priorities between the continents, but within each continent the differences are very small apart from the translated language)
(10) IKEA is not your “normal” global brand as in “American” (Holt et al, 2004), but from Sweden, a very small (and therefore less “threatening”?) country in Scandinavia.

All together the facts above create an interesting dynamism between the local and the global in the meeting with the consumer- a dynamism, which may generate some particular dimensions that we have not seen before in academic research, often aiming at brands like McDonalds (i.e. Ritzer, 1993; Belk, 1996) or Coca-Cola (i.e. Ger & Belk, 1996).
ANALYSIS

The textual analysis of the data had as purpose to define, by connecting to ideological themes, perspectives and propositions, the dominant discourses regarding anti- and pro- global brands, as well as seeing if discourse regarding global shopping brands would in any way differ in terms of above-mentioned themes.

Anti-global-brand discourse

Brand Reification

The texts reflect a contradictive view upon humanity. In order to defend the cynical view upon corporations, which are run by humans, a de-humanization is made where brands are reified into active and cynical subjects far alienated from humanity. Some texts un-critically express this (extract 1) whilst some (extract 2) sarcastically ironize this view.

Extract 1
I think that global brands will destroy ethical and cultural diversity all over the world. Those brands do not care about particularities; they only want to make profit. Small brands will be eliminated, bio-diversity as well, since global brands only want to be profit efficient. (French male)

Extract 2
The funny thing is that “I” believe that there is something good in all people. But on the other hand global brands/corporations are just blood-sucking scum, that just want to make money- no matter the consequences (Danish male)

Ideological Conflation

In accordance with Beck’s (1994) description on the dissolution of traditional left- and right wing dichotomy, we see in the texts how terms used in traditional right-wing discourse are tweaked and understood as left-wing values (ex.3-7). Instead of talking about the good for the collective and humanity as such, left wing claims are mixed with conservative priorities being family, friends and religion. Although all anti-global brand texts indicate that this discourse is left wing in terms of humanistic priorities instead of capitalist, the conservative undertones reveal a non-progressive genre of leftism which, as opposed to right-wing conservatism which, in spite of its strive backwards in time in terms of morals, encourages technological development, innovation, globalization and cultural exchange. This political melting pot permits multiple interpretations creating a contradictive stereotype that could be anyone. It is a conflation, which in its complete form lacks clear consistency in ideological direction.

Extract 3
It’s about being honest with yourself and the rest of the world. Nature and “back to basic” play an important role in everyday life which reflects in buying products. (Dutch female)

Extract 4
I search for happiness and fulfilment. In my life the most important thing would be family. (American male)

Extract 5
I have a strong respect for human beings. My family is very important for me. I try to spend most of my free time with them and my career is not so important. (Canadian female)

Extract 6
I think maybe the most important thing in my life would be my family, and religion would also take an important place. (French female)

Extract 7
My close environment like my family and friends are those important to me. Not money or job-related success. (…) My biggest concern would be to be dependent on somebody or something. I would be a very individualistic person who wants to be in control of my life. (Canadian female)

Extract 8
I would want to avoid this “mass consumption”, and defend smaller stores (like butchers, and bakers) that allow us to keep the traditional way of life. (French female)

Underdog-Power Urgency

The texts call for societal and individual action in an urgent manner which signals that something can be done if only people let their ego go. This opposed to the more fatal view according to which there is no way out of this development. Still, the expressed urgency indicates that once the huge corporations have, which is soon according to this discourse, swallowed the globe with all its consumers and family firms, there is no way back (ex.9-10).

Extract 9
If we do not resist this process, we will be all the same, and the planet will certainly be in danger, because it’s not good to play at changing the rules of nature. I prefer to go to the market place, buy farmers’ products. (French male)

Extract 10
Most large corporations sacrifice the well being of the individual, and of course the entire community in order to seek profit. (Canadian female)

Particularist Multi-Culturalism

As opposed to cultural diffusion theories, such as the late heliocentric Manchester school of thought, led by Grafton Elliot Smith and William J. Perry, arguing that only one civilization was responsible for all cultural development, and hence, that all heterogeneous cultures radiate from one single source, in this investigation the texts express a discourse which assumes a diametrically opposite view upon cultural development. That is, the “real” and authentic cultures emerged separately and isolated, whereupon local cultures should stay local as some kind of natural law, assuming that mixing them would be like a gene manipulating operation which challenges and destroys the natural system. Some would probably call this “left-wing multi-culturalism”, where cultures are seen to be helped by being kept untouched, “clean” and not mixed. Again, we see a contradiction between the claims of human equality (as patented by the left-wing discourse) and the claims of freedom to enhance natural individual differences (as patented by the right-wing discourse) (ex.11-12).

Extract 11
I think that it is very important for each society to keep their own values, without being influenced by others (Canadian female)

Extract 12
It’s important for me to associate with something I feel really familiar with and which is related to my own country. (…). The key value in this case concerns identity. Globalization has a
standardization effect on people and cultures, which I do not appreciate. (Canadian female)

Authentication Guardians
Thompson & Arsel (2004) talk about a hegemonic brandscape, which they define as: “a cultural system of servicescapes linked together and structured by discursive, symbolic, and competitive relationships to a dominant (market driving) experiential brand” (ibid p.6). In other words it is a cultural model, which: “shapes individuals’ actions through conventionalized social practices, interactions with its material objectifications, and internalization of its discourses via cognitive structures and embodied habits” (ibid). Their thesis is based upon an assumption that especially experiential (i.e. shopping brands) and market-driving brands exert influence on local markets (referring to Pine & Gilmore (1999) and Schmitt (1999)). Through the lens of hegemonic brandscape they found support for the theoretical standpoint that global brands systematically use their power to influence the “cultural hetero-hybridization engendered by glocalization” (p.26). According to this standpoint, Starbucks first created a global coffee shop “revolution” and then became indispensable as referents for more local coffee shops to be able to even make a point. In line with this argument the texts in my investigation tend to argue for the same asymmetric symmetry, or symmetric asymmetry if you will. That is, complete asymmetry, as preached by Adorno or McLoughlan, is denied as there is an assumed consumer power, which can change the rule of the game (if urgently taken care of). Also, the “victims” (the consumers and the smaller family firms) are assumed to use the “bad” image of the huge corporations to, in a post-structuralist sense of relativism, create an oppositional image of “good” where smaller firms neatly fit in (ex.13-16). Hence, this asymmetry is presumably necessary, for the anti-global brand discourse, and therefore becomes partly (not completely!) symmetrical in terms of power. That is, on one hand the image of the small, local cafés has transformed into “saint-like” based on a sense of authenticity,

Extract 13
Most large corporations sacrifice the well being of the individual, and of course the entire community in order to seek profit. (Canadian female)

Extract 14
All the global brands take away the chance for small companies, brands, to perform in their business. I think that it’s unfair. I’ll try to buy small brands to help them to survive in the world (a wild one). (Belgian male)

Extract 15
I think that business people and managers have only capitalist goals. They try to make as much money as possible and don’t really care about me, the final consumer. (Canadian female)

Extract 16
I value small companies from my local region who cannot compete with the world scale competitors. I’m ready to pay more in a small store than in a big store like Wal Mart. I think the big companies don’t pay their employees enough and they should pay more. (Canadian Male)

Pro global brand- discourse
Fatalism
In these texts consumers see them selves as victims, but not of corporations per se (they are also victims), but of an unstoppable force which will, through successive osmosis, strive towards a harmonic equilibrium of cultural homogeneity, like a heliocentric reverse (ex.17-18). The Darwinist undertone is clear and sometimes expressed directly (ex.18-)

Extract 17
In a sense we are all the same : we all need to eat, we all need to wash, why not the same way? (French male)

Extract 18
I think it is possible to live with similar standards in every country. I think that powerful people who can’t afford to expand must take profit even at another one’s expense. I also think that in the world, it’s possible to reach a common vision in a long-term view. Cultures’ differences are not that important for me and don’t consist in a value-added form in this multi-ethnical world. (Canadian female)

Extract 19
A global corporation may seem to be a little too powerful sometimes, but at the end of the day, it is also the customers that make a choice to purchase the products. If a large corporation cannot answer the majority’s need, it is impossible for its survival anyways. As such, adaptation is the most important thing in today’s world, not only for the corpora- tions, but for individuals as well. (Chinese-Canadian female)

Extract 20
I know that the big corporations are dominating this world and many aspects of our lives, but I probably work, or aspire to work in one of those big firms who are doing the dominating. (Singaporean female)

Extract 21
Even though I believe that it is sad for companies that cannot compete with big competitors, I think that it’s just the way it is and there is nothing we can do. It’s the law of the strongest. I also believe that it’s okay to pay employees a low wage because if they are not satisfied they can go work elsewhere. (Canadian male)

Extract 22
I strongly believe in the market system and that everybody gets what he deserves based on his own effort. “Only the fittest survives” would be my motto.(German male)

Humanistic Capitalism
The texts reveal a clearly contradictory blend between clichés on greedy capitalism (ex 23) and honest devotion to the belief in a better world as a result of globalization leading to economical and cultural exchange (ex.24). Inter-textually they both typically stem from bi-polar perspectives (compare Norberg (2003) and Klein (2000)) of discourses on globalization capitalism. Maybe more interesting is, in line with Foucault’s thesis on “rule of tactical polyvalence of discourses” (1978, p.101), that not only do “the accused” use counter arguments of the same form, but also of the same content as their accuser (ex.25-26).

Extract 23
They [the pro-global-brand people] want to have the best value for money, even if this means that others have to pay for it, e.g. poor countries being exploited by large corporations to satisfy the needs of the 1’st world. They may believe in the
value of the family, strength in themselves and religion. These people may be conservative and/or liberal, but rather more conservative than liberal. Furthermore I think people like these tend to be arrogant. (German male)

Extract 24
Internationalization is a value I would believe in, building larger political or economic organizations (EC/WTO). (...) I would believe that by having larger multinational/international markets the standard of living could be increased. I think that cultural exchange is of high value. (German male)

Extract 25
They [the global corporations] have the means to be good. More, with their quality and low prices, they offer value for everyone all over the planet. (...) Those companies settle everywhere and give job opportunities to everyone, including in poor countries, that’s important! (...) I think that globalization will increase incomes for everyone on the planet. (French male)

Extract 26
I think the global brands bring to the consumers a lot of advantages. The prices will decrease due to scale economy. I think the global brands bring to the consumers a lot of advantages. The prices will decrease due to scale economy. It’s very important nowadays (everybody wants the cheapest items). Secondly it’s more relaxed to do shopping everywhere and can find the items that we want and that we know. Finally, I think that the global brands help the fairly working condition. I think that Carrefour has a lot of interest in that. That also help people of not developed countries. Those brands give them a job, and escort their products all over the world. I think that global brands are benefits for everybody. (French male)

Progressive Conservatism
Family, Religion, and the State is a recurring trilogy in the pro-global brands texts, which signals a traditional right-wing conservatism leaning on values and morals. At the same time it is, in these texts, also the discourse that encourages most development and change for the future of the world (such as globalization, free trade, technology etc), which is an ideological blend or even contradiction (ex. 27-30), although not historically. The pro-globalization discourses in this case are inter-textually driven by capitalistic discourses, which also traditionally belongs to the right wing.

Extract 27
I value respect and honest people. In my society I want to feel safe. However at the same time I’m looking for variation and challenges. I search for new things, and I can get bored very quickly. I value my family and friends and their well-being. (...) I’m a sensitive person, I’m concerned about other people and I care what others think of me. I want to belong to a group in life although that is not necessary at all times. (Swedish female)

Extract 28
I would be less afraid of open markets and the challenges and uncertainties that emerge. (German male)

Extract 29
My main values would be freedom and modernity. It means I would live “with my time”. (...) I would like to be informed of the last new innovation. In my life the important thing would be my job, and to gain a lot of money. It would be a more capitalistic way of life/way of thinking. I would be an independent woman, who would travel a lot. (French female)

Extract 30
If I go abroad I’m glad to find products I’m familiar with. I’m interested in product developments and always curious about new things. I’m not scared by variety and love to try new things. (German female)

The shopping brand, IKEA
As described earlier, the respondents were first asked to take on polarising discourses active around global brands. After that, the respondents’ personal standpoints regarding global shopping brands, referring to IKEA as a representative example, were requested.

The tone changed remarkably when a specific global shopping brand was mentioned. In general the texts changed from moving around on a societal macro level to a market offer micro level (ex. 31-32). But in content the texts also revealed how well known and surrounded by narratives IKEA is, not the least amongst the non-Swedish students (ex. 32).

Extract 31
I would argue about the benefits that this global company can offer to their customers, e.g. cheap, good quality products. (German male. Compare with the same male’s account in extract 23 above)

Extract 32
I personally choose to speak for. It’s a firm, which allowed answering to real consumer needs. In fact it proposes middle quality for low prices. So it’s perfect for the middle classes and for young people who start their life. IKEA is also an innovative firm, which has a good foresee about the way of life. It’s a firm, who couldn’t be imitated because its image today is so strong, for 50 years it built a strong relationship with its customers. (French female. Compare with the same female’s account in extract 8 above)

Somewhat surprising (at least to this author), the texts on global shopping brands reveal no reflection upon the, by anti-large-corporation opinion leaders like Naomi Klein and Joanne Blythman, often brought-up issue of large retailers’ occupation of public space. Instead, the discourse concerning the actual market offer (quality, consumer needs, price, design, etc) completely takes over.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION
It is quite striking how inherently, and not just in-between one-another, contradictory the accounted-for anti- and pro-global brand discourses are presented in the texts analyzed in this study—at least in terms of this author’s pre-disposed theoretical understanding of ideological perspectives. The inherent contradictions somehow make it more understandable how complex the ultimate cultural contradiction of global shopping brands is in relation to necessary navigation amongst arguments, for the collective as well as for the individual. They (I have for sake of pedagogies recapitulated the themes in Table 1) don’t contrast as much from each other as one would have expected considering mass-medial debates. Instead, as mentioned earlier, Foucault’s thesis on the “rule of tactical polyvalence of discourses” (1978, p.101), is highly supported by the results of this investigation. Not only do the respondents use the same categories when arguing for the two oppositional sides in the dichotomy, but also they use the same content. The accused uses the
argument of the accuser and twists it to be the platform of defense, and vice versa. This way a contradiction stays alive and un-solved, which consequently would make it easier for the collective and/or the individual to avoid choosing “sides”.

The discourse revealed in the texts about IKEA is rather a brand management discourse than an anti- or pro-brand discourse. That is; when moving down from a macro-level to a specific brand level (in this case a brand that amongst the respondents was very appreciated), the socio-political and socio-cultural danger aspects are marginalized and forgotten. On one hand this could be a sign of IKEA managing their brand just right, in terms of corporate social responsibility, global influence and image. On the other hand, IKEA has a highly standardized offer, which in long-term could have socio-cultural homogenization or “McDonaldization”-of-the-home effects sketched out as the dominant threat in the anti-global-brand discourse (Ritzer, 1993) (also see “Multi-culturalism” above).

For future explorative research on the matter, using respondents from multiple and diverse social strata would be of interest. Applying, in literature, extant consumer typologies, such as shopping orientation, on the accounts and themes may also help us to further understand more about the global brand dimensions. For increased knowledge on possible sources of similarities relative to differences in discourse, research on national media rhetoric would come well at hand.

**REFERENCES**

**TABLE 1**
Themes in the dominant discourses of global brands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anti-global-brand discourse</th>
<th>Pro-global-brand discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Reification</td>
<td>Fatalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Conflation</td>
<td>Humanistic Capitalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underdog-Power Urgency</td>
<td>Progressive Conservatism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particularist Multi-Culturalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity Guardians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>