



Creative Storytelling in IKEA Advertising: Furnishing Narratives
A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Creative Storytelling Techniques in IKEA Advertising

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Abstract

Understanding the role of stories and narratives is increasingly vital for shaping audience engagement across various platforms. This thesis explores the role of multimodal storytelling in creating immersive and persuasive brand narratives, focusing on IKEA, a global leader in furnishings. The study examines the integration of visual, textual, and spatial elements in IKEA's advertising strategies, specifically through the "Do Try This at Home" campaign, the "IKEA Kreativ" tool, and in-store showrooms. By employing affordance theory, with an emphasis on imaginative affordances and narrative transportation theory, this research reveals how IKEA's storytelling extends beyond mere product promotion to engage consumers on a deeper level. It demonstrates how narratives are crafted to include individuals as active participants in the brand's story rather than passive consumers, thereby fostering a stronger connection between the brand and its audience. The findings contribute to the field of Media and Communication Studies by providing insights into the power of narrative and imaginative affordances in shaping consumer experiences, enhancing brand perception, and promoting engagement through inclusive and interactive storytelling.

Multimodal Storytelling | Audience Engagement | Brand Narratives | IKEA | Visual Communication | Narrative Transportation Theory | Affordance Theory | Advertising Strategies | Consumer Experience | Media and Communication Studies | Interactive Storytelling | Brand Perception | Inclusive Storytelling | Immersive Branding

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1. Introduction

In today's advertising environment, it is more important than ever for brands to grab the audience's attention across various platforms. Increasing advertising also requires innovative approaches and methods. This makes it crucial for brands to craft engaging narratives that resonate with their target consumers across different media forms. This phenomenon, described by Henry Jenkins as "media convergence," highlights the blending of traditional and new media, where content flows seamlessly across multiple platforms, and audiences engage with it in various ways (Jenkins, 2008). As a result, storytelling in advertising has evolved, transcending traditional methods by embedding products within engaging, transmedia narratives that emotionally resonate with consumers (Escalas, 2004).

In this context, the societal relevance of examining creative storytelling in advertising becomes evident. As consumers are increasingly exposed to various marketing messages across various media channels, understanding how to create narratives that capture attention and foster deep emotional connections is vital. Moreover, in a society increasingly valuing inclusivity and participation, IKEA's approach to storytelling through interaction reflects a democratization of design. Allowing consumers to actively engage in creating personalized spaces, regardless of their background or expertise, promoting a sense of agency and creativity. Such an approach enhances consumer engagement and aligns with broader societal trends towards inclusivity and participatory culture, where consumers become co-creators of their own experiences.

The significance of exploring creative storytelling in advertising lies in its impact on brand perception, especially in a media landscape characterized by convergence. Jenkins emphasizes that in a "convergence culture," consumers are not just passive receivers of content but active participants who contribute to the flow of media narratives across various platforms (Jenkins, 2008). However, the effectiveness of these narratives is deeply influenced by the context in which they are presented as to significantly shape how audiences perceive and connect with the narrative. This thesis focuses on IKEA, a global leader in furnishings, to investigate how their multimodal storytelling techniques in advertising create immersive and persuasive brand narratives across multiple platforms, embodying Jenkins' principles of transmedia storytelling.

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the multimodal elements and different layers of IKEA's advertising and how they contribute to its storytelling effectiveness. I will examine the combination of visuals, textual narratives, and spatial arrangements to better understand how IKEA engages its customers. The study focuses on three core components of IKEA's advertising: their first global campaign, "Do Try This at Home," launched in 2024, the online "IKEA Kreativ" tool, and the in-store showrooms. These elements not only present a brand narrative but also allow consumers to co-create the story, reflecting the participatory culture central to convergence (Jenkins, 2008).

Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of communication; I aspire to contribute to Media and Communication Studies by examining dimensions of transmedia narrative, particularly its emerging role in shaping nuanced consumer experiences and brand perceptions. While foundational studies, such as those by Green and Brock (2000), have laid the groundwork for understanding narrative impact, my research will focus on how integrating transmedia elements across digital platforms can create more immersive and emotionally resonant brand experiences. IKEA's approach serves as a case study for examining the effectiveness of narrative techniques, but the relevance of this topic extends beyond IKEA. As society navigates an era of information overload and heightened competition for attention, uncovering the principles behind practical narrative construction is critical for media professionals and communication scholars. This research seeks to provide insights that could inform future practices, enhancing how brands communicate and connect with their audiences (Dessart, 2018).

This study employs a qualitative research approach rooted in the interpretivism paradigm, which values subjective experiences and meanings. It is significant as it leverages traditional narrative advertising research by bridging to innovative, unconventional forms of storytelling that integrate spatial and physical, interactive elements alongside visual and textual elements. These interactions are emphasized to create holistic, immersive brand experiences that resonate deeply with consumers (Lundqvist et al., 2013).

2. Background

2.1 IKEA

Founded in 1943 by Ingvar Kamprad in Sweden, IKEA has become a global player in the home furnishing industry (IKEA, n.d.4). IKEA's business concept is based on offering

functional, well-designed home furnishings at low prices that are affordable for as many people as possible. This strategy has enabled IKEA to maintain a strong market presence and expand its operations across 50 countries, with more than 400 stores worldwide.

2.2 IKEA's Storytelling Evolution

Storytelling has long been a central part of IKEA's marketing. Initial advertisements focused on the practicality and affordability of the products and often used simple, straightforward messages (IKEA, 2024). When the company expanded, however, marketing concepts began to evolve to include more elaborate storytelling methods. Fostering digital storytelling enforces accessibility for people to become an active part of IKEA's story. The "IKEA Kreativ" tool, for example, allows customers to visualize IKEA products in their own spaces. This tool enriches the shopping experience by involving customers as active participants in the storytelling process. IKEA leverages user-generated content by enabling customers to share their unique stories and home designs on social media, thus enhancing the brand's narrative (IKEA, 2024). In 2024, IKEA launched its first global marketing campaign, "Do Try This at Home," marking the first attempt at unified marketing approaches (ibid.).

3. Previous Research

This literature review seeks to navigate the rich tapestry of scholarship surrounding storytelling, drawing upon interdisciplinary insights from fields such as narrative advertising, branding and customer behavior, and media technology. The review aims to provide a holistic understanding of storytelling's role within the broader media and communication field by synthesizing diverse perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and empirical findings. It ends with my definition of storytelling, setting the stage for the study.

This review critically engages with existing literature to identify key themes and approaches to the study of storytelling in Media and Communication. Moreover, it seeks to highlight gaps in current scholarship and propose avenues for future research, thereby contributing to ongoing discourse and inquiry within the field.

3.1 Storytelling

The following aims to elaborate on the background of storytelling and explore its different aspects.

Lance Strate asserts that narrative and storytelling are synonymous because narrative primarily operates within linguistic forms (Strate, 2014). He argues that while conveying a story through sequences of images is conceivable, these are symbolic forms of communication and, hence, still rely on the underlying principles of narrative structure found in language. Even when a story is told through images, those images are interpreted within a framework shaped by linguistic conventions, such as sequence, causality, and temporality, which are essential to the narrative. This perspective is further supported by Kress and van Leeuwen, who highlight that storytelling extends beyond linguistic forms into multimodal communication, where visual, auditory, and spatial elements play crucial roles in constructing meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). They argue that these modes of communication, while different from language, still adhere to narrative structures shaped by cultural conventions, enhancing the complexity and richness of the storytelling process.

Amangeldiyeva et al. describe storytelling as similar to “[...] speech activity, which has certain communicative goals and tasks” (Amangeldiyeva, et al., 2020, p. 3164). They limit storytelling to written and oral manners, each serving as a vehicle for conveying messages and eliciting responses from the audience. Equating narrative solely with linguistic forms overlooks the diversity of storytelling mediums; by dismissing non-linguistic forms of storytelling, their perspectives may neglect the significance of imagery or sensory experiences in conveying narrative meaning. However, Strate suggests that such nonverbal narratives likely emerged after the language established storytelling as a practice (Strate, 2014). They propose that individuals must first be familiar with linguistic narrative before effectively interpreting nonverbal narratives, as the latter often rely on the audience's ability to understand implied or unspoken elements (ibid.). I agree with Strate's assertion to an extent. Understanding linguistic narratives provides a foundational framework for interpreting nonverbal stories, mainly because linguistic narratives teach us how to recognize patterns, sequence events and infer meaning—skills also necessary for interpreting nonverbal communication. However, I would argue that nonverbal narratives can be intuitive and accessible. Visual storytelling, for instance, often taps into universal human experiences and emotions that can be understood across cultural and linguistic barriers. Therefore, I believe that the human capacity for storytelling is not entirely dependent on language and can also exist in a more instinctual form.

Von Stackelberg and Jones state that people view the world through ever-evolving narratives; they and Randazzo believe that storytelling is innate to people and has existed since humankind started engaging with one another through stories (Randazzo, 2006; Von Stackelberg & Jones, 2014). Spurgeon underlines this view of storytelling as a fundamental aspect of human communication, elaborating on different factors (Spurgeon, 2015). They see its significance in helping to maintain cultural norms and traditions, ensuring the continuity and cohesion of a group, and underscoring the vital role of storytelling in preserving and transmitting cultural identity and knowledge across generations (ibid.).

Building on the framework of storytelling being a form of communication innate to people, Amangeldiyeva et al. expand on the findings of Ponomarev, who characterizes storytelling as a specific narrative structure involving the sequential presentation of real or fictional stories featuring intelligent and sensitive topics central to the narrative's development (Amangeldiyeva, et al., 2020). Gilliam and Flaherty and Strate also pose significance on structure, defining a story as a narrative that unfolds through interconnected actions and resulting consequences in chronological sequence (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015; Strate, 2014). These actions and consequences encompass events, processes, situations, or states. Nie et al., have similar definitions, seeing a story as a narrative unfolding through a series of interconnected actions and their resulting consequences, presented chronologically (Nie et al., 2017). They ground storytelling in theater, connecting the people involved and the setting; they further split storytelling into its main aspects: chronological order and causality (ibid.).

The presence of causal connections between events appears to be a fundamental storytelling characteristic. Lundqvist et al. align with this, describing a story that unfolds by answering narration questions and building it up chronologically with causally linked happenings, aiming to capture the consumer with an overarching message (Lundqvist, et al., 2013).

Next to the structure, they focus on problem-solving and say the solution should be the story's core, surrounded by storytelling and listener engagement.

They all put people in the center of stories as storytellers or recipients. In this context, the storyteller plays a crucial role as the mediator between the brand and the audience. They are positioned as both the creator and guide of the narrative, crafting a story that both conveys information and engages the audience on an emotional and cognitive level. The storyteller is responsible for weaving multimodal narrative

elements—visual, textual, or spatial—into a cohesive and compelling story that resonates with the audience. This position requires the storyteller to deeply understand the audience's values, emotions, and cultural contexts to ensure the story is relevant and impactful. Audience engagement unfolds as a core storytelling aspect; all scholars agree. According to Randazzo, storytelling, or adopting a narrative or dramatic approach, operates more intuitively, emphasizing feelings and emotions. It immerses the audience within the story, effectively conveying a message while forging an emotional bond with the audience (Randazzo, 2006). Green and Brock (2000) further explore this emotional engagement through the concept of "narrative transportation." They argue that when individuals are deeply engrossed in a story, they are more likely to be persuaded by its message as they become emotionally and cognitively immersed in the narrative (ibid.). This highlights the power of storytelling in shaping audience perceptions and behaviors and will be used as a theory to support this thesis. Amangeldiyeva et al. see storytelling as a narrative geared towards attaining distinct objectives, often linked indirectly to the psychological impact on the audience, aiming to stimulate needs by tapping into consumers' sensory and emotional experiences (Amangeldiyeva, et al., 2020). They distinctively put emotions in the center of storytelling, either stating that emotions are the means used for storytelling or becoming the core of it (ibid.). They and Lundqvist et al. argue that emotions are based on personal experiences and that emotion-led storytelling links the information to emotion and experience, thus bringing it closer to the listener (Lundqvist, et al., 2013). Nie et al., theoretically build on that, referring to Fournier, who, in consumer behavior, explains that a story encapsulates the information stored in an individual's mind (Nie et al., 2017). These encompassing incidents can be recalled from memory (ibid.). Gilliam and Flaherty put it very straightforwardly: they see stories as superior to informational facts, as storytelling can evoke something in people bare facts cannot (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). Spurgeon connects these forms of evoking engagement through storytelling with co-creative methods (Spurgeon, 2015). Von Stackelberg and Jones add an important factor: a well-curated story is indispensable to successfully engage with consumers (within a transmedia experience) (Von Stackelberg & Jones, 2014). Henry Jenkins expands on this idea with his concept of "transmedia storytelling," where stories are spread across multiple platforms, each contributing to a cohesive narrative experience (Jenkins, 2006). This approach allows for deeper audience engagement as different media forms offer unique perspectives and elements of the story, making the narrative more immersive and interactive.

Nowadays, the transcending aspect is increasingly vital to successful user engagement. Strate connects narratives with media, emphasizing that narrations must continuously adapt to changes in media and technology, such as including technological elements in the story (Strate, 2014). Building on this, Lev Manovich introduces the idea of "narrative as database," particularly in digital media, where storytelling is often non-linear and user-driven (Manovich, 2001). This concept challenges traditional narrative structures by allowing users to interact with and navigate stories in various ways, reflecting the fluid nature of narratives in the digital age. Amangeldiyeva et al. also refer to popular forms of digital storytelling, such as video or multimedia publications (Amangeldiyeva et al., 2020). They touch upon "involving a totality of storytelling" on web pages, for example, opening the stage for new ways of integrating storytelling (ibid., p. 3168). However, they do not take it beyond passive engagement or virtual spheres. They say storytelling is the "universal form of interaction with audience in wide and polyphonic media space" (ibid., p.3170). Spurgeon leverages the first-hand image of narratives used to engage users; she explores the concept of co-creation to elucidate how user engagement influences the development of trans-media storytelling (Spurgeon, 2015). Co-creation refers to the collaborative practices essential for producing innovative forms of storytelling where consumers play an active role in shaping content within the frameworks (ibid.). People who use these contribute to the value of the content and experiences within the limitations and affordances set by the platforms (ibid.).

According to scholars, whether a story is real or fictional has no relevance to people's engagement, regardless of the platform. Lundqvist et al. argue that an organization can tell and shape its narrative to convey its brand values and underlying ethos (Lundqvist, et al., 2013). Independent of its form, storytelling transports meaning. The authors, however, emphasize the importance of authenticity in storytelling as it must not be perceived as misleading (ibid). Again, they argue there is no need for the story to be realistic as long as it is thoughtfully done; the importance lies in identifying with the presented characters and evolving around one central message (ibid). This key message can be conveyed with the help of the mentioned characters (Strate, 2014). Dessart underlines the significance of characters in storytelling, emphasizing that audiences are likelier to empathize and engage with stories when they feature relatable characters with clear goals and motivations (Dessart, 2018). Nie et al. also highlight that storytelling enables consumers to mentally embody the characters within the narrative, enhancing their immersion and emotional connection with the story (Nie et al., 2017). Strate builds

on this connection, seeing the narrative as a simple version of reality, making it memorable (Strate, 2014). Randazzo has a bit more complex take than Strate; he sees stories as a combination of factual and fictional, unfolding as it progresses and encapsulating different things about the teller (Randazzo, 2006).

In conclusion, this review underscores the essential role of storytelling as a dynamic and multifaceted tool in brand communication. The synthesis of various scholarly perspectives reveals that storytelling transcends mere information delivery through its structure and multimodal elements, crafting immersive and emotionally engaging experiences that resonate deeply with consumers. This reinforces brand identity and fosters stronger connections between brands and their audiences. Moreover, this understanding aligns with contemporary shifts towards interactive and user-driven content, where consumers are not just passive recipients but active participants in the storytelling process.

3.2 Media and Communication Studies and Storytelling

Storytelling is a foundational element in media and communication studies, crucial for understanding how narratives structure and influence human experience across various contexts. The study of storytelling is significant within the field, as it provides key insights into the mechanisms of narrative construction and its impact on audience engagement and cultural discourse (Couldry, 2008). Couldry (2008) emphasizes that storytelling in media not only reflects societal values but also plays a critical role in shaping them, particularly through the process of "mediation," where media acts as a bridge between personal stories and collective meaning-making. Marie-Laure Ryan (2001) offers a complementary perspective by discussing how storytelling adapts across different media, especially in the digital age, where narratives are not confined to a single platform but can traverse various forms of media, creating a more complex and multi-layered narrative experience. This idea extends Jenkins' (2006) concept of "convergence culture," where storytelling transcends single media platforms, creating a more immersive and interactive experience across multiple channels. Roland Barthes' (1986) work on semiology provides a deeper understanding of how media constructs and interprets stories. Barthes' exploration of semiotic processes reveals how storytelling in media involves a complex interaction between signs and their interpretation by audiences, where meaning is co-created. This approach underscores the importance of considering not just

the content of stories but also the underlying structures that shape how narratives are understood.

Spurgeon and Burgess (2015) emphasize a disruption in media studies with the emergence of new digital technologies, which have fundamentally altered traditional communication systems. These changes introduce new forms of "transmedia storytelling," as discussed by Jenkins (2006), where control over narratives becomes decentralized, allowing audiences to actively participate in the creation and dissemination of stories across various media.

Janet Staiger (1992) offers additional insights into how audiences interact with stories, particularly in the context of media reception studies. Staiger argues that audience interpretation plays a crucial role in the storytelling process, as different viewers bring their own experiences and cultural backgrounds to bear on how they understand and engage with media narratives. This perspective enhances the discussion on how storytelling in media is not only about narrative delivery but also about the audience's active role in creating meaning.

Establishing an emotional connection with the audience has become essential for effective interaction, a point reinforced by Jenkins (2006), who argues that emotional engagement is crucial in transmedia storytelling, where audiences become co-creators of the narrative.

Ryan's exploration of digital narratives, Staiger's focus on audience reception, and Jenkins' concept of "participatory culture" collectively illustrate how modern storytelling in media transcends traditional formats. These scholars emphasize that storytelling now engages audiences on multiple levels, transforming them from passive consumers into active participants who shape and influence narratives across various platforms. This evolution in storytelling underscores the dynamic interaction between media and audiences in the digital age.

3.3 Digital Storytelling

In this chapter, the review will explore the evolving nature of storytelling in the digital age, where new media technologies and participation have transformed the dynamics of narratives. From user-generated content and transmedia storytelling to immersive virtual experiences, the digital sphere offers novel avenues for exploring storytelling's potential and challenges.

Von Stackelberg and Jones see value in the intersection of digital media technologies and transmedia storytelling (Von Stackelberg & Jones, 2014). To them, transmedia indicates that the narration spans different media forms, remaining in the same (fictional) world (ibid.). This aligns with Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling: "a story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 95). He (ibid.) further emphasizes that transmedia storytelling allows for deeper audience engagement, as each platform invites users to participate in and expand upon the narrative. Rather than simply conveying a message, transmedia storytelling communicates an entire experience to the customers (Von Stackelberg & Jones, 2014). Von Stackelberg and Jones state that traditional storytelling elements, in combination with new means like user-generated elements, enhance the storytelling experience, resulting in an immersive experience (ibid.). Ching, et al. also see the differences between traditional media and digital narratives due to online platforms' technological competencies and interactive features' resulting facilitation (Ching, et al., 2013). To Radoičić et al. and Koniorczyk, those interactive and immersive elements weigh way more than mere products and services (Radoičić et al., 2022; Koniorczyk, 2015). Usually, the customer is seen as a passive consumer; Spurgeon and Burgess disagree with that and suggest that storytelling has evolved beyond traditional linear formats into digital mediums, including non-linear media formats, letting users actively participate in the narrative (Spurgeon & Burgess, 2015). Here, according to Koniorczyk, the internet is a significant factor to consider when working collaboratively with customers (Koniorczyk, 2015). Interestingly, Spurgeon and Burgess highlight that digital storytelling is not isolated from participatory media practices, meaning they can go hand in hand (Spurgeon & Burgess, 2015).

Hagberg and Jonsson add an important layer. They suggest that digitalization extends beyond mere e-commerce: it encompasses the approach to customer engagement, communication, and ensuring uniform access to information for all customers, whether they are shopping in-store or online (Hagberg & Jonsson, 2022). They imply integrating digital solutions into physical stores and vice versa to provide comprehensive product information, thereby enhancing the overall customer experience (ibid.).

When a company aims to enhance and cultivate enduring relationships with its product users, employing augmented reality applications emerges as a contemporary approach in the digital age (Radoičić et al., 2022). Radoičić et al. believe that companies must adopt modern methods to maintain their competitiveness (ibid.). These applications

are innovative tools that make people familiar and engage with the products. The authors discuss the transformative impact of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR) on experiences, enabling individuals to transcend the confines of reality and immerse themselves in new, imaginative worlds (ibid.). Rauschnabel expands on this view; according to him, augmented reality immerses the customer as the virtual aspects become, to differing degrees, part of their immediate environment (Rauschnabel, 2023). He says that people like (to engage with) a brand based on connotations they have with it; this can be influenced by AR's potential of interactively immersing individuals into the expanded world AR helps to create (ibid.).

3.4 My Definition of Storytelling

The significance of storytelling within media and communication studies is underscored by its pervasive presence across various media forms and platforms. Whether in traditional narratives or contemporary manifestations in advertising and digital media, storytelling is a central mechanism for engaging audiences and conveying messages and meanings.

I want to base my definition of storytelling on what Spurgeon and Burgess see as an issue in storytellers' methods of adapting to storytelling mediums, as many storytellers struggle to effectively translate narratives across various platforms, often leading to a fragmented or less engaging audience experience. (Spurgeon & Burgess, 2015). With my study, I aim to extend the narrow definition that was implied before. My conclusion of storytelling is what Rodrigues and Brandão define as “relationship building, combining different parts (sensory, affective) to shape experiences with a brand” (Rodrigues and Brandão, 202, p.79).

Hence, I define contemporary storytelling as a dynamic interplay of media that actively engages and immerses its audience. It goes beyond traditional storytelling by weaving narratives across various layers, from digital platforms to real-life experiences. This form of storytelling fosters a deep connection, encouraging people to identify with the story and contribute to its evolution transcending oral or written narratives. Whether experienced online or offline, storytelling, per my definition, blurs the boundaries between observer and participant, inviting everyone to be part of the unfolding narrative.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Affordance Theory

All scholars start with or return to Gibson when addressing affordances, as he termed the theory concept. Gibson referred to affordances by explaining,

"The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill. The verb *to afford* is found in the dictionary, but the noun *affordance* is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment" (Gibson 1979, p.127).

Hence, this implies the possibility of cues a subject can perceive and act upon. The concept refers to the presence and awareness of what is implied instead of executed actions or appeals. With his definition, Gibson sees affordances as existing, independent of their perception (Ha & Lee, 2021). His view of affordances means the interplay between an organism and its surroundings, sending and receiving signals (Maier & Fadel, 2009).

At its core is an interplay of body and setting or situation; affordances are, to the same degree, part of the environment and conduct. Affordances are located "in the interaction" between a person and the things they are surrounded by (Bærentsen & Trettvik, 2002, p. 52). Further "affordance being a *relationship* (or the possibility of a relationship) between organism and features of the environment, perception of affordances is the perception of relations between features of the environment *and* features of the organism itself." (Bærentsen and Trettvik 2002, p.53) This definition describes the interplay as not independent of each. It is about how the environment presents opportunities or constraints for action based on the organism's characteristics and how the environment's properties relate to its capabilities, needs, and intentions. For this first understanding, when individuals perceive affordances, they notice the opportunities or possibilities for action the environment offers. This perception is based on understanding how the environment's characteristics match or relate to their abilities, desires, and goals. It highlights the dynamic interaction between the organism and its environment in shaping perception and action.

When viewing affordances as the interaction of subject and object, affordances can expand on the overview before shifting relations, either building or changing them (Erofeeva, 2019). Individuals perceive action opportunities directly based on their surroundings' arrangement (Beynon-Davies & Lederman, 2017; Raymond et al., 2017).

This straightforward perspective suggests that objects signal different use cases, a viewpoint that aligns with Gibson's theory, which suggests that meaning is inherent within the environment, and individuals perceive meaning through direct interaction with their surroundings, gathering cues through the senses (Gibson, 1979).

While affordance initially describes the perception of implied actions, both can happen independently (Ha & Lee, 2021). It is possible to only perceive a characteristic or nuance of an object without an implied action and vice versa; people often take subconscious actions without perceiving the need to do so (ibid.). This perspective adds depth to the concept. Affordances are not merely subconscious perceptions of potential actions but a complex interplay involving affordance, ability, and information, which interplay to uncover “physical, social, and self dimensions” (Ha and Lee 2021, p. 1888).

In simple terms, affordance theory describes how individuals use their senses to identify their surroundings' signals for action; hence, affordances are the noticeable opportunities for action that emerge from the environment. Some scholars put visible objects in the core to transport a cue of action to the user – and function as a signaler addressing senses that result in different actions (Beynon-Davies & Lederman, 2017). What is essential for this thesis is the close allocation of affordances to design as artifacts that transmit sense regulations on various levels.

Further exploring affordances means a critical investigation of their object-centeredness. At the same time, it is implied that the object suggests the action; there needs to be an emphasis on the perceiving subject. Depending on the specific circumstances, this individual needs to be able to grasp the implied action that varies from person to person (Erofeeva, 2019; Beynon-Davies & Lederman, 2017). All objects suggest different action possibilities transcending their designated purpose when designed; affordances cover all the changing implied subtleties grasped uniquely by each person. This calls for a thoughtful approach when designing signifiers to tackle specific affordances.

The complementarity between an organism and its environment, as suggested by Gibson, is crucial in design, as it involves understanding the intertwined relations between users and artifacts within their environment. Generally, affordances are user-specific, although they can sometimes be grouped conveniently (Maier & Fadel, 2009). As mentioned above, different users may perceive different affordances from the same artifact. Thus highlighting the user-dependent nature of affordances. Artifacts, too, can possess multiple affordances; however, some affordances may be more dominant or better

realized than others, leading to variations in quality (ibid.). This underscores the importance of considering the physical embodiment – information transportation – of affordances in design.

Other scholars explore different notions of Gibson's affordance theory, one of which is particularly interesting to this study. The authors introduce UI (User Interface) affordances as crucial elements of website UI design (Lee, et al., 2024). Here, the simplicity and ease of navigating and how this ease is perceived is central to actively shaping affordances. The impact of UI design on user experience suggests that well-designed UIs can enhance positive user feelings, as a smooth navigation experience can enhance the perceived effectiveness of the website (ibid.).

To set the stage for the following analysis, affordances in media and communications studies need expansion of the traditional understanding to include not only the physical or functional attributes of media technologies but also users' subjective perceptions, attitudes, and expectations (Nagy & Neff, 2015). This expanded concept, termed "imagined affordances," is the most useful version of this theory for this study. It acknowledges that users perceive and interpret technologies in ways that may not align with their intended design or functionality (ibid.). According to the authors, "Imagined affordances emerge between users' perceptions, attitudes, and expectations; between the materiality and functionality of technologies; and between the intentions and perceptions of designers" (ibid., p.5). They are not fixed or rigid but relatively flexible and dynamic, adapting to the complex socio-technical relationships in social life. The concept of imagined affordances allows a deeper understanding of technologies' adaptive and responsive nature. Furthermore, imagined affordances offer a theoretical framework for addressing the evolving concerns of communication technology studies, particularly in understanding the dynamic interactions between users and technologies in various social settings, which will be part of this thesis. Overall, imagined affordances provide a more holistic approach to affordance theory, accommodating the complex interplay between users, technologies, and social contexts in communication technology studies (ibid.).

Affordances theory justifies the need for this study because it provides a framework for understanding how IKEA's storytelling engages and interacts with its audience. By focusing on how IKEA's environments afford specific actions or interpretations, the study reveals how storytelling is not just about narrative but also about the possibilities that these narratives create for the audience. Though not central to the theory, the notion of imagined affordances adds a nuanced layer by highlighting how these affordances work

in tandem with narrative transportation, further enriching the audience's engagement and connection with the brand. This makes the study particularly valuable to Media and Communication Studies, as it offers insights into how stories can be crafted to engage and inspire through the affordances they present.

4.2 Narrative Transportation Theory

Another theory critical for this thesis is aligned with the literature review, narrative transportation theory. Narrative transportation theory suggests that when immersed in a narrative – engaging with a story in different contexts, individuals become absorbed in the narrative and shift attitudes and intentions to align with the story's context (Van Berkel, et al. 2022; Chalke et al., 2023; Lundqvist, et al., 2013). This theory is applied across various disciplines, including the broader spectrum of communication. This thesis will use narrative transportation as a theory model for the analysis.

The essence of narrative transportation is the transformative journey individuals undergo when immersed in a story, akin to a traveler returning changed by their experiences (Glaser & Reisinger, 2022). Stories captivate consumers' attention and profoundly influence them (Lundqvist, et al., 2013). Transportation refers to the degree of immersion individuals experience when engaging with a story and becoming lost in its narrative (Escalas, 2004). As mental simulations have a narrative structure, individuals engaged in simulation may become transported by their self-iterated stories, also apparent in journalism, which leads to less critical analysis of commercial arguments, ultimately enhancing persuasion, especially when evoked emotions are positive (Escalas, 2004; Chalke et al., 2023; Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). Persuasion is facilitated and positively influenced through narrative transportation and trust (Chalke et al., 2023). Narrative transportation theory thus implies that storytelling mentally transports people into the narrative world, engaging in comprehensive narrative processing instead of analytical scrutiny.

Additionally, it is challenging to counterargue a narrative, even if it is fictional, as believing in the plausibility of story events can be as influential as events that occur in real life (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). Narrative transportation immerses consumers into the story, fostering an awareness of its unfolding events, particularly its characters' actions, desires, emotions, and experiences (Dessart, 2018). This engagement with narrative elements can heighten consumer identification with the story, but more

empirical data is needed to test the ambiguity and degree of positive or negative evaluation.

As narrative transportation theory assumes that people who engage in storytelling undergo a unique cognitive process characterized by the reduction of counterarguments and the formation of memorable characteristics, it is natural that it is used in advertising and customer engagement. Generally, narrative theory focuses on the cognitive process through which individuals construct mental simulations through stories or narratives (Green & Brock, 2000). These narratives are created by simulating events, focusing on goals, behaviors, and outcomes, thereby organizing experiences into a coherent temporal framework with elements such as chronology and causality (described more thoroughly in the literature review) (Escalas, 2004). Narrative theory introduces the concept of "indices," which are touchpoints or components of a story facilitating comprehension and understanding through familiarity, relevance, or empathy (Mills & John, n.d., p.3). Critical parts are a plot, characters, and a meaningful message in narrative theory (ibid.). Consumers use these indices to associate product information with existing knowledge about the product or category, engaging memory recall and facilitating comprehension (ibid). The presence of relevant indices enhances the story's effectiveness, making it easier to understand and recall. Advertisements employ storytelling by featuring characters with motives in various settings, encompassing dimensions to layer the story with space, time, and a sequence of events. Unlike factual ads focusing on product features, storytelling ads aim to forge deeper emotional connections with consumers, transcending mere product usage (Dessart, 2018). Storytelling advertisements significantly influence long-term attitudes and intentions because they induce narrative transportation. Narrative transportation is akin to a matching process, wherein consumers interpret incoming stories by drawing upon their stored memories, building associations with brands, and developing opinions towards them through comparison (ibid). Several notions contribute to the phenomenon of narrative transportation. Narratives are processed thoroughly on a cognitive level, and when evoking positive connotations, the responses are strong; transportation is further enhanced by characters and the identification with such (Glaser & Reisinger, 2022).

Narrative transportation does not have to be restricted to traditional narrative advertising, which builds an essential foundation for this thesis. Narrative transportation theory posits that stories have persuasive power by captivating individuals within their narrative realms, influencing their perceptions and attitudes (Glaser & Reisinger, 2022).

This theory suggests that in the context of narrative advertising, factors such as the linkage between product and story influence the degree of transportation experienced by the audience (Green & Brock, 2000). Message factors, such as the alignment between the story and the product, are particularly significant as they are within the advertiser's control, allowing for the deliberate design to enhance the persuasive impact of the narrative (Glaser & Reisinger, 2022). This perspective underscores the importance of crafting narratives in advertising, see those utilized by IKEA, to transport audiences and shape their perceptions effectively. In narrative advertising, the message conveyed is intrinsically tied to the product, ensuring that when customers understand the message, it seamlessly bridges to affordances - referring to the perceived and actual properties of a product that determine how it can be used. This connection enhances the immersion of narrative transportation.

Understanding narrative theory and its persuasive mechanisms will be a beneficial framework for analyzing IKEA's storytelling techniques across various application areas. This theory can be applied to storytelling's visible, verbal, and interactive nuances by recognizing how narratives engage individuals through transportation.

In summary, Narrative Transportation Theory is central to understanding how individuals become deeply immersed in a story, leading to shifts in attitudes that align with the narrative's context. This theory highlights the transformative power of stories to captivate and engage audiences, making them more receptive to the messages conveyed. Narrative transportation reduces counterarguments and enhances persuasion by fostering a sense of immersion, making it a valuable tool in advertising and communication. In this thesis, the theory will analyze how IKEA's storytelling techniques effectively transport audiences to deepen their connection with the brand.

5. Research Questions

The need for this research stems from the increasing importance of narrative techniques in brand communication. As consumers become more selective in their interactions with brands, understanding the role of storytelling in shaping brand identity and consumer perceptions is critical (Lundqvist et al., 2013).

Formulating research questions is crucial in guiding academic inquiry and providing a clear focus and framework for analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This study's research questions are designed to explore the intricate relationship between storytelling, brand identity, and consumer engagement. The first two questions are “what“ questions,

building on Blaikie and Priest, who state that a “what“ question builds the foundation for “how“ questions (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). The third research question is a “how“ question; using “how“ questions, according to Layder, is chosen as a suitable approach, as they are both tangible and empirical (2013). It facilitates me as the researcher to uncover the causalities by asking how certain outcomes are achieved, leading to a deeper understanding of the dynamics and intricacies of the respective data (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). In research studies, "how" questions help analyze strategies and techniques to achieve outcomes, such as in advertising campaigns. Researchers can identify strategic choices and examine effectiveness by investigating how interventions are implemented. (Yin, 2017).

These research questions help analyze how IKEA employs storytelling in its advertising, split into different layers, to engage consumers and influence their perceptions and behaviors. They explore IKEA's use of narrative techniques and affordances in its visual, verbal, and interactive storytelling strategies to understand how these elements contribute to consumer engagement. The findings will enhance the academic understanding of brand storytelling.

Research Questions:

1. What are the key elements of IKEA's brand identity as communicated through its campaigns?
2. What values and perceptions does IKEA intend to convey through its brand identity and storytelling efforts?
3. How does IKEA strategically employ storytelling across various virtual and physical platforms to engage consumers and promote its products?

6. Methodology

The methodology for this research is grounded in a qualitative approach to provide a solid understanding of IKEA's storytelling strategies. This approach is informed by the interpretivism paradigm, which emphasizes understanding individuals' subjective experiences and meanings of their interactions with the world (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Understanding how brands strategically employ storytelling is crucial for unraveling the complexities of consumer engagement and brand construction. In my study, I take an interpretive approach, which diverges from traditional deductive methods by commencing with specific observations and data collection from IKEA's advertisements, online presence, and in-store experiences. This approach allows for exploring emergent themes and patterns in IKEA's storytelling to uncover new insights based on observed practices and consumer interactions.

6.1 Research Paradigm

My research adopts an interpretive paradigm characterized by the belief that reality and meaning-making are subjective and constructed through individual human experiences (Collins, 2019). Interpretivism focuses on understanding the meanings and interpretations that people attach to their experiences and interactions with the sensory cues in the world around them (Creswell, 2012).

It is significant for my research that interpretivism acknowledges the complexity of human experiences, emphasizing that they cannot be fully understood through objective measurements alone. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of context, meaning, and the subjective experiences of individuals (Schwandt, 2000).

In the context of my study, the interpretivism paradigm allows me to delve flexibly into how consumers perceive and interact with IKEA's storytelling without being bound to a specific theoretical framework (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). By focusing on individual perceptions and experiences, I can uncover the deeper meanings and emotional connections that consumers form with the brand.

To achieve this understanding and explore how IKEA crafts and communicates its brand narrative, I have applied qualitative research methods that are well-suited to the interpretive paradigm. Qualitative methods like ethnography, visual analysis, and observant participation enable me to gather rich data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). These methods allow for a detailed examination of how visual, textual, and spatial elements intersect to influence consumer perceptions and experiences within IKEA's marketing ecosystem.

Furthermore, the interpretivism paradigm supports multimodal discourse analysis, which examines how different modes of communication work together to convey meaning (Kress & Bezemer, 2023). By analyzing IKEA's advertising campaign, online tool, and in-store experiences through this lens, the interpretivism paradigm provides a

robust framework for my research on IKEA's storytelling strategies and their impact on consumers.

6.2 Research Design

The research design for this study includes three main components: visual analysis for the advertising campaign "Do Try This at Home", observant participation for the online "Kreativ" tool, and ethnographic fieldwork at an IKEA store in Umeå for the in-store experience. Each component adheres to a different aspect of IKEA's storytelling layers I am investigating and its impact on customers.

6.2.1 Visual Analysis

I did research on IKEA's current global campaign to help understand its storytelling and explore the aesthetic and classic understanding of storytelling through an advertisement (IKEA, 2024). Visual analysis involves examining the visual elements of IKEA's advertising campaign. Thus uncovering underlying meanings, cultural symbols, and implicit social messages (Rose, 2014). This method is beneficial for analyzing how IKEA employs visual storytelling techniques such as imagery, character depictions, and compositional techniques to convey the brand's values. By scrutinizing the visual components of advertisements, researchers can discern how these visual cues evoke specific emotions and resonate with target audiences (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In advertising, visuals often dominate in shaping perceptions and eliciting emotional responses. Focusing on visual elements can unravel the nuanced layers of meaning conveyed through imagery, complementing textual analysis when text is given (ibid.).

Focusing on visual elements sets the stage for the analysis of the following layers to integrate analytical depth by considering more dimensions of (visual) communication and, thus, storytelling (Fairclough, 2013).

6.2.2 Observant Participation

I chose to examine IKEA's online tool, "IKEA Kreativ," and apply observant participation to understand the second layer of IKEA's manners in incorporating customers into their stories.

Observant participation involves actively engaging with and observing IKEA's online presence, mainly focusing on its interactive tool and distinguishing it from other retailers (Seim, 2024). My sample group (6.2.3) and I actively engaged with IKEA's

"Kreativ" online tool. By immersing myself in the digital environment and observing the participants as they navigated through the tool, I could directly witness the interactions and strategies IKEA employs to engage consumers through digital storytelling. This approach allowed me to gather valuable insights into how consumers interact with and respond to the various features of the tool.

Active participation and immersion in online spheres are fundamental to understanding digital interactions' complexities and multifaceted nature (ibid.). By directly engaging with IKEA's online applications and observing functionalities, I can uncover nuanced details about how its online presence can be perceived in the scope of my study. This approach equipped me as the researcher to capture the dynamics and understand the practical implications of IKEA "Kreativ". While exploring the technological part, engagement with these (online) environments helps understand the dynamic's social components and see the context in which it is happening (Seim, 2024).

6.2.3 Ethnographic Fieldwork

For the third layer, the in-store experience, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork with a carefully selected target group. Ethnographic approaches are fundamental to understanding audiences' daily experiences and practices, especially in media and cultural studies (Hodkinson, 2017). This approach complements personal observations, ensuring a well-rounded understanding of the in-store experience from multiple perspectives.

Ethnographic research included observing and interacting with consumers navigating the in-store experience, especially build-in inspirational homes, and conducting interviews with the focus group to gather detailed accounts of their perceptions and experiences. For fruitful results, I selected eight friends and acquaintances familiar with IKEA and its overall concept to participate in my study. The group consisted of five males and three females, aged 20 to 28, from various European countries. Choosing participants who understand IKEA's overall concept and brand idea was crucial for gathering more insightful and informed responses to how IKEA's storytelling strategies are perceived. By selecting friends and acquaintances, I created a comfortable interview environment. This familiarity led to more open and honest responses, as the participants did not feel compelled to give answers they thought were expected or socially acceptable. The smaller group size allowed for in-depth conversations, which were instrumental in exploring how IKEA's environment and interactions contribute to its storytelling. It is important to note that the small,

homogeneous sample of participants and the familiarity with the interviewer could introduce bias and limit the generalizability of the findings. The results may be different from those of the broader population. However, these limitations are acceptable within the scope of this study, as it represents only one layer of the overall analysis. These factors should be considered when interpreting the findings, as they may impact the conclusions drawn about how IKEA's storytelling strategies resonate across different population segments.

The primary goal was to gather perspectives from individuals who know IKEA well, hence providing a richer interpretation beyond my own, allowing me to explore another – physical – spectrum of how IKEA's environment and interactions contribute to its overall storytelling strategy.

Interviewing different people about their experiences involves immersing oneself in the cultural context under study to understand social practices, behaviors, and values (Rose, 2001). Thus offering a rich, holistic perspective on how individuals interpret and interact with visuals and other cultural artifacts. Ethnography involves oneself as the researcher in the context of the studied field and interpreting other individuals' experiences (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). Integrating interviews allows for a more nuanced and authentic grasping of their experiences, avoiding potential biases inherent when exclusively relying on the researcher's perspective (Hodkinson, 2017).

Combining personal observations with targeted interviews provides a robust methodological framework for this study. This approach enriches the understanding of IKEA's in-store storytelling techniques and ensures the analysis is grounded in consumers' experiences and perceptions.

In summary, this research's methodology is based on a qualitative approach grounded in the interpretivism paradigm. I gathered detailed data about consumers' perceptions and experiences with IKEA's storytelling strategies using observant participation, visual analysis, and ethnographic research.

6.3 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

In this thesis, the discourse I examine concerns how IKEA constructs and communicates its brand identity and narrative across various platforms, including advertising campaigns, digital tools like IKEA Kreativ, and physical in-store showrooms. This discourse consists of the strategic use of storytelling to convey key themes such as inclusivity, affordability, and personalization. These themes are communicated through multiple modes of

communication—textual, visual, and spatial—that work together to shape consumer perceptions and engagement.

To explore this discourse, I apply Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), a method that examines how different modes of communication interact to create meaning (Kress & Bezemer, 2013).

This holistic approach is valuable in media and communication studies, especially my study, where I research different modes of communication that can be brought across and frequently conveyed through a combination of modes. One crucial principle of MDA is that different modes have distinct affordances that influence how they can be amplified to transport and convey meaning (Kress, 2013). Textual elements can provide detailed, linear explanations, while visuals can convey immediate, holistic representations of concepts (*ibid.*).

I will follow specific steps for conducting a multimodal discourse analysis to structure my analysis:

Coding Data and Identifying Modes:

I will begin by coding the data collected through visual analysis, observant participation, and ethnographic fieldwork. The focus here is on identifying and categorizing the different modes of communication used in IKEA's storytelling across the three platforms (advertising, IKEA Kreativ, and in-store experiences). This process identifies textual, visual, and spatial elements, allowing me to map out how each mode displays different themes, contributing to the overall discourse.

Analyzing Intermodal Relationships:

After coding, I will analyze the relationships between these different modes of communication. This step involves exploring how textual, visual, and spatial elements interact and complement each other to convey IKEA's brand narrative. I will consider aspects such as coherence (how well the elements fit together), cohesion (how these elements support the overall narrative), and the unique affordances of each mode that enhance meaning-making.

Contextualizing:

In the discussion, I will interpret the findings to understand how IKEA's multimodal storytelling strategies engage consumers and effectively promote its products to answer the research questions. Theories of narrative transportation and affordances will inform this interpretation, helping to explain how different modes create opportunities for action and interaction (Gibson, 1979) and how they immerse consumers in IKEA's narrative world.

It is essential to consider that the multimodal discourse analysis also poses challenges. Analyzing multiple modes across different outlets requires delicate and careful interpretation, as the interactions between modes can be complex and challenging to decipher. Additionally, the subjective nature of interpretation in MDA means that findings can vary significantly between analysts.

7. Ethics

Ethical considerations are necessary when researching IKEA's storytelling techniques using Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), visual analysis, observant participation, and semi-structured interviews.

7.1 Confidentiality and Consent

According to Layder's principles of qualitative research, obtaining informed consent is fundamental (Layder, 2013). Participants involved in the semi-structured interviews at IKEA showrooms were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research. Using friends as participants presents specific ethical challenges, such as potential bias, personal relationships, and power dynamics that might influence responses, where participants could feel pressured to participate or respond favorably. To address these issues, I employed reflexive practices to maintain objectivity, assured confidentiality by anonymizing data, and emphasized voluntary participation to prevent perceived coercion. Confidentiality was crucial, and all data was securely stored to protect participant privacy (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). Participants were given the interview guide beforehand, briefed on how the data would be used, and assured of their right to withdraw at any stage without any repercussions. Written consent was secured from all participants, ensuring they were comfortable with their contributions being recorded and analyzed. This approach ensured that the data collection process was respectful and inclusive, fostering a comfortable

environment for participants to share their perspectives. This was also emphasized through conversational style in the interview to avoid a build-up of pressure at all costs.

7.2 Researcher Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity involves continuous self-awareness of my biases, assumptions, and influence on the research process. It is required to enhance the credibility and authenticity of qualitative research through reflexivity (Layder, 2013). In this study, I applied my personal observations at several stages, taking extra time to double-check my own views and using language that does not generalize my analysis.

One key concern was ensuring that visual and multimodal data were interpreted ethically without imposing subjective judgments. To address this, I followed guidelines suggested by scholars like Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), emphasizing the importance of a systematic and transparent approach to multimodal analysis. By carefully examining the distinct affordances of each mode and maintaining attention to the cultural and social contexts in which these modes are used, I ensured my analysis remained grounded in the theoretical frameworks.

By clearly communicating my dual role as participant and observer, I aimed to ensure an understanding of my actions and observations during the research process. This approach aligns with the ethical guidelines proposed by Blaikie and Priest, emphasizing the need for clarity and honesty about the researcher's position to avoid potential conflicts of interest and to ensure that the research process remains unbiased and fair (Blaikie & Priest, 2017).

8. Analysis

8.1 "Do Try This at Home" Campaign Coding Data and Identifying Modes

IKEA's "Do Try This at Home" campaign is the first global campaign IKEA launched (IKEA, 2024). Earlier advertisements were specifically catered to the customs and needs of the respective countries. Consisting of a one-minute video advertising and key visuals, the advertisement campaign is analyzed to point out IKEA's fundamental approach to storytelling and compare the other layers of consideration (IKEA Belgium, 2024).

8.1.1 Visual Elements

The visual analysis of IKEA's first global campaign is informed by affordance theory (Gibson, 1979) and narrative transportation theory (Green & Brock, 2000) to reveal how IKEA's visual storytelling techniques foster a deeper connection with its audience and hence contribute to multimodal discourse analysis.

At first glance, the campaign features high-resolution images and videos of various living spaces furnished with IKEA products, varying from depicted home to home (IKEA Belgium, 2024).

To systematically analyze the visual elements of IKEA's campaign, I focus on four categories:

1. Composition and Design Elements

This category helps analyze the aesthetic choices and their impact on viewers. By examining the color palette, lighting, and framing, I interpret how these elements create a particular mood or atmosphere that transports IKEA's brand values.

Generally, the chosen color palette typically features neutral tones per the well-known Scandic design approach, accented with bright colors, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere that aligns with the advertising's rebellious character. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), such visuals go beyond aesthetic appeal to convey cultural narratives, here, of minimalist living combined with room to add accents that fit individuals' lifestyles. The emphasis on natural and colorful lighting highlights the furniture's versatility, suggesting that IKEA products can enhance any home by providing both style and functionality. This visual storytelling strategy employs affordance theory to offer viewers the adaptability of IKEA products. According to Gibson's theory, every object provides clues about how it can be used (Gibson, 1979). The items afford viewers the versatile possibilities of seamlessly integrating IKEA items into their lives, enhancing the narrative's relatability and accessibility.

2. Representation of People and Characters

This category explores how inclusivity and diversity are communicated through visual storytelling. The representation of diverse characters in IKEA's campaign—such as an older man playing a computer game (visual one), a young man applying makeup (visual two), and a child with Down syndrome practicing martial arts (visual three)—challenges traditional stereotypes and promotes inclusivity. The campaign's images and videos show people interacting with the products, such as cooking together in the kitchen, children playing, or individuals doing their hobbies (IKEA Belgium, 2024). This

inclusivity allows the campaign to resonate with a global audience, aligning with Gibson's (1979) and Norman's (1988) emphasis on the importance of cultural context in the perception of affordances. In narrative transportation theory, immersive stories lead to a deeper psychological engagement, drawing customers into the IKEA world (Radoičić et al., 2022). The advertisement challenges stereotypes and fosters inclusivity by showcasing diverse characters interacting, reflecting IKEA's global audience through the age, gender, and ethnicity of the individuals featured in the campaigns. By depicting characters that viewers can relate to or see themselves as, advertisements can draw viewers into the narrative more effectively, fostering a deeper emotional and psychological engagement with the brand's story (Green & Brock, 2000).

3. Affordances of Products and Environments

The visuals depict IKEA products in dynamic, versatile settings where people engage in everyday activities. This suggests a narrative of adaptability and personalization, highlighting that IKEA products are not just static objects but integral parts of daily life that can adapt to various needs and preferences. This reflects affordance theory, particularly the concept of "imagined affordances," as Nagy and Neff (2015) described, emphasizing the functional possibilities of IKEA products and encouraging viewers to envision these items as customizable elements of their homes.

The campaign enhances the perceived usability of IKEA products by using realistic and relatable scenarios (Gibson, 1979). The imagery effectively communicates the practicality and flexibility of IKEA furniture, inviting viewers to imagine these items in their own homes. Users understand the potential uses of an object based on visual cues and seeing other people interact (Norman, 1988). Showcasing social interactions, such as family cooking or friends gathering in living rooms, IKEA emphasizes how its products can foster communal experiences and create a sense of togetherness. Creating affordances beyond the products but as social settings (Treem & Leonardi, 2012)

4. Narrative Context and Emotional Engagement

The final category focuses on the story told through the visuals, conveying messages beyond the products.

The campaign's narrative strategy aims to create a deeper emotional connection with the audience by telling relatable and inspiring stories and fostering a sense of narrative transportation through featuring characters in various life scenarios—such as a

young couple experimenting with makeup or a grandmother practicing martial arts with her grandchild. These scenarios are designed to showcase the versatility of IKEA products and evoke emotions and memories in the audience, making the story feel personal and relevant. Gilliam and Flaherty (2015) discuss the importance of storytelling in building emotional connections with the audience, suggesting that stories can humanize a brand.

The underlying message is that IKEA is more than just a furniture retailer; it is a facilitator of meaningful experiences and a supporter of creative, personalized living, highlighting the power of storytelling to engage audiences emotionally and cognitively (Green & Brock, 2000).



Picture one: Do Try This at Home - 1 (IKEA, 2024)



Picture two: Do Try This at Home - 2 (IKEA, 2024)



Picture three: Do Try This at Home - 3 (IKEA, 2024)

8.1.2 Textual Elements

The textual elements of IKEA's campaign play a pivotal role in conveying the campaign's message and engaging the audience. In this campaign, the textual elements do not function in isolation but are integrated with visual and auditory components to create a cohesive and compelling narrative. This aligns with Kress and Bezemer, who put the

interplay of different communication modes as the focus of multimodal discourse (Kress & Bezemer, 2001).

Title and Initial Contrast

The campaign's title, "Do Try This at Home," is a playful twist on the standard safety warning, "Do Not Try This at Home." The advertisement starts with the words written and spoken, "Warning: Do Not Try This at Home," only for the word "not" to be crossed out, transforming the message into a positive and inviting one: "Do Try This at Home" (IKEA Belgium, 2024). This narrative twist aligns with narrative transportation theory, which suggests that such textual engagement can captivate the audience and immerse them in the campaign's story (Green & Brock, 2000). By altering a familiar phrase, IKEA draws viewers into a narrative encouraging creativity and experimentation, reinforcing its brand ethos of innovation and accessibility.

The emphasis on product names and "new lower price" labels throughout the advertisement highlights IKEA's commitment to affordability (IKEA Belgium, 2024). This aligns with the first part of the campaign's sub-text: "It's time to embrace your inner rebel. With our affordable solutions, you can defy expectations and live the way you want to – no matter what your home is like" (IKEA India, 2024). This focus on cost-effectiveness broadens the appeal of IKEA's products. It aligns with affordance theory, where highlighting affordability makes these products seem more accessible and versatile for a wide range of consumers (Norman, 1988).

The closing message of the advertisement, "Home can do it.," succinctly comprises the campaign's core message. By presenting the home as a site of unlimited potential, IKEA taps into the narrative transportation theory, which posits that individuals become absorbed in narratives that resonate with their aspirations and identities, thereby enhancing emotional engagement (Escalas, 2004). This narrative technique also aligns with the concept of imagined affordances, which refers to the perceived possibilities for action that are shaped by users' interpretations and cultural contexts (Nagy & Neff, 2015). By suggesting that a kitchen can be transformed into a cooking show or a bedroom into a concert venue, IKEA is not merely selling furniture but an idea—an imagined potential of what a home could be. This is consistent with affordance theory, where the environment offers various possibilities for action based on the user's goals and experiences (Gibson, 1979; Norman, 1988). All textual elements of IKEA's campaign, from the playful transformation of the warning message to the message of the sub-text,

work together to draw viewers into a narrative where they are encouraged to reimagine their homes and embrace their creative potential. This uplifting inspirational targeting of the audience can lead to individuals becoming absorbed in their story, which potentially contributes to the persuasion of the customers when they shop at IKEA the next time. Hence, it is a mechanism coherent with Green and Brock's idea of narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000).

Musical Elements

The Swedish band The Hives' background song "Come On!" adds an energetic tone to the advertisement (IKEA Belgium, 2024). The song choice creates a balance between IKEA's Swedish heritage and reaching an international audience with an English song. Upbeat tempo and lyrics encourage viewers to take action and embrace the possibilities within their homes. Music, as a multimodal element, enhances the emotional appeal of the advertisement, making the message more memorable and engaging.

“Music in film and advertising works to intensify the viewer's experience, often aligning with visual and textual cues to evoke specific emotions and reinforce the overall message” (Kalinak, 2010, p. 36). Hence, music in multimedia contexts functions to shape interpretations, working synergistically with visual and textual elements to create a cohesive narrative, as the overall aim of multimodal discourse suggests.

8.1.3 Spatial Organization

In the advert, the camera films different home setups, showing various room layouts representing actual homes, with rooms differing in size and purpose (IKEA Belgium, 2024). This spatial organization helps consumers visualize how to arrange IKEA products in their homes.

The varied settings and props used in the advertisement reflect different lifestyles and needs, contributing significantly to the storytelling by creating a cohesive and inviting environment. The visual media affordances here—such as close-ups of cozy elements like armchairs, blankets, and warm lighting—encourage viewers to associate these products with universal symbols of comfort and homeliness (IKEA Belgium, 2024). This spatial affordance supports storytelling by helping viewers imagine themselves within these spaces, making the narrative more relatable. These settings are juxtaposed with high-tech components, such as multiple screens in the gaming area, highlighting the adaptability of

IKEA furniture to different lifestyles and interests. According to affordance theory, the placement of products in specific contexts can suggest and encourage their use in similar real-life scenarios (Gibson, 1979). By showing IKEA furniture in diverse settings, the advertisements suggest that these products suit various personal tastes and activities. Norman (1988) explains that visual cues can afford emotional responses from viewers, aligning with the intended narrative of the media. This aligns with Gibson's (1979) idea that “affordances are properties of the environment” that suggest how an object can be used or interacted with (p. 129), as the settings suggest actions and feelings like relaxation or productivity that viewers can imagine in their own homes.

8.2 Intermodal Relationships

Next, the analysis examines the relationships between the different modes of communication, exploring how they interact and complement each other to convey IKEA’s storytelling. These elements do not exist in isolation but interact dynamically to enhance the storytelling, ensuring coherence and cohesion and maximizing multimodal affordances (Kress, 2013).

The campaign's multimodal interaction is evident through the complementary relationship between the visual and textual elements. High-quality visuals of home setups are paired with textual descriptions that provide information about the main products. These visual and textual elements afford different types of engagement: Visuals afford immediate emotional connection by illustrating a lifestyle, while text affords informational engagement by providing context and details about the products. The textual elements, such as the alteration from “Do Not Try This at Home” to “Do Try This at Home,” set a tone reinforced by the visuals and music (IKEA Belgium, 2024). The campaign’s subtext, “It’s time to embrace your inner rebel. With our affordable solutions, you can defy expectations and live the way you want to—no matter what your home is like,” is brought to life through the images of diverse and creative uses of IKEA products (IKEA India, 2024).

Nagy and Neff (2015) elaborate on how affordances are not just about physical interactions but also about imagined possibilities, stating, “Imagined affordances are the result of the interplay between the materiality of technologies and users’ perceptions, experiences, and expectations” (p. 2). This perspective supports the idea that the IKEA campaign uses media affordances to allow viewers to imagine themselves interacting with

the products in personalized ways, thus deepening the engagement with the brand's narrative.

The campaign fully utilizes the multimodal affordances offered by the interplay of visual, textual, and spatial elements (Kress & Bezemer, 2023). By seamlessly integrating these modes, IKEA creates a more holistic narrative than each part could have been.

8.3 Online Tool “Kreativ“ Coding Data and Identifying Modes

The second layer of my analysis is the virtual stage; IKEA’s “Kreativ“ tool integrates technology to inspire customers and place their products in a different setting. IKEA leverages this application to create an immersive experience that virtually simplifies visualizing and designing rooms. Based on my observations while using the tool on the Swedish website, this analysis will focus on visuals, textual components, and interactive aspects to substitute for the spatial elements to showcase how IKEA engages customers and applies this form of storytelling (IKEA n.d.2).

8.3.1 Visual Elements

Interface Design

The interface design of “Kreativ“ is highly intuitive and visually appealing, ensuring simple navigation. The thoughtful layout, intuitive visual cues, guided workflows, minimalist approach, and consistent design elements all ensure that navigation is simple and engaging, encouraging users to explore and utilize the tool’s features with ease. It is separated into two spaces, one with interactive showrooms to have a layout of a room as a foundation or the option to design one’s own home via the IKEA app. The application is designed clean and minimalist in tone with the whole website. When a user selects a room to design, the room and all the product images presented are of high quality, with products rendered in 3D. This enables users to view items from various angles and in multiple configurations, enhancing the sense of immersion and realism. Affordance theory suggests that an object’s design communicates possible UI functions (Lee, et al., 2024). In the “Kreativ” tool, the affordances are visually communicated through intuitive icons and buttons that indicate their function. For example, a "drag-and-drop" icon is accompanied by an animated cursor change, signaling that they can move objects around the space, thus reducing the learning curve for new users. This clear visual feedback

ensures users understand how to interact with the tool, which aligns with Gibson's theory that affordances should be perceivable and actionable (Gibson, 1979).

Visualization

Users of the “Kreativ” tool can select products from a comprehensive library or search for specific items to place within a virtual room. The tool provides detailed, high-quality visualizations, showing users how these items would look in different spaces with realistic accuracy. This feature supports immersive and playful interaction, encouraging customers to explore various design possibilities and experiment with different configurations.

Based on my observations and user testing with a sample group of eight individuals, including myself, the tool effectively simulates a realistic environment where users can visualize potential room designs. Viewing items in 3D from different angles provides users with a tactile sense of the space, which aligns with affordance theory. This suggests that the more realistic and interactive a virtual tool is, the better it can communicate the affordances of the objects within it, thus guiding user actions and enhancing engagement (Gibson 1979; Nagy & Neff 2015).

Each library item is accompanied by visual cues that offer insights into color and texture when available for the product, even with different color or scale options (IKEA n.d.1). For instance, when users hover over an item, a small pop-up displays the available colors and materials, enhancing the visual detail and aiding decision-making. This customization is highly flexible, allowing users to test different colors and layouts, which makes the tool user-friendly and aligns with the affordance theory by suggesting that each item has potential actions or modifications that the user can explore. Users in the sample group reported feeling confident and in control when experimenting with different layouts and colors, demonstrating the tool’s effectiveness in guiding user behavior and encouraging creative exploration.

On the Swedish website, customers can choose from 21 pre-designed room spaces to design according to their preferences (IKEA n.d.2). Different settings are available, including multiple room types, to achieve a high level of realistic display and the option to arrange different IKEA products according to the required context. The high-quality visual rendering and the addition of lifelike ambient lighting and shadows add an extra dimension to the virtual setting, further supporting affordance theory by providing environmental cues that enhance user perception of the space’s affordances.

8.3.2 Textual Elements

Guidance

Within “Kreativ,” textual elements create clear and straightforward guidance through the application’s process, providing a foundation for intuitively using the features. This aligns with affordance theory, which suggests that the design of elements communicates possible actions to users (Gibson, 1979). For example, the option to read more about the tool, indicated by a simple button labeled “läs mer” (read more), is an affordance by clearly signaling to users that additional information is available. The benefits of the tool are listed and explained briefly through these textual elements, pointing out that the tool should help inspire people, making the process less time-consuming and build confidence in designing a room by themselves (IKEA n.d.3). Here, all features and purposes are explained in more detail with examples from people and user testimonials (ibid.). The Read More page also features a video that explains the process in a real-life setting, complementing the textual descriptions and reinforcing the affordances by showing users how to navigate the tool effectively (ibid.). Going back to the leading site of the feature, the titles make it very easy to distinguish between the pre-designed rooms and the app feature to design one’s own home. On each of those segments, there is the possibility of getting to the more detailed pages if needed. The other button, “gå till utställningsrum, “ shows the overview of rooms to select from (IKEA n.d.2). This clear guidance aligns with affordance theory by making potential actions apparent and understandable, guiding users smoothly through the tool’s features (Gibson, 1979). When choosing a room setting, the room shows up. On the left panel, the product library shows up under the title “Lägg till en produkt“ (add a product) with a search bar, some products displayed, and the option of a drop-down menu to navigate different product categories (IKEA n.d.1). This clear guidance helps users understand the next steps, reducing confusion and enhancing the overall usability of the tool, aligning with the principle that affordances should be immediately apparent and easily understood by users (Gibson, 1979). Each product picture includes the name of the item and some extra information. When selecting one, more details like price, availability, and the option to read more about the product appear, focusing on both the aesthetic and practical aspects of each item. These descriptions give brief information about features that help customers make well-considered decisions. Agreeing in part with narrative transportation theory, which emphasizes the importance of deep engagement in story-like experiences, the challenge is subtly integrating textual

information so that it informs without overwhelming (Glaser & Reisinger, 2022). Balancing informative content with engaging, interactive experiences can maintain narrative immersion while providing necessary guidance.

Beneath the product is a button “Lägg till i rummet“ (add to the room) and icons, a simple way of textual indication to add to the cart or favorites (IKEA n.d.1). Customers also add a personal touch by giving the design a self-chosen title.

The language is approachable but not overly embellished, more to convey information quickly and precisely. Phrases like “Hoppa in i rum...” (Jump in a room) or “...kombinera olika produkter för att göra din stil perfekt.” (combine different products to perfect your style) encourage users to explore and experiment with the tool (IKEA n.d.2). According to the observations of my sample group, these textual elements play a crucial role in guiding users through the tool’s various features. The inclusion of user testimonials and stories further enriches the textual content (IKEA n.d.3). By showcasing real-life examples, the “Kreativ” tool uses narrative transportation to immerse users in the experiences of others, fostering a sense of relatability and encouraging them to engage more deeply with the tool (Glaser & Reisinger, 2022). This user-generated content reinforces the idea that IKEA products are versatile and suitable for various styles and needs, thus encouraging users to engage with the tool and explore different design possibilities.

8.3.2 Spatial Organization

The spatial element of the analysis of IKEA’s “Kreativ“ tool is vital for comprehending how customers interact with and perceive space online. The tool is an intuitive platform for users to engage with spatial arrangements, facilitating an interactive design process. This functionality allows users to create customized room designs by selecting and arranging furniture, lighting, and accessories from IKEA’s extensive catalog. The drag-and-drop interface is intuitive and responsive, providing real-time feedback as users experiment with different layouts and configurations (IKEA n.d.1). This affordance allows users to become active participants in the design process rather than passive observers, which aligns with the affordance theory’s emphasis on the interplay between perception and action (Gibson 1979). Affordances exist in the artifact-user interaction, suggesting a dynamic in which the available tools shape actions and inspire imagination (Bærentsen & Trettvik, 2002). The drag-and-drop functionality is a direct application of this theory. This feature affords intuitive control over furniture placement and design and

encourages experimentation, directly engaging users by making the virtual environment responsive to their inputs.

This transforms customers into active participants, offering a hands-on experience and fostering a better understanding of spaces, thus inspiring customers to imagine affordances (Nagy & Neff, 2015). Users receive immediate visual feedback when adjusting their layouts or design elements, which helps them perceive changes instantly and adjust their actions based on the arrangement. This aligns with Gibson's concept of continuous interaction between perception and action within an environment, where affordances are about perceiving possible actions and receiving feedback that guides subsequent actions (Gibson, 1979). Integrating augmented reality further enhances the spatial element, especially in the app version, by blending virtual items into real-world environments (Rauschnabel, 2023). Users can use smartphones or tablets to visualize how selected IKEA products will look in their living spaces—adding a layer of realism and practical applicability. Augmented reality bridges the gap between virtual and physical spaces. It offers users a tangible sense of how products will fit and function in their homes and demonstrates IKEA's commitment to leveraging technology to improve the customer experience. This spatial exploration further simplifies making informed purchasing decisions, enabling users to assess product suitability in real-world contexts.

“Kreativ“ also includes advanced features such as the ability to adjust the size and color of products, change wall and floor finishes, and add decorative elements (IKEA n.d.1). This flexibility aligns with affordance theory, which posits that individuals perceive affordances differently based on their unique characteristics and needs (Maier & Fadel, 2009). The ability to configure within "Kreativ" reflects this aspect by allowing each user to modify the virtual environment according to personal preference and functional needs. This personalization enhances the usability of the tool for diverse individuals and fosters creativity. Observations from my sample group highlight that users feel empowered by these customizable affordances, finding the tool both accessible and versatile.

8.4 Intermodal Relationships

In IKEA's "Kreativ" tool, intermodal relationships are essential in enhancing the overall user experience by effectively integrating visual, textual, and interactive modes of communication. These relationships ensure that each element complements and enriches

the others, fostering a seamless and engaging user journey as they explore and design their personalized living spaces.

IKEA's "Kreativ" tool uses multimodal affordances to achieve a coherent narrative across different modes of communication. Affordance theory suggests that the properties of an environment or object guide possible actions, while multimodal discourse focuses on how different modes contribute to meaning-making (Gibson, 1979; Kress, 2010). Collaboratively, these multimodal elements contribute to cohesive storytelling. The stronger the narrative, the more profound the transportation effect, leading to greater persuasion and influence on attitudes and behaviors (Dessart, 2018). Ensuring that each tool element contributes to a straightforward, engaging narrative about home design, IKEA can enhance users' narrative transportation, making them feel part of a creative journey.

The high-quality visuals of products allow users to visualize different possibilities, while the interactive features enable personalization and experimentation with layouts. For example, when a user moves a piece of furniture, visual indicators show whether the item fits within the space, while textual prompts suggest alternative placements or complementary items. According to affordance theory, the properties of an environment or object guide possible actions (Gibson, 1979). In "Kreativ," each product option can offer its own affordances—specific uses, placements, or combinations within a space. These affordances are communicated through the tool's interface by showing how products can fit within different room settings or how they can be combined to achieve a particular look or functionality. This integration of visual, textual, and interactive elements helps users understand how products fit together and enhances their overall engagement by providing a dynamic and responsive environment.

While the tool offers many options, it is structured to intuitively guide users through the design process, highlighting the affordances of different products and layouts. This structure helps users avoid feeling overwhelmed by choices, ensuring they can focus on creating cohesive and aesthetically pleasing spaces. The tool's design aligns with affordance theory by providing clear visual and textual cues that highlight the most relevant affordances for each user, supporting effective decision-making and fostering creativity. Observations from my study confirm that users appreciate this balance of guidance and freedom, finding the tool engaging and easy to use.

8.5 In-store Showroom Coding Data and Identifying Modes

IKEA's in-store showrooms are a fundamental part of the brand's strategy to engage consumers and promote its products through a different layer of storytelling, in person. The carefully curated spaces provide customers with tangible, immersive experiences demonstrating how IKEA products can be integrated into real-life settings. Affordance theory, as proposed by Gibson (1979), suggests that these environments offer cues that guide possible actions, encouraging customers to interact with the space and imagine the possibilities of using IKEA products in their own homes. By strategically arranging products and room layouts, IKEA leverages these affordances to prompting customers to visualize how these arrangements could be adapted to their personal spaces (Bærentsen & Trettvik, 2002). Based on my ethnographic findings, I aspire to decode the different modes of communication used in these showrooms.

8.5.1 Visual Elements

The overall design and layout of IKEA's in-store showrooms are planned to create visually appealing and functional living spaces. Each showroom resembles a natural home, with living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms in different styles and sizes. Coordinated color schemes, stylish decor, and strategic lighting enhance these spaces' visual appeal and realism. According to affordance theory, these visual elements serve as affordances that suggest potential uses and actions, such as where to place furniture or how to organize space efficiently (Gibson, 1979).

Different interviewees agreed that the detailed furniture and thematic room setups create an immersive experience, pulling them into the set-up space. Affordances, as described by Gibson (1979), suggest that environments like IKEA showrooms provide cues that guide customer actions by highlighting the practical uses of products within a space. Bærentsen and Trettvik expand on this by noting that affordances exist in the interaction between the individual and their environment, emphasizing that these cues are not just perceived but are interactive and dynamic (Bærentsen & Trettvik, 2002). IKEA's showrooms are not merely aesthetic; they serve as cues that suggest comfort, functionality, and style; thus, IKEA's showrooms utilize affordances effectively, making it easier for customers to envision integrating these products into their own living spaces, demonstrating the interaction between perceived possibilities and personal needs (Bærentsen & Trettvik, 2002). This setup utilizes affordances by making it easier for customers to understand how different products can be integrated into their living spaces - IKEA products are put in context, allowing customers to see how other items can be

combined to create cohesive and attractive interiors. Interviewee Six stated, "I felt like I was journeying through different stages of life—from home to study to office—each space drawing me into IKEA's world." Hence, by presenting products in well-designed settings, IKEA helps customers visualize how these items might look and function in their homes.

Different products in the showrooms are arranged to highlight their features and potential uses. For example, storage solutions are displayed in ways that demonstrate their capacity and versatility, while furniture pieces are arranged to showcase their comfort and style. As different scholars discuss, the arrangement of objects and the environment can directly signal their uses (Erofeeva, 2019; Beynon-Davies & Lederman, 2017). In IKEA showrooms, the placement of items in a staged room setting not only displays the product but also suggests its use, enhancing the customer's understanding of product functionality through direct interaction with the setup. This visual arrangement helps customers understand the versatile benefits while also overloading with different product options; one interviewee criticized that while the details are an excellent addition to the spaces, it creates a more significant need to buy more to achieve the same level of living comfort.

The use of props and accessories further enhances the visual storytelling. Such elements act as affordances, triggering imagined uses and allowing customers to project their own experiences onto the space. This suggests how IKEA products can fit different peoples' everyday lives. Settings range from small to spacious apartments, each tailored to various customer needs and preferences. Realistic textures and lighting make the spaces feel authentic and inviting. Interviewee Three highlighted the realistic nature of IKEA's room setups: "I could easily imagine living in those spaces - it was almost like stepping into a real bedroom". This indicates the visual effectiveness of IKEA's displays in conveying a sense of realism and inviting users to imagine these settings in their homes, leading to imagining themselves living in these IKEA-curated places. According to Nagy and Neff, 'imagined affordances' involve how users perceive and interpret the functionalities and potential of technologies or environments based on their expectations and previous experiences (Nagy & Neff, 2015). In the context of IKEA's showrooms, customers might imagine their life improvements through the setups designed to appeal to a broad range of lifestyles and preferences. These imagined affordances are critical in influencing customer decisions and satisfaction, aligning the physical environment with personal aspirations and lifestyle goals.

8.5.2 Textual Elements

Textual elements within IKEA's showrooms guide customers and provide essential product information. These textual affordances guide customers through the space, highlighting key product features and facilitating efficient decision-making. Descriptions often include practical tips and suggestions for using the products. For example, a label on a storage solution might highlight its modular design and suggest ways to customize it to fit different spaces. This informative content helps customers understand the flexible functionality of IKEA products, making it easier to envision how these items can meet their needs. Interviewees noted that these textual affordances, including personas and fictional stories, helped them imagine using the products in their own homes. This knits the story further as the purely visual level of the depicted home is complemented by a more emotional one. One interviewee was surprised that after reading the text about the persona, she could identify even better with the apartment depicted, even though it initially did not correspond directly to her taste. Narrative transportation theory posits that when individuals are immersed in a story, they are more likely to be influenced by it, as the narrative can shift attitudes and intentions to align with the story's context (Van Berkel et al., 2022; Chalke et al., 2023; Lundqvist et al., 2013). In in-store settings, textual narratives can help weave a story around products, enhancing emotional engagement and making the information more relatable and memorable.

Informational signage serves as affordances, offering actionable information that enhances customer decision-making by making product features and benefits more apparent. Interviewee Two noted that IKEA stores are always laid out in a familiar way, independent of location, giving guidance and consistency: "You are taken by the hand and led through the store; it is like a destination for a day trip including taking time to stroll around and have a Fika". Consistent and familiar storytelling elements across different contexts can enhance narrative transportation by reducing cognitive load and increasing focus on the narrative (Escalas, 2004). This consistency in storytelling helps maintain customer engagement and trust in the brand narrative. That sense of uniformity across IKEA's global stores helps create a consistent brand narrative that customers find reassuring and easy to navigate.

8.5.3 Spatial Organization

The whole space and layout of IKEA's showrooms are designed to create a flow and guide customers through a logical and engaging journey. Each showroom is arranged to

mimic the layout of a typical home, with different sections dedicated to various rooms and functions. This layout acts as an affordance, inviting customers to explore, suggesting paths and potential uses for each space, aligning with Gibson's (1979) theory of environmental cues guiding actions. Narrative transportation is not just about the story's content but also about how it is presented. The physical layout of a space can significantly affect how individuals interact with and perceive narrative elements within that space (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). A well-organized space that leads customers through a series of interconnected narratives can enhance narrative transportation by making the journey through the store feel like a story unfolding.

The journey through interconnected spaces mirrors a story's progression, from introduction to climax. Customers are led through interlinked spaces, each offering new ideas and design possibilities. Interviewee One described the store as a guided journey where you are "taken by the hand and led through the store." This indicates the spatial design of the store, which directs customer flow and keeps them engaged while they see the full range of IKEA's offerings.

Interactive elements within the showrooms enhance the customer experience by encouraging engagement and participation. These interactive affordances invite customers to engage directly with the products, providing tangible feedback that influences their purchase decisions. Gibson's concept of affordances explains that the environment offers cues for possible actions that individuals perceive (Gibson, 1979; Ha & Lee, 2021; Maier & Fadel, 2009). All of IKEA's interactive elements are designed to suggest and facilitate specific actions, like trying out and exploring products, which enhance the shopper's ability to judge and evaluate their choices effectively. Hence, affordance theory accurately describes the purpose behind the design of IKEA's interactive showroom features. These strategic design elements enable actions that make the shopping experience enjoyable and informative. While affordance theory focuses on the action potential, it aligns with my observations that these actions are critical in making IKEA's environments more intuitive and user-friendly. However, it is important to recognize that while affordances create opportunities for interaction, the extent of user engagement can vary significantly based on personal preferences and past experiences. The interactive features make the shopping experience more dynamic, allowing customers to experience the products firsthand. According to Narrative Transportation Theory, engagement in a story—in this case, the staged rooms of IKEA—transforms consumer attitudes and enhances immersion (Van Berkel et al., 2022; Chalke et al., 2023;

Lundqvist et al., 2013). IKEA's interactive showroom setup is a narrative medium that showcases furniture and tells a story of living spaces that customers can step into and experience first-hand. I concur with Narrative Transportation theories here; IKEA's showrooms do more than display items—they narrate a lifestyle that resonates with customers, promoting deeper emotional and cognitive engagement. All interviewees noted that the pathway is well thought-out, providing tangible inspiration that transcends mere visuals. Blending furniture, they already have with the one they see is simplified by testing the products firsthand and experiencing colors in different light settings.

In some showrooms, customers can access digital tools and resources to explore design ideas and product options further. For example, in the Umeå store, touchscreens offer direct access to the availability of the products displayed immediately next to the showrooms, offering detailed information about specific products. These interactive elements blend the physical and digital experiences, offering customers a comprehensive and immersive shopping journey.

All IKEA showrooms emphasize the importance of personalization and customization. Customers are encouraged to mix and match products to create unique spaces. Modular furniture, customizable storage solutions, and a wide range of accessories provide endless possibilities for personalization. The interviewees noted that customizing the showroom experience connected them more to the products and increased their anticipation.

Even without buying anything, the natural path through the store offers inspiration. This is primarily seen as positive, but Interviewee Five said that they are happy to be able to bypass the showroom spaces, as it extends his stay if he already knows exactly what he wants. Interviewees Seven and Eight contradicted this, however, and emphasized that the IKEA experience for them depends precisely on it being an actual visit that takes and should take time. They like to spend time in the rooms and set up their imaginary vacation home in their heads. All this underlines how subjective and individual the view is. Everyone finds what they want and is inspired; creativity and flexibility are the focus at IKEA, even if some leave the store overstimulated by the oversupply and endless options that cater to all kinds of preferences.

8.6 Intermodal Relationships

IKEA's in-store showrooms exemplify the brand's strategic use of storytelling to engage consumers and promote its products through immersive, real-life settings. Narrative

transportation theory complements my observations that the showroom's design narrative is more than just about aesthetics; creating a lived experience that resonates emotionally with customers (Escalas, 2004). However, narrative transportation implies a passive reception of a story, whereas IKEA encourages active participation. The success of the in-store showrooms highlights the power of combining physical experiences with storytelling.

The in-store showrooms at IKEA provide a rich multimodal interaction experience that engages customers on multiple sensory levels. Interviewee Seven highlighted the ability to interact with the products physically, noting that sitting on furniture or touching fabrics provides a sensory dimension that enhances the shopping experience beyond what is possible online.

Visual stimuli in the showrooms, such as the detailed arrangement of furniture and decor, are complemented by spatial cues that guide customer movement and exploration. Interviewee Eight, who sees themselves as a visual person, emphasized the ease of finding what they are looking for without needing specific keywords, thanks to the clear and intuitive visual displays. This visual-spatial interaction allows customers to navigate the store effortlessly while absorbing the design inspirations presented in each room. The showroom design facilitates an intuitive exploration that aligns with customers' inherent tendencies to interact with their surroundings, making the shopping experience more effective (Beynon-Davies & Lederman, 2017).

Additionally, the tactile interaction with products reinforces customers' perceptions of quality and functionality, as noted by Interviewee Three, who mentioned the importance of being able to touch and experience items firsthand.

Moreover, as mentioned in the interview, auditory elements, such as background music or ambient sounds like bird chirping, further enrich the sensory experience, making the showrooms feel more like real-life environments. This multimodal interaction enhances the immediate shopping experience and leaves a lasting impression on customers, as they can vividly recall the atmosphere and emotions associated with their visit. That engagement goes beyond mere observation; it invites customers into a narrative they can feel, touch, and even hear, deepening their immersion and connection to the IKEA brand (Glaser & Reisinger, 2022).

8.7 Coherence and Cohesion

Coherence and cohesion are critical elements in IKEA's storytelling strategy across its advertising campaigns, the "Kreativ" tool, and in-store showrooms.

The "Do Try This at Home" campaign achieves coherence through dynamic interactions among characters and a consistent visual aesthetic. The characters' body language and facial expressions align with the warm lighting and vibrant colors to create an engaging and relatable narrative, enhancing emotional connection and narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000). This coherent integration of visual and textual elements allows viewers to follow and immerse themselves in the story being told easily.

Similarly, the "Kreativ" tool achieves coherence by seamlessly integrating visual, textual, and interactive elements into an intuitive user interface. The clear instructions and consistent design make navigation easy, fostering user engagement by allowing them to design their spaces intuitively. The tool's cohesive integration of features such as AR capabilities and social sharing options further enhances the narrative experience, encouraging collaboration and social interaction (Van Berkel et al., 2022; Glaser & Reisinger, 2022).

On the other hand, in-store showrooms exemplify coherence through a strategically organized layout that guides customers through a thematic journey. The consistent presentation of room setups reinforces IKEA's brand values of practicality, inclusivity, and accessibility, creating a cohesive shopping experience that strengthens customers' emotional connection to the brand (Escalas, 2004; Dessart, 2018). Across all platforms, IKEA's coherent and cohesive storytelling ensures a unified narrative that deeply engages consumers at multiple touchpoints.

9. Concluding Discussion

The analysis of IKEA's storytelling strategies across its visual, digital, and physical platforms reveals a cohesive approach to engaging consumers and promoting products. By integrating findings from the "Do Try This at Home" campaign, the "Kreativ" tool, and in-store showrooms, I will discuss the aspects that address the research questions and highlight the interactions between these different layers.

Research Question 1: IKEA's brand identity is communicated through several key elements that resonate deeply with customers' perceptions and values, effectively uniting the diverse components of its storytelling strategy. This research contributes to the

broader understanding of how brands communicate identity through integrated storytelling techniques, which is increasingly important to cater to fragmented attention and diverse platforms.

Inclusivity is central to IKEA's brand identity, catering to "all the people", "reflected in the "Do Try This at Home" campaign, depicting a wide range of people and homes, challenging stereotypes and fostering a sense of belonging. This commitment to diversity is further reflected in the "Kreativ" tool, allowing for an interactive and personalized experience, where users can customize their virtual rooms to reflect their own identities and preferences. In-store showrooms extend this by creating immersive environments that customers can walk through and interact with, providing a tangible sense of how products can be adapted to different needs. This approach aligns with affordance theory, where products are presented in a manner that highlights their usability and adaptability, enabling consumers to perceive their own potential interactions with the products (Gibson, 1979).

Affordability and accessibility are vital elements of IKEA's brand identity, prominently featured across its visual, textual, and digital narratives. The "Do Try This at Home" campaign highlights the affordability of IKEA products through clear pricing information and messages emphasizing economic value. The "Kreativ" tool reinforces this by enabling users to explore cost-effective design solutions, ensuring that creativity and personal expression remain accessible regardless of budget. In-store showrooms further emphasize affordability by showcasing practical solutions for various living spaces. Nevertheless, a visit to IKEA is perceived as a real outing, which, with a visit to the IKEA restaurant next to the regular shopping, offers an oversupply of bargains and inexpensive products but does not encourage sustainable savings.

Practicality and innovation are demonstrated through IKEA's use of technology in the "Kreativ" tool and app and the design of its in-store showrooms. The app's interactive features and AR capabilities showcase IKEA's forward-thinking approach to home design. At the same time, the in-store showrooms offer a hands-on, immersive experience that helps customers visualize the practical application of products in their daily lives. This blend of innovation and practicality aligns with consumer needs for user-friendly solutions, enhancing brand loyalty and engagement. By investigating how technology and innovation are integrated into storytelling, this study emphasizes the growing importance of digital tools in creating interactive artifact-user interaction.

Research Question 2: IKEA's storytelling efforts convey values such as creativity, self-expression, and inspiration resulting from the key elements of its brand identity. Affordance theory, which suggests that objects and environments inherently offer cues that guide potential actions (Gibson, 1979), is instrumental in understanding how IKEA's narrative strategies foster these values across different platforms.

Through the "Do Try This at Home" campaign, IKEA inspires creativity and self-expression by depicting various home environments that reflect different personal styles and living situations. This campaign utilizes visual affordances by showcasing how IKEA products can be used in diverse ways, encouraging viewers to see these items as versatile tools for creating their unique spaces. The way products are arranged and styled in the advertisements offers viewers clear cues on how they can use them, fostering a sense of inspiration and creativity.

The "Kreativ" tool further enhances these values by allowing users to personalize their designs, supporting self-expression and inspiring creativity. The digital affordances provided by the "Kreativ" tool enable users to experiment with different layouts, styles, and configurations, demonstrating how IKEA products can be adapted to fit their unique needs and preferences. This interactive platform empowers consumers to take control of their home environments, aligning with narrative transportation theory, which posits that engaging narratives can immerse consumers in a brand's story (Green & Brock, 2000). By giving users the ability to visualize and manipulate their spaces in real-time, IKEA allows them to see the potential uses of its products, reinforcing the perception that they can creatively customize their living environments.

In-store showrooms also convey these values by presenting a variety of room setups that inspire customers to envision their own spaces and express their individuality through design. The physical affordances of the showroom environment—such as the ability to touch, move, and interact with products—enhance the inspirational aspect, showing customers the endless possibilities for personalizing their homes with IKEA's products. By engaging directly with the products in a tangible, real-world context, customers are encouraged to explore different arrangements and uses, which supports the values of creativity and self-expression.

Research Question 3: IKEA strategically employs storytelling across various platforms to engage consumers and promote its products, each platform uniquely contributing to a cohesive brand narrative. The "Do Try This at Home" campaign utilizes high-resolution

images and videos to place IKEA products within diverse, relatable home settings, highlighting themes of inclusivity, affordability, and accessibility. This visual storytelling aligns with affordance theory, which suggests that objects provide cues about their potential uses (Gibson, 1979). By showcasing a variety of home environments, the campaign helps viewers imagine IKEA products in their spaces, enhancing the perceived versatility and adaptability of these items.

The "Kreativ" tool extends this narrative into the digital sphere, focusing on customization and innovation. It allows users to visualize and design their spaces virtually, experimenting with different layouts through a user-friendly interface and high-quality 3D renderings. This tool leverages narrative transportation theory, immersing users in a personalized experience that bridges the gap between virtual and physical spaces through augmented reality (Rauschnabel, 2023). By enabling customers to see how products would look in their homes, the tool enhances the usability and versatility of IKEA products.

In-store showrooms bring these narratives to life in a tangible way, providing immersive setups that resemble real homes. These physical spaces enhance narrative coherence and emotional engagement by allowing customers to interact with products directly and visualize how they fit into their lives. This experience leverages affordance theory by suggesting practical uses for products within lived environments, making the shopping experience both informative and engaging (Gibson, 1979; Green & Brock, 2000). The seamless organization of spaces further enhances this holistic narrative, creating a coherent brand story across all consumer touchpoints.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that integrating various modes of communication enhances the meaning-making process, which is evident in IKEA's ability to combine visual, textual, and spatial elements across platforms. This multimodal approach ensures that IKEA's narrative is adaptable and resonates with a diverse audience, effectively reinforcing its brand identity.

The interaction between these layers is crucial to IKEA's storytelling success. The visual and textual elements of the "Do Try This at Home" campaign set the stage for the narrative of being part of IKEA's brand and story, establishing a discourse that revolves around themes of inclusivity, affordability, and practical design. This narrative is then deepened and personalized through the "Kreativ" tool, where the discourse shifts to a focus on creativity, self-expression, and innovation. By allowing users to customize their

spaces and experiment with different designs, the tool invites consumers to actively participate in the narrative, making them co-creators of their own IKEA-inspired environments. Finally, the in-store showrooms bring this narrative to life, providing a physical space where the discourse becomes experiential. Customers can engage with the products firsthand, experiencing the practicality and versatility of IKEA's offerings in a tangible way. This multimodal approach ensures that the narrative is coherent and resonant across consumer touchpoints, weaving a unified story that seamlessly transitions from digital to physical, encouraging continuous engagement with the IKEA brand.

9.1 Limitations and Further Research

As mentioned in different parts before, the scope of this study is constrained by factors that remain to be addressed in future studies.

The analysis is based on different outputs, each analyzed objectively. However, the small sample size of interviewees provided a deep understanding but limited generalizability. A more extensive and diverse sample, including IKEA staff, would be beneficial to improve the study. Increasing the sample size and diversity can significantly enhance the credibility and transferability of qualitative research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In touch with generalizability, applying qualitative approaches adds to a more holistic understanding. Surveys, experiments, and statistical analyses can complement qualitative findings and offer a more robust basis for generalization (Creswell, 2012).

Besides, the study primarily focuses on the global IKEA campaign and Sweden as a specific geographical and cultural context. Given that consumer behavior and brand perceptions can vary significantly across different regions. Applying a cross-cultural approach in future research can reveal nuanced differences in consumer responses, providing insights into how IKEA can tailor its strategies to various cultural contexts (Hall, 1980).

With the increasing importance of digital and social media platforms in consumer engagement, future studies could further investigate how IKEA's storytelling strategies are implemented and received on these platforms. Research can examine the role of user-generated content and elaborate more on the app and its features.

A significant societal issue not addressed in this study is the ethical considerations in marketing practices. While effective, the rise of persuasive storytelling in marketing raises concerns about consumer manipulation and the potential exploitation of emotions

to drive sales (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017). Future research could explore the societal impacts of such strategies, including how they influence consumer behavior and the ethical implications of blurring the lines between entertainment and advertising. Analyzing the long-term effects of IKEA's marketing strategies on consumer trust and perception would provide valuable insights into the broader societal consequences of these practices (Sirdeshmukh, et al., 2002).

Moreover, discussing the environmental issues associated with IKEA's business model is necessary. While IKEA promotes affordability and accessibility, its approach often relies on mass production and high product turnover, which can have significant environmental impacts (Jackson, 2009). Future research could examine the sustainability of IKEA's practices, including the ecological footprint of its supply chain. Investigating how IKEA's storytelling could incorporate more sustainable narratives, emphasizing long-lasting products and environmentally friendly practices, would be valuable in understanding how the brand can align with the growing consumer demand for sustainability (Ottman, 2017).

This thesis has examined IKEA's storytelling strategies across various platforms, revealing that the success of IKEA's brand narrative is multi-layered and relies on more than just a single form of communication. Traditional advertising campaigns like "Do Try This at Home" effectively convey IKEA's key elements of inclusivity, affordability, and accessibility but may not fully capture the complexity of modern consumer engagement. Advertising alone can sometimes feel unidirectional, lacking the interactive and immersive qualities of digital and in-store experiences. The "Kreativ" tool and in-store showrooms add more layers and access entries, broadening IKEA's storytelling scope. Both allow for greater personalization and interactivity, aligning with affordance and narrative transportation theories. However, due to the overwhelming number of options available, particularly in in-store environments, there is also a potential for decision fatigue. Balancing the richness of these experiences with user-friendly interfaces and streamlined choices is crucial for maintaining customer engagement.

In conclusion, this research underscores the critical role of storytelling in (contemporary) brand communication. By analyzing IKEA's multifaceted storytelling strategy, this study contributes to the field of Media and Communication by exploring how storytelling can bridge the gap between brands and consumers, creating meaningful and lasting connections.

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12. Appendix: Interview Guidelines

Introduction and Purpose of the Interview

Hello, and thank you for taking the time to meet me today. As you know, I am Neele, a Media and Communication Master student from Malmö University, and I'm very excited to do a store visit at IKEA with you. I am currently writing my

Master's Thesis, where I am looking at the multi-layered approach of IKEA's advertising strategies. I am looking forward to hearing your perspectives for me to conduct a more in-depth analysis

Participant Consent

Before we begin, I'd like to inform you that the interview after our visit will be recorded and transcribed to provide empirical data for my analysis of IKEA's in-store experience. Please be assured that all information shared will be handled with the utmost care and confidentiality. Also, I want to mention that your answers will be anonymous, so you can answer these questions more freely. You are also allowed to withdraw your consent at any point before the publication of the thesis.

Agenda Overview

To provide a brief overview of what we are doing today. We will start by walking through the store as a group. You can walk at your own pace, but it is important to not skip the showrooms. Afterwards, we will have Fika at the IKEA restaurant and I will interview each of you in conversational, semi-structured way.

Questions

1. Can you describe your overall experience with IKEA? What makes it distinct from other retailers?
2. How often do you visit IKEA stores or engage with their online platforms?
3. What aspects of the IKEA in-store experience do you find most engaging or unique?
4. How do the room setups and examples in IKEA stores influence your shopping experience and purchasing decisions?
5. Is there one of the showrooms that we've been in now that had your attention in particular?
6. In what way does it inspire daydreaming, in the sense that you imagine yourself living somewhere here?
7. How do the room inspirations enhance your shopping experience at the store?
8. To what extent does IKEA make you feel involved in their whole brand?

Additional Input

Before we conclude, I want to give you an opportunity to provide any additional insights or information that you believe is crucial for my study. Is there anything specific you would like to highlight or share? Also, feel free to reach out any time, if you want to change or edit any of your answers, have comments or concerns or want to withdraw your consent.

Closing Remarks

Again, thank you so much for your time, you have added enormous value to my study!

