Mythologies of Finnishness in Advertising

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the dimensions of Nordic regionality through advertisement-based narratives of Finnishness. Building from theory on myth, this study responds to the call for more research that reflects "greater sensitivity to place and history" in operationalizing regionally based marketing and consumer research (Chelekis & Figueiredo, 2015, p. 321). Through an interpretive inquiry of print advertisements that invoke the idea of Finnishness, we find mythical portrayals of Finnishness in advertising appeal to, reinforce, and extend a collective sense of national and cultural identity. Advertisements also leverage national symbolism and implied domestic product origins to propagate localist, protectionist, and regionalist narratives with moralistic undertones. A final major theme explicated is the mythical portrayal of a rustic lifestyle of the past, which enables Finnish consumers to regain a material connection with a "paradise lost" of traditional Finnishness. Appeals to international consumer segments also use idyllic imagery from the Finnish countryside and nature in the form of an "exotic other." We discuss implications of our analysis for theorizations of mythologies and their relationships with regions and cultural strategy.

Keywords: regionalities, advertising, mythology, marketplace myths, Nordic consumer culture

INTRODUCTION: A REGIONAL FRAMING

Regions have only recently begun to serve as a means of theorizing culturally based marketing and consumer research (Arnould & Thompson, 2015). In the past, geographical frontiers were used only to delineate and contextualize marketing and consumer research and not to advance theoretical development (Arnould, Price, & Moisio, 2006). To further the discussion of geographical boundaries, the concept of glocalization has been used to describe local interpretations of transnational mythologies like the global youth segment (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). From examinations of the anonymity and shared aspects of transnational Asian brands, we now know biopolitical national boundaries to be mythological (Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008). Recent research has offered regionality as a new way of understanding social organization to "help researchers grasp phenomena that span over areas larger than a single locality" (Chelekis & Figueiredo, 2015, p. 321).

We enter the conversation on regions as a means of theorizing culturally based marketing research by examining the regionality-marketer nexus. We pose the question: *How does myth narrate the imaginaries of the Nordic socio-cultural region through advertisements?* Through a study of advertisements found in Finnish magazines, with discursive roots that span both intranational and international audiences (Östberg, 2011), we find that mythic narratives, archetypes, and plotlines speak to contradictions or paradoxes that are immanent in the natural and social experience of consumers living in Finland or as travelers confronted with advertisement-based narratives of Finnishness. Despite the fact that some of the mythological imagery that we shall visit in this chapter is definitively and specifically Finnish, we allow ourselves to speak in terms of "regions" because we find that some of the imagery pertaining to Finnish national mythology is inscribed in a broader framework of Nordic and Arctic references; further, it is not always obvious exactly where the line is drawn.

The chapter is structured as follows. We first discuss current literature that is addressing myth in the world of marketing, building on consumer culture theory and marketing scholarship. We then describe our research design and subsequently present our analysis of the mythic portrayals of Finnishness in print advertisements. Finally, we present our findings and state a brief conclusion.

MYTHOLOGY IN THE WORLD OF MARKETING

Our examination responds to the call for more research that reflects "greater sensitivity to place and history" in operationalizing regionally based marketing and consumer research by mobilizing theory on myth (Chelekis & Figueiredo, 2015, p. 321). The continuity of mythic symbols, motifs, and narratives reveals the *longue durée* of mythologies that correspond to structures that have an extreme longevity (Siikala, Frog, & Stepanova, 2010). Adhering to Barthes (1957), we take myths to be a representational mode of signification, comprising a system of signs and signifiers that encode cultural meanings into an object, subject, image, text, or practice. Myths are a type of narrative, archetype, or plotline that social groups rely on to explain the nature of the world and the rationale for social conduct in a given culture (Tillotson & Martin, 2014). Also, myths "provide a logical model capable of overcoming contradictions or paradoxes in natural and social experience" (Levy, 1981, p.51). Updated to suit contemporary conditions, mythic narratives, archetypes, and plotlines grounded in the most fundamental concerns of human experience draw from a vast historical supply of cultural meanings that supersede historical particularities (Martin, Bullis, Tillotson, & Schouten, 2014). Myths are "as old as humanity, yet [are] constantly renewed to fit contemporary life" (Stern, 1995, p. 183). Throughout various historical and cultural contexts, mythologies are purposefully created and used to propagate ideologies and serve different social, political, and commercial goals (for specific Nordic examples see Kristensen, Boye, & Askegaard,

2011 and Tillotson & Martin, 2015). Upon their creation, myths channel powerful ideologically steeped meanings that consumer groups experience in advertising messages (Parker, 1998). Much like myths, ideologies are frameworks for understanding the world that is "shared by members of social groups" and "constituted by relevant selections of sociocultural values" (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 248). Myths naturalize ideologies and "individuals become immersed in a shared understanding whereby the culturally contingent aspects of social life (such as common cultural associations, social practices, or power relationships) are seen as being the natural order of things" (Thompson & Haytko, 1997, p. 20).

In our chapter, we shed light on how advertising coupled with mythological systems of Finnishness constitutes a specific way of receiving and interpreting global consumer culture that reproduces the regionally based Nordic socio-cultural model (Østergaard, 1997, 2006). Advertising takes on points of ideological instability common to the Nordic milieu and, through myth, transforms cultural conflict and contradiction into something with value and marketability even for international audiences. The concept of a nation can be seen as a myth that is produced in a certain historical context but taken as the natural order of things. To those in the community, a nation is a mythical phenomenon in itself, but it is also a mythological narrative construct to those outside of that community. Nations become part of a signification process regarding "foreign–domestic" and "country X–country Y" (Anderson, 1983; Askegaard & Ger, 1998; Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008; Ger, 1999). National myths shape individual, social, economic, and political life:

> At the individual level, myths are key source material for stitching people to national identities, imbuing personal identity with the solidity, status, and camaraderie that comes from the felt participation in collective ideals and achievements. At a societal and political level, myths serve a conservative

> political function, smoothing over contradictions and challenges to ideology (Holt, 2006, p. 359–360).

Regional cultural contradictions become fodder for national mythologies. Cultural contradictions function as points of ideological instability. Mythic narratives or plotlines serve to smooth over these points as they resonate within a cultural group (Thompson, 2004; Slotkin, 1992).

Research on commercial mythology offers insights into the application of regionality in advertisements, revealing that commercial mediated mythology "[harnesses] myth for commercial purposes through the marketplace" (Cayla & Arnould, 2008, p. 101). Advertising operates not in product markets but rather in myth markets, where "the topic of the conversation is the national ideology, and it is taken up by many contenders" (Holt, 2003, p. 44). Importantly, mythologies can serve multiple ideological agendas that pull consumer identities and lifestyles in particular directions (Thompson, 2004). Myths "permeate consumer culture" and play a significant role in the media and advertising texts as creators of an appealing brand and product images (Thompson, 2004, p. 162). Commercial myth making refers to the efforts of marketers to associate their brands, products, and services with culturally resonant stories. Consumers use those mythic stories to help resolve acute tensions in their lives, and thus myths contribute to various consumer and communal identity projects (Thompson, 2004).

An emphasis on the purposeful creation of myths in the commercial setting is useful to marketers. Narratives, archetypes, and plotlines can serve as implements of cultural codes—compelling cultural content that allows consumers to easily understand and experience intended advertising meanings (Holt & Cameron, 2010). A bias toward seeing advertising as competing for cultural share heightens awareness of myths' effectiveness in shaping behaviors at the individual and community levels (Holt, 2004). The perspective of commercial mythologies as an ideological process produced by marketers emphasizes myths' framing power more than their playfulness. We

believe this may facilitate understanding of the commodifying of cultural identities in the Nordics. Finally, in a study of iconic brands, Holt (2006, p. 359) calls attention to a promising potential of myth, namely that of "narrating the imagined nation." Our study takes one step in the direction of realizing that potential in the realm of the Nordic socio-cultural region.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The broad aim of this chapter is to produce an account of the complex interplay of visual, verbal, and narrative symbols in advertisements (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). Advertising remains a relevant and exciting focus of research exploring the flow of cultural meanings. Particularly since companies spend billions of dollars annually on advertising as a communications channel. There are at least three main grounds for focusing on advertisements. First, advertising brings together consumer goods and the culturally constituted world so that consumers make associations between the attributes of a particular good and a certain desirable concept within the culturally constituted world (McCracken, 1986). Second, myths work through advertisements, as encoded symbols of meaning, engaging the receiver's imagination to spark an affective response through contradiction with conventional understandings of the world (Hackley & Hackley, 2016; Holt, 2004; Stern, 1995). Mythologies animate advertisements; they become a "kind of knowing" and, thereby, construct ideological meaningfulness in our experiences with the world (Doty, 2000, p. 55; Barthes, 1957; Levy, 1981). Third, advertisements are polysemic and ambiguous, carriers of multiple meanings as mythic symbols become a medium for different ideologies (Brown, McDonagh, & Shultz II, 2013; Luedicke, Thompson, & Giesler, 2010). Through mythology, advertisements can become instruments of power and rhetorical force in society (Thompson, 2004). In the rest of this section, we turn to specific techniques and procedures concerning data collection and analysis. A presentation of our findings will follow before drawing some brief conclusions.

Data Collection

The primary sources of data for this study were 30 print advertisements that appeared in either of two Finnish magazines: *Eeva* and *Blue Wings*. We selected these advertisements on the basis of their relevance to the research question— *How does myth narrate the imaginaries of the Nordic socio-cultural region through advertisements?* Each advertisement seemingly expresses Nordic regional elements by appealing to the idea of Finnishness, which can be deciphered with the chosen methods. We make no claims about the commonness of cultural, mythical elements in advertising in general, but rather gauge the use and application of regional–cultural mythology in advertising where such mythology has recently been discoverable. We chose advertisements appearing in 2014 to allow a focus on contemporary brands and their respective marketing methods.

The common denominator for advertising texts selected for analysis include those that invoke the use of Finnishness for consumer appeals. According to Media Audit Finland, *Eeva* is among the most widely read women's magazines in Finland (379,000 readers), and has the target demographic: "discerning women, who value themselves and a good quality of life" (Finnish Periodical Publishers' Association [FPPA] 2015). *Blue Wings*, the Finnair in-flight magazine, has as its main target group business travelers (FPPA, 2015). It was chosen as one of the sources to include the international aspect of marketing through national cultural mythical elements in the empirical part of the study. It features many Finnish brands and its readers are of diverse nationalities.

Data Analysis

Recognizing that Finnishness is discussed from mythic points of view, our attention focused on salient themes tied to narratives, archetypes, and plotlines linked to the Nordic region. Data analysis occurred as a continuous act throughout the research project. Visual communication is exceedingly culture-specific: different cultures may interpret given visual cues in very different ways. We identified cultural codes and references that connected the ads to the larger realm of collective cultural imagery. In the early phase of analysis, we identified three themes in print advertisements that revolved around the regional symbolism of Finnishness: (1) cultural stereotypes, (2) romantic nostalgia, and (3) social politics. These themes were continuously refined, collapsed, reworked, and discarded as we sought to make sense of our findings in a conceptually coherent way (Belk, Fischer, & Kozinets, 2012). In acknowledgement of the importance of connecting images to the cultural context of the marketplace, we individually re-analyzed the advertisement material and generate analytic codes that explored how images "embody and express cultural values and contradictions" within consumer culture (Schroeder, 2006, p. 303). We then analyzed each of the themes to evaluate in more detail how advertisements functioned concerning the marketplace and leveraged mythology to narrate imaginaries of the Nordic socio-cultural region. We began another iteration of coding our data. As we moved between theory and data, we were able to find distinct yet interconnected dimensions of marketplace myths foregrounding (1) mythic symbols of Finnishness, (2) propagating localist, protectionist, and regionalist narratives, and (3) romantic nostalgia. In the coming section, we outline these dimensions in more detail.

FINDINGS

Mythic Symbols of Finnishness

Mythical portrayals of Finnishness in advertising appeal to and strengthen and extend a collective sense of national and cultural identity. The advertisement in image 1 relies on a blue-and-white font and background coloring theme that matches the Finnish national flag, invoking the idea that Nordea Bank understands Finns and therefore must be adept at managing their finances. While the bank is based in Helsinki, Finland, the name Nordea comes from a Swedish company but as the name underlies they have a clear strategic vision about being "Nordic." While blue has been found to be the most commonly used color, particularly in finance advertising (Gorn, Chattopadhyay, Yi, and Dahl, 1997), there are instances where cultural disposition resonates new meanings through the ambiguous character of mythic symbols (Brown et al., 2013). Furthermore, as we know from reader-response theory (e.g., Scott, 1994), while their colors have been blue and white also prior to the spread to other Nordic countries, this fact does not prevent Finns from identifying the blue and white colors as resonant with Finnish national symbolism.

[Insert image 1 - Nordea ad]

The Nordea advertisement shows a piggy bank pig sustaining the weight of a set of coins on its nose. The text below asserts, "Keep your finances in top shape. Do not let your assets degenerate or your condition for results deteriorate. *Sisu* puts your money in a systematic training." Here, Nordea Bank draws on *sisu*, the mythical quality of Finnish perseverance under extremely harsh conditions. An illustrative example is the Winter War miracle myth of outnumbered but persistent Finnish troops, who in 1939–1940 managed to fight back the Russians in extremely adverse circumstances using *sisu*. Like Finnish men in the Winter War, Nordea bankers are perseverant fighters who will overcome any obstacle imposed by the complicated world of finances to make your money work for you. The connotation of *sisu*, as used to describe Finnish character, is that life is hard work and your money should work hard for you too (with the help of Nordea, of course). *Sisu* associates the

Nordea brand with a favorably viewed cultural trait that represents "us," and reinforces these agreeable components of a national identity. Later, *sisu* is intentionally given a double meaning: *sinun suunnitelmasi*, which means "your plan" or your financial plan.

Localist, Protectionist, and Regionalist Narratives

National symbolism and implied domestic product origins are leveraged to propagate localist, protectionist, and regionalist narratives with moralistic undertones. An example of national symbolism tied to localist narratives is the "land of engineers" myth. *Suomalainen insinööritaito* (Finnish engineering skills/competence) and Finland as a "land of technology" are related ideas that perpetuate the belief that Finns have a unique way of looking at the world, making them exceptionally adept in technological and engineering pursuits. Despite post-Nokia industry-wide struggles relating to technological innovation, the popular memory of 'The Nokia Miracle' lives on and contributes to this notion. One exceptional company, Nokia, saved Finland from a severe economic downturn during the early 1990s. A central figure in the Finnish national epic, *Kalevala*, is *Ilmarinen*, a blacksmith and inventor who can be seen as the origin of this mythical idea of Finnishness. For example, in a situation where the enchantress and wicked queen request a magical object in return for a rite of passage, *Ilmarinen* turns out to be the only one capable of forging such a magical object—the *Sampo*—a kind of mill capable of producing flour, salt and money out of nothing. The object is —for obvious reasons— believed to bring good fortune to its holder. The idea of a "technological fix" is therefore deeply inscribed in Finnish mythology.

While there may be little difference in the actual policies in terms of the political focus on the Arctic areas between the three Nordic countries of Norway, Sweden and Finland (e.g., Suorsa, 2007), it may be possible to state that the Northernmost parts of these countries play different roles

in the national imaginaries of the respective countries. While the self-imagery of Sweden, backed by a not too distant past as the regional superpower, is that of a global player and moral model of modernity (Trägårdh, 2018) leaves little room for a central role for the remote and undeveloped "north", the imagery in Norway and Finland are different. In spite of the fact that, in particular the northern Finnmark region in Norway has been subject to both a degree of marginalization and exoticization due to its Sami population, there is a long tendency in Norway for stressing and supporting local development in the peripheries (e.g., Amdam, 2002), not least sustained by the oil income. The Norwegian state has implemented an "Arctic identity" policy (relatively unthinkable in Sweden), albeit with results that are far from unambiguous at least so far (Medby, 2014). Likewise, Finland has since long promoted the northern region of Lapland as a high-profile tourist destination including a fully-grown *Santa Claus* industry (Pretes, 1995). A relatively forgotten inter-Nordic conflict, that we shall also not unpack here, between Finland and Greenland (and even a few small towns in Norway) is whom can claim to have the authentic home of Santa Clause. Finland is in the lead not at least due to the significant resources invested in one of the world's strongest brands (Hall, 2008)! Due to the presence of this industry, the Arctic plays a more central role in the Finnish national self-understanding compared to Sweden.

Beyond—or rather in addition to—the local traditionalist and Arctic references, we also find references to the insertion of Finland in the Nordic region. For example, in an investor- and citizen-oriented campaign, the city of Oulu appropriates a regionalist narrative that aims to create associations between Oulu and "Scandinavia." The official slogan of the city, "the Capital of Northern Scandinavia," is highlighted, portraying Oulu as a "first-rate operating environment for companies." The myth of the land of engineers is evoked throughout the text and makes references to constructing a smart city that utilizes "iCT technologies." By introducing Oulu as a business-friendly environment and the capital of northern Scandinavia, the local political and business scenes hope to attract more capital and innovation. Arcticness is referred to explicitly through narratives

that highlight it as the "Arctic Smart City" and in the body text: "The goal is to focus on the development of sustainable and energy-efficient city planning and construction that answer the challenges imposed by the extreme conditions of the Arctic." We interpret the convergence of "Scandinavianness" with "Arcticness" and "Nordicness" as the imagination of an identity that places all the emphasis on the collective (Kjeldgaard and Östberg 2007), at once establishing consensus and conformity to a regional brand while also establishing its exceptionalism amongst the international audience (Browning 2007). As can happen in cases of American exceptionalism tied to mythic narratives (Luedicke et al. 2009), the advertisement harnesses the land-of-engineers myth to position the city as ecologically and socially responsible, playing off the theme of sustainability and its moral implications.

[Insert image 2 – Isku advert]

The Finnish "key flag symbol," found in the bottom right corner of the Isku advertisement (image 2), assumes at least two narratives. For local audiences, as well as informed foreigners (people who know the Finnish flag), it represents the myth of the nation (Askegaard, 1988) as a classical country-of-origin, or as we prefer to say, product-country-imagery narrative (Askegaard & Ger, 1998). What such a narrative contains is not easy to isolate or explicate. The late semiotician and novelist, Umberto Eco, wrote in his "Foucault's Pendulum: 'To each memorable image you attach a thought, a label, a category, a piece of the cosmic furniture, syllogisms, an enourmous sorites, chains of apothegms, strings of hypallages, rosters of zeugmas, dances of hysteron proteron, apophantic logoi, hierarchic stoichea, processions of equinoxes and parallaxes, herbaria, genealogies of gymnosophists - and so on to infinity.'" (Eco, cit.in Papadopoulous, 1993 p.3). What this eloquent list of features signals is the complex web of knowledge and belief, hierarchizations of elements, cultural categories, analogies, and connotations that each (just relatively) complex image engenders. The reference to a country (like Finland) through its flag definitely falls into this

category. The intended message may very well be a kind of localist narrative, demarcating the local (and consequently favorable) origin of products and brands. At least potentially, it ideologically motivates consumers' moralistic identity work.

Such a campaign may also be interpreted as "protectionist." A highly contested qualifier in this day of global trade wars between groups often characterized as "liberal globalists" and "populist nationalists." As an explicit reference to the Finnish origin of the product, the Finnish key flag symbol was found on many product ads ranging from health products like lactase pills, melatonin, and skin creams to grocery chains and furniture companies. In this context, most such flag symbols represent a campaign that urge the consumers to "favor the Finnish" (*suosi suomalaista*).

Finnish origin represents a responsible and moral choice for consumers, as they care about the success of their countrymen and gladly ignore the more attractive foreign deals brought to them by globalization. Consumption of foreign brands is implied as a less moral choice, triggering guilt. If this strategy proves successful, systematic consumer "solidarity" toward Finnish origin undoubtedly benefits domestic brands that negotiate global competition. Further, this converges with findings of previous studies that suggest Nordic countries are built on export economies (Tillotson & Martin, 2015), and the Finnish origin allows companies, like Isku, to become distinctive in their home market, while also spreading Finnish/Nordic know-how, quality, and industrial innovation abroad.

Romantic Nostalgia

Mythical portrayals of a rustic lifestyle of the past enable Finnish consumers to regain a material connection with a "paradise lost" of traditional Finnishness. Idyllic imagery from the countryside and Finnish nature represent an "exotic other" for appeals to international consumer segments (Ger, 1999). For example, place branding and tourism companies draw on the dream-like imagery of a "winter wonderland" with Santa Claus or a land of a thousand lakes with the "beauty" and "purity" of the Finnish nature. In image 3, the town of Raseborg (Raasepori) appeals to intranational readers with place branding through the idyllic and rustic, and to international consumers with the exotic. We see the "ideal" at the upper part of the picture: a rural red wooden cottage, a child enjoying playing out in the snow, and traditional Finnish Christmas decorations. The "real" at the lower part of the picture explains the nature of the city. Raseborg is portrayed as being close to Helsinki, and thus a convenient place to live and do business. However, the ad suggests that Raseborg is "different" in addition to being close to the city. Both the text below and the pictorial motifs of the ad explain exactly how we are supposed to think Raseborg is different: it is an idyllic little town that has maintained an endearing rustic lifestyle. The innuendo is intended to remind Finns of the good old times in the countryside, as opposed to the dull and dusty urban life they most probably currently lead. The ad also provides prospective tourists with appealing exotic imagery of a "true, traditional Christmas" in a "fascinating maritime idyll and old towns filled with old-fashioned wooden houses."

[Insert image 3 – Raseborg advert]

Serving to bridge community-specific displaced meanings (McCracken, 1986), Nordic-based global brands harnessing pastoral and bucolic motifs to associate themselves with mythical imagery of high nostalgic value. In the Finnish context, such displaced meaning often lies in romanticized narratives and popular memories of a pastoral lifestyle and a sense of togetherness of the past. Connecting with these displaced meanings is supposed to alleviate consumer anxieties in ever-changing societal circumstances.

Transnational brands, like Arla in image 4, harness regional myths of Finnishness by attempting to tap into a previous narrative by the iconic brand Valio, which was traditionally the leading dairy brand in Finland (Tillotson & Martin, 2015). The Arla advertisement features two photographs. On the left, we see "Pentti," a Finnish male baby boomer, surrounded by rustic countryside imagery. In the upper right corner is a smaller image of the Arla milk packaging and a glass of milk in a rural setting. The text on the right says: "If you do not have time to listen, do not ask Pentti why he loves milk so much. Milk that has its home in Finland." The Arla slogan urges the consumer to "enjoy the good." Arla Foods is a company and brand that spans the Nordic socio-cultural region by way of Finnish, Swedish, and Danish borders. Arla has a long history in Finland with roots deep in Finnish culture and the dairy business since 1929. In the advertisement above, Arla has taken to the market the myth of the local with its numerous Finnish references. While one could argue that similar rustic imagery may also be part of the Danish or Swedish mythology, every attempt is made to portray Arla as Finnish and to dispel any foreign "cultural odor" (Iwabuchi, 2002). Employing a character with the name of Pentti, a traditional and uniquely Finnish male given name, and the slogan of "milk that has its home in Finland." We interpret this to mean that the milk that Arla sells in groceries comes from Finnish farmers. The image of Pentti, a Finnish farmer, is a mythic symbol that solicits the audience to become emotionally invested with the Arla brand through its links to the Finnish ways of life. Apparently, this strategic approach has proved effective as Arla has recently surpassed Valio in daily milk production by a significant margin (Mainio, 2015).

[Insert image 4 – Arla advert]

The dairy industry and its connections to the countryside link narratives of Finnishness to a mythologized bucolic way of life. Despite the concentration of the Finnish population in three

larger urban centers, romantic elements of ‘the simple life’ emerge from Finland’s heritage as an agriculturally based community. These mythic symbols work to assuage the stresses associated with the hustle and bustle of urban living common in contemporary times (Tillotson & Martin 2015). Further, “The connection between a healthy countryside lifestyle and the consumption of fresh milk” inscribes feelings of “social pride and strength” in Nordic food culture (Kristensen et al., 2011, p. 200). Idyllic, harmonious, and communal notions of the countryside ground Finns’ idea of a united nation, language, and culture, which has established itself as a significant part of the Finnish collective imagery (Korkiakangas, 2005). This bucolic rural imagery is among the essential constituents of not only the Finnish national identity but also the Nordic socio-cultural region and as such serves as an intertextual symbol established by reference to one's previous intranational experience (Östberg, 2011). Interpreting the mythic symbol gains one membership to an exclusive club, where each act of interpretation serves to revitalize the feelings of belonging to that cultural group (Barthes, 1977).

Advertising texts frame their products and brands as solutions to unique problems experienced by the regional cultural group. The goal of such solutions to alleviate difficulties like living in rough Arctic conditions with harsh weather and no daylight.

[Insert image 5 – Marli Vital advert]

For instance, a juice producer, Marli Vital, provides vitality and light to the dark Arctic conditions (image 5). Their advertisement points out that Finland has little daylight during certain months of fall and winter. The text in the advertisement reads “when the sun is on vacation,” and includes several photographs lined next to one another depicting a dark silhouette of a house over a 24-hour period. The repeated image emphasizes the darkness, as it occurs around the clock in the middle of

Arctic winter, and the harsh living conditions without daylight. Depression and fatigue are rampant during this particular season; therefore, it is a good idea to enjoy some juice that will make the consumer more healthy and vital. After all, the brand name suggests giving "vitality from nature" (tagline below the logo).

A well-known French based probiotic yogurt brand, we refer to under the pseudonym Digest Well, developed a campaign designed to engage Finnish consumers in a similar way, where advertising texts frame the products and brands as solutions to unique problems experienced by the Nordic socio-cultural group. The text in their advertisement asserts "the Finnish winter is easy to digest." In Finnish, the verb *sulattaa* has various meanings (to digest; to melt, to defrost), which allow the ad to play on words. First, as Nordic people, Finns can easily "digest" the winter (as in tolerating it), but especially if they use this yogurt brand to promote better functioning of the digestive organs. The second meaning, to melt, evokes an idea of the melting of the snow shown in the image. In the lower part of the advertisement, the text reads, "The [Digest Well] flavor of this winter is the forest berry. It has such softness full of light that every winter stomach dreams of. If food digestion troubles you, [Digest Well] helps." Digest Well is the brand that can alleviate the harm and physical ailments that incur from those rough and perpetual Arctic natural conditions.

DISCUSSION

We propose that mythology and its premises represent a means to capture and explain regional imaginaries through advertising. In addressing our research question, we have identified three interconnected dimensions of marketplace myths that become inscribed in a broader framework of Nordic, Scandinavian, and Arctic references: (1) mythic symbols of Finnishness, (2)

propagating localist, protectionist, and regionalist narratives, and (3) romantic and historical nostalgia.

Over the course of this chapter, we have made selective comparisons with other culturally-oriented consumer and marketing research that have touched upon the premise that mythology plays an important role in delineating regional phenomena like nations, imaginary transnational brand communities, or global consumer culture (Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008; Chelekis & Figueiredo, 2015; Holt, 2004; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006; Thompson & Tian, 2008). We propose that mythologies are a kind of episteme and thereby a mutually constitutive process whereby meaningfulness of experiences cannot be determined outside the stories told of them; in turn, the meanings of those stories cannot be resolved without any reference to the world in which they originate (Widdershoven, 1993). Here, mythology can be considered a system of signs or a web of practical significance provided by the socio-historical and material context that helps constitute knowledge about the world.

Our findings are suggestive of the importance of mythology to marketers and advertisers and of their efforts to build the affective link between cultural contradictions and the therapeutic benefits afforded by mythic symbols (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014; Holt, 2004). The mythic symbol of Sisu, like that of the American frontier (Slotkin, 1992), the man-of-action hero (Holt & Thompson, 2004), the American South (Thompson & Tian, 2008), the mountain man (Belk & Costa, 1998), the American West (Peñaloza, 2001), Chinese political myths (Zhao & Belk, 2008), as well as indie consumers (Arsel & Thompson, 2010) emplot strong heroic performance in the face of overwhelming forces. Through the lens of what 'other people' believe, myths engage the imagination and ignite emotional response through contrast and disjunction from ideological opposition, while at once defining and identifying oneself in relation to those 'others' (Arsel & Thompson, 2010; Kozinets, 2001; McAlexander, Dufault, Martin, & Schouten, 2015).

Through mythology, Finnishness converges with the Nordic, Arctic, and Scandinavian identity revealing Nordic regionality through advertising. Marketing scholars interested in regional theory development may wish to pay attention to commercial mythology in advertisements for many reasons. Perhaps the most important is that commercial mythology helps see how brands can create an imagined regional identity—in this case, a regional "Scandinavian myth" or "Nordic myth"—for commercial purposes via the marketplace. In advertising or marketing, harnessing place and country-of-origin is "always contingent on the various mythologies that are always already available regarding a place" (Östberg, 2011, p. 232). We propose that intertextuality and ambiguity of mythic symbols provide the condition of possibility for interpreting Finnishiness as a Nordic, Scandinavian, or Arctic regional phenomenon. A brand can borrow successful mythical notions of another place context if the extension of the place to one's context is narratively acceptable and believable (Ricoeur, 1980). The city of Oulu, which seems to be aspiring to Scandinavian-ness with its marketing communication, takes this approach. By attempting to create an associative link between the city of Oulu and Scandinavia, marketers evoke positive regional imagery. Ultimately the brand value of Scandinavian-ness would translate itself as more capital and innovation in the city.

Our analysis has implications for research on cultural strategy. Much like the case of Swedish-ness (Östberg, 2011, p. 233), companies might "oscillate between a provincial position" in their local market and a Finnish position in the international market. In the case of Isku, we suggest that the key flag symbol offers a dual narrative. The product-country-imagery narrative speaks to the quality of the product and brand for international audiences who are 'in the know' (Askegaard and Ger, 1998). Protectionist narratives encourage local audiences linked to the origin of the brand to 'buy local' support national interests (Luedicke et al., 2010). Cultural strategy is said to guide managers to leverage ideological opportunities to repurpose cultural content and become a salient

brand (Holt & Cameron, 2010). Ideologies refer to a normative system of ideas, beliefs, and ideals of a group or culture (Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004). Following the cultural strategy logic, we have particular advertisements that leverage normative ideologies calling for social and ecological responsibility. By presenting the brand as socially or ecologically responsible, the official story goes, marketers can attract consumers who are increasingly willing to consume for a better conscience. This of course feeds a larger mythology and ideology of Nordic supremacy and leadership in terms of reconciling capitalism and social responsibility. Likewise, the regionalist myth conveys an endearing brand image with a "personality," better equipped to "out-local" large global brands (Ger, 1999). Finally, pointing consumer attention to regions also propagates a protectionist moralistic ideology of consuming the local for the common good of one's compatriots. However, a reference to regionality does not mean that a brand is a small local producer. A big international corporation, like Arla, may use the story of a small regional producer, who is wrapped up in the conglomerate, to advertise for local appeals (Östberg, 2011).

To conclude, our analysis of Finnishness in advertisements is an attempt to cast light on how myth narrates the imaginaries of the Nordic socio-cultural region. Advertising is a marketing communication and branding event particularly appropriate for mythic portrayals of national and cultural identity (Holt, 2004). Recognition that advertisements using myths of Finnishness do so through localist, protectionist and regionalist narratives with moralistic and nostalgic undertones add new layers to consumers' conception of self. The analysis of mythic narratives of Finnishness, seen as a point of passage between global consumer culture and national identity, can help us think beyond geopolitical frontiers as natural boundaries of market and consumer contexts—making these findings relevant for theoretical development relating to the role of regions for marketing and consumption-oriented social science.

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IMAGE 1
NORDEA ADVERTISEMENT

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IMAGE 2
ISKU ADVERTISEMENT

Isku on suomalainen vuonna 1928 Lahteen perustettu perheyritys, joka työllistää noin 800 henkilöä, joista Lahden tehtaalla noin 400. Isku suunnittelee, valmistaa ja markkinoi kalusteita ja kokonaisvaltaisia sisustusratkaisuja sekä koteihin että kouluihin, toimistoihin ja kaikkiin julkisiin tiloihin. Koko Suomen kattavan Isku-myymäläketjun lisäksi Isku toimii Pohjoismaissa, Baltiassa, Venäjällä sekä Lähi-Idässä. Iskun huonekalutehtaat sijaitsevat Lahdessa. Iskulla on ISO 9001 -laatujärjestelmä ja Isku toimii aktiivisesti ekologisen tuotannon kehittäjänä: Isku sai ISO 14001 -ympäristösertifikaatin ensimmäisenä alalla, ja tänä päivänä koko tuotanto on PEFC-sertifioitua, eli kaiken Iskun käyttämän puun alkuperä on tunnettua ja kestävän kehityksen periaatteiden mukaan tuotettua. Testaamme kaikki sohvat kestämään kovaa koti- sekä julkitilakäyttöä.

NOTE. —Isku advertisement. Reproduced with permission from Isku Interior Oy. Reprinted from Eeva, 8/2014, p. 47

IMAGE 3
RASEBORG ADVERTISEMENTS

NOTE. —The town of Raseborg advertisement. Reproduced with permission from visit Raseborg/Raseborg tourist information. Reprinted from Blue Wings, 12/2014, p. 79

IMAGE $
ARLA ADVERTISEMENT

Jos sinulla ei ole aikaa
jäädä kuuntelemaan,
älä kysy Pentiltä,
miksi hän rakastaa
maitoa niin paljon.

Maitoa, jolla on
koti Suomessa.

Arla

nauti hyvästä

NOTE.— Arla advertisement. Reproduced with permission from Arla Oy. Reprinted from Eeva, 7/2014, p. 13

IMAGE 5
MARLI VITAL ADVERTISEMENT

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