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How Scandinavian Graphic Design Is Perceived by Graphic Designers Around the Globe

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Abstract <p>The aim of the present study was to determine how graphic designers around the globe perceive Scandinavian graphic design.</p> <p>53 participants from industrial countries around the world partook in the study, which used a combination method of mail interviews and questionnaires.</p> <p>The results of this study indicated that, regardless of continent, Scandinavian graphic design was perceived as simple and functional. The often grid-based layout favored the use of sans-serifs, white space and few graphic elements according to the participants in this study. Achromatic colors such as black, white, and grey without gradients and shadows were preferred. Followed by earthy and pastel hues. Motifs were used sparingly, but when they were, they depicted elements found in nature or geometric shapes. Photos and illustrations were perceived to be equally in use, with a slight inclination towards illustrations being used more.</p> <p>The perceived impact of Scandinavian graphic design was wide-ranging. The participants who found the impact to be high were due to advocating simplicity and functionality, intertwining design fields, and/or raising awareness of conscious graphic design. The participants, who found the impact to be low, believed that too little exposure was a contributing factor.</p> <p>Most participants in this study considered Scandinavian graphic design simpler in comparison to what they can see in their own countries. Furthermore, African, Asian and South American participants perceived the colors to be lower in chromatic value.</p>	
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Sammanfattning <p>Syftet med föreliggande studie har varit att kartlägga hur grafiska formgivare runt om i världen uppfattar skandinavisk grafisk design. 53 deltagare från industriländer deltog i studien som använde en kombination av mail-intervjuer och enkäter.</p> <p>Resultaten från denna studie indikerar att, oavsett kontinent, upplevs skandinavisk grafisk design som enkel och funktionell. Layouten uppfattades som rutnätsbaserad med mycket ljusrum och få grafiska element. Monokroma färger som svart, vit och grå utan gradienter och skuggor uppfattades som typiska för skandinavisk grafisk design; följt av jord- och pastellfärger. Sanserifer var mest förknippade med skandinavisk grafisk design. Motiv ansågs i denna studie att användas sparsamt, men när de används avbildar de naturen eller geometriska former. Foton och illustrationer ansågs användas ungefär lika mycket, illustrationer hade en smärre större preferens.</p> <p>Den upplevda påverkan av skandinavisk grafisk design varierade mellan deltagarna. Deltagarna som tyckte att påverkan var stor, ansåg att detta berodde på förespråkandet av enkelhet och funktion, sammanflätning av designområden och/eller frammaning av hållbar grafisk design. Deltagarna som ansåg att påverkan var låg, tyckte att för lite publicitet var en bidragande faktor.</p> <p>De flesta deltagarna i denna undersökning ansåg att skandinavisk grafisk design var enklare i jämförelse med vad de kunde se i sina hemländer. Vidare tyckte afrikanska, asiatiska och sydamerikanska deltagare att färgerna hade lägre kroma.</p>	
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Preface

I would like to thank my thesis supervisors Åsa Svensson and Gustav Boklund for the support and encouragement throughout this thesis paper. Furthermore, I would like to thank Sara Webb for all the time and help she offered me. Likewise, I would like to thank all the participants who took their time to contribute to this study.

A big thank you to all of you!

On a further note, I believe it is important to keep in mind that Denmark, Norway and Sweden are different countries, and that the works originating from these three countries have different characteristics, just as graphic designers have their own personal style. My intentions are not to try and generalize these under the term Scandinavian graphic design, instead this thesis paper rather sets out to see what connotations the term Scandinavian graphic design has; it does not need to be a reflection of the actual works emerging from Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Gisela Olsen

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1 Introduction

An often neglected field when describing Scandinavian design is graphic design. While Scandinavian graphic design is not as recognized as Scandinavian industrial design, graphic design is still a field that is commonly practiced in Scandinavia and around the world in the present time. This thesis therefore sets out to answer how graphic designers around the globe perceive Scandinavian graphic design.

1.1 Descriptions of Scandinavian Graphic Design

When Scandinavian industrial design became recognized worldwide predominantly during the 1950s and 1960s, it was described as functional, modern, democratic, elegant, simple, and inspired by nature (Fiell, 2002; Halén & Wickman, 2007; Hedqvist, 2002; Sommar, 2003). However, when looking at how Scandinavian graphic design is portrayed, there are a lot of similarities, but also a few differences.

Art Director Jelle Van der Toorn Vrijthoff (Brismar Pålsson, Skeppstedt, & Sjöwall, 2011) wrote in the introduction of the book *Nordic Graphic Designers*:

Many designers gave uniform answers in the sense that they often used the same keywords to illustrate their preferences or to indicate characteristics they identify in their own work or in that of colleagues, i.e. serious, down to earth, simplicity, purity, functionality, less is more, uncluttered, undecorated, form and function, etc. Only a few denied that such a style exists. (p. 6)

He also mentioned that the Scandinavian approach is to allow functional requirements to take precedence over artistic criteria, but that the Scandinavian graphic designers are well aware that to achieve innovation and originality one needs to step away from these requirements. And thus, a playful approach has emerged that is more common on international ground. Moreover, he explained:

[...] Scandinavian designers have achieved a balance between deep-rooted and natural inclination towards functionality on the one hand and individual artistic expression on the other. Emotional impact is the noticeable result. (p. 7)

In the book *Scandinavian Graphic Design* (Shaoqiang, 2012) there are interviews with various Scandinavian graphic designers. Most of them described the Scandinavian graphic design as modern, functional, simplistic and clean. One of the first interviewed was Swedish Graphic Designer Henrik Nygren, his impression was:

It's functional, doable, long lasting, clean and simple – though some of these words are frequently used when you speak about Swedish graphic design, I think they do define what it is all about. (p. 4)

Svein Haakon Lia from the Norwegian design consultancy Bleed was also interviewed, and he stated the following:

Norwegians (like most Scandinavians) are practical people, we don't like a big fuss or complicating a message. There is a matter of fact approach in how we communicate with not too much politeness or unnecessary decoration. I think this makes Norwegian and Scandinavian design cleaner and to the point. In these cases the form becomes the message and concept. We see the same in industrial and architecture. (p. 6)

The museum director, art critic, curator, and writer Lars Nittve stated in the book *Swedish Graphic Designers 2004* (Beckman & Sarstad, 2004) that the Swedish graphic design is a contradictive mix of international influences, rule-based discipline, economical rationality, a rustic visual impact, tradition, and innovation. In the end, he hesitantly defined the typical Swedish graphic design as:

Internationally experienced, commercially aware and with a unique respect for craftsmanship. That might be a good summary of Swedish Graphic Design in 2003. (p. 9)

In the book *North by North* written by Klanten and Hellige (2002), there is an interview with the founders of Kaliber10000, a today terminated webzine. The founders Toke Nygaard and Michael Schmidt described the Scandinavian graphic design as follows:

While flicking through the pages of *North by North*, much to our surprise, we suddenly found ourselves muttering, 'sure – you can smell the Nordic flavor from miles away'. It seemed that Scandinavian designers share some common traits; the functional, often rigid and grid-like structure, the lavish use of white space to evoke an atmosphere and focus the eyes on one single design element, the love of beautiful, timeless photography and illustration, the kitsch, the lines, the squares, the slightly obsessive attention to all the minor details and last, but not least, the tongue-in-cheek humor – dry, understated, and without the crass edge often found amongst our American brethren. (p. 62–63)

To summarize: the common words to describe Scandinavian graphic design appears to be functional, simple, clean, drawn with international influences, but with respect for the crafts and Scandinavian heritage. On the other hand, when looking at what non-Scandinavians say about Scandinavian graphic design, the term becomes more diffused.

Bouvéron (2007), writer at the Swedish design magazine *Cap&Design*, asked his Japanese colleagues and friends to pick out designs that had been inspired by Swedish graphic design or could have been made by a Swede. To his surprise, he could not recognize the style presented to him. Before him were natural patterns; mainly the colors brown and green; and he could agree that there were slight resemblances of the 70s upon a closer look, but it was not the design that he associated with Swedish graphic design in the present era.

Furthermore, Bouvéron wrote:

Svensk grafisk design är levande. Många svenska designbyråer och formgivare gör bra, uppmärksammade jobb. Vissa vinner priser, studenter får stipendier, men Koichiro (Bouvéron's japanska vän) verkar inte veta om det. »Varför?« är min nästa fråga, och till den har vi inget bra svar.

Translation:

Swedish graphic design is alive. Many Swedish design agencies and graphic designers do good, acclaimed works. Some win prizes, students get scholarships, but Koichiro (Bouvéron's Japanese friend) does not seem to know. "Why?" is my next question, and to that we do not have a good answer.

As seen above, Bouvéron mentioned that Swedish design agencies and graphic designers do good works and win prizes. In order to get an understanding of how much of his claims are true, the subsequent chapter looks into the recognition Scandinavian graphic design had internationally during 2015.

1.2 Recognition of Scandinavian Graphic Design Abroad in 2015

Scandinavian graphic designers and design agencies had some recognition in international contests during 2015. For example the Swedish design bureau Forsman & Bodenfors received the grand prix for creative effectiveness for Volvo Trucks – Live Test Series, with an additional silver and bronze for best 360 degrees rebranding experience and tone of voice for Oatly (see Figure 1) at Cannes Lions¹ 2015.

Other Scandinavian creative bureaus such as, but not limited to Ingo (Sweden), POL (Norway), Uncle Grey (Denmark), and Robert/Boisen (Denmark) also received recognition of various degrees at Cannes Lions 2015 ('Winners: Cannes lions archive', 2015).

In the European Design Awards² 2015 numerous Scandinavian creative agencies – predominantly from Norway – received gold, silver, and bronze for various projects and categories ('European Design Winners', 2015).

However, in the D&AD Awards³ the Scandinavians were not as successful. Only the Norwegian design agency HeyDays managed to receive a shared tenth place for the category most awarded design agency ('Most Awarded Design Agency', 2015).



Figure 1
Example of Oatly's new packaging, rebranded by Forsman & Bodenfors.

¹ The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity is The World Championship of Creativity and a global event for those working in the creative communications, advertising and related fields. Every year awards in different categories are handed out.

² The European Design Awards are annual awards for work in the communication, interactive and illustration design fields for European designers.

³ D&AD Awards are annual international awards celebrating works in the design and advertising industry.

1.3 Scandinavian Graphic Designers

This segment provides a review on a handful of Scandinavian graphic designers, starting with the Danish designer, academic and writer Per Mollerup. Mollerup is responsible for several identities and signage systems for airports in Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm (see Figure 2). But perhaps his most famous works are the multitude of books he has written; *Design for Life*, *Marks of Excellence: The History and Taxonomy of Trademarks*, *Wayshowing: A Guide to Environmental Signage*, to name a few (Dexigner, 2015; ‘Per Mollerup | Biography, Life, Work, Logos and Awards’, 2013; Swinburne University of Technology, 2010). The returning matter in Mollerup’s works is the use and importance of simplicity. In 2015 he released the book *Simplicity: A Matter of Design*. The book proposes three aspects of design: functionality: the simplicity for comfort, aesthetics: the simplicity for pleasure, and ethics: the simplicity for conscience (Mollerup, 2015).

Possibly one of the most prominent graphic designers from Sweden was Olle Eksell. Famous for the Ögon Cacao, the first design program that Eksell made for Mazetti (see Figure 3). Eksell’s work has been described as playful, abstract geometry, and a tad bit crazy (Kase, n.d.). In his book *Design = Ekonomi*, translated: *Design = Economy*, he stated that good design is not only aesthetical, but economical as well. Moreover, he wrote “... *And we have few serious graphic designers whom can create functional environments in the home, the workplace, the urban landscape, the communication, and for the education*” (Eksell, 1999, p. 10). Unmistakably, Eksell shared some views on functionalism as of those working with Scandinavian industrial design. Affordable and beautifully designed things for everyday use were what many Scandinavian industrial designers aimed for during the middle of the twentieth century (Hedström, 2001). The Norwegian museum director, art historian and critic Peter Anker (Donovan, 1982) remarked that:

Generally speaking, the style known as Scandinavian Design is based on functionalism. Its forms are simple and geometric, its materials and technical solutions clearly visible. Ornament is more or less restricted, especially that derived from nature motifs. In textiles, a slightly different situation may be seen. (p. 142–148)

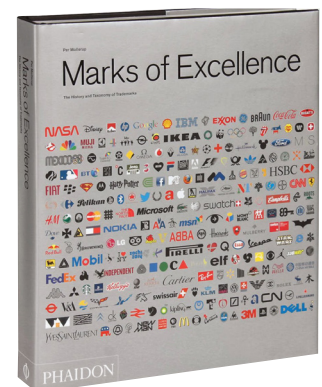


Figure 2
A sample of Per Mollerup’s works.

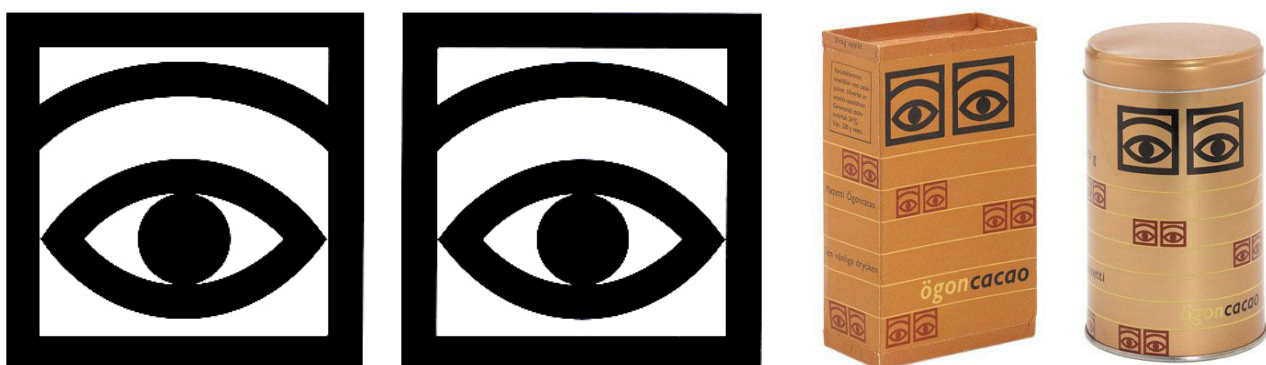


Figure 3
Examples of Ögon Cacao.

One should not forget that Eksell also had international influences, mainly from the United States. With friends like Paul Rand, Lester Beall, and Alvin Lustig, it is evident that Eksell thrived from transnational stimuli. In the book *Olle Eksell – Javisst!* created for IKEA, there is an interview with Eksell. The interviewer David Castenfors asked Eksell what would be the worst disaster for him. Eksell answered “*Att inte kunna lämna Sverige och att inte kunna få komma tillbaka.*” Which translates into: *Not being able to leave Sweden, and not being able to return* (Eksell, & Castenfors, 2015, p. 248).

1.4 Scandinavian Type Designers and Typefaces

Scandinavia had, and still has their fair share of type designers. For Denmark, it is most likely the works of Knud V. Engelhardt that springs to mind. His work is seen on the street signs of Gentofte City (see Figure 4), with a heart on the lowercase letter j (Nygaard Folkmann, 2007; Rosendorf, 2014). Thorvald Bindsbøll, the maker of the Carlsberg’s label, in turn influenced Engelhardt’s work.

In Sweden, Karl-Erik Forsberg became internationally famous for the Berling Antikva (see Figure 5), but he was also responsible for several identities such as Volvo (‘Karl-Erik Forsberg’, 2013; Ljungman, 2014). Another type designer was Bo Berndal who made over thirty typefaces, along with several trademarks for Swedish institutions and companies (Middendorp, 2011). Some of Berndal’s trademarks can be seen in Figure 6.

In the present day, there are several Scandinavian type designers: Göran Söderström, who made custom typefaces for international brands such as Cadillac and MTG, but his retail typefaces are used by the like of Red Bull and Tictail; Sofie Beier, maker of Karlo and Ovink; Claus Eggers Sørensen, maker of Playfair Display; etc. (Devroye, 2016; Söderström, n.d.). A selection of the typefaces is presented in Figure 7.

Sweden Sans received international interest as possibly the first typeface made for a country (see Figure 8). The Swedish government commissioned the creative bureau Söderhavet to create a visual identity for Sweden, specifically for the Swedish ministries, agencies, and corporations. The typeface is based on Swedish signs from the 1950s and is used when speaking in behalf of Sweden. The creators Stefan Hattenbach and Jesper Robinell describe Sweden Sans as a modern geometric font, a sans-serif with some modern tweaks (Campbell-Dollaghan, 2014; ‘Global brand Sweden’, 2014; ‘Identitytool for Sweden’, 2016; Russell, 2014).

Although serifs, scripts, and other quirky typefaces are being made, sans-serifs appears to be favored by the Scandinavian type designers.



Figure 8 An example of the typeface Sweden Sans, designed by Söderhavet.



Figure 4 An example of Engelhardt’s work, depicting a street sign at Gentofte City, Denmark.

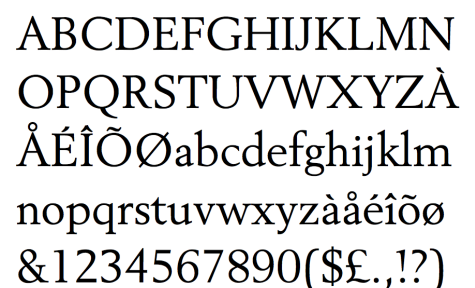


Figure 5 An example of the typeface Berling Antikva, designed by Karl-Erik Forsberg.



Figure 6 An example of trademarks designed by Bo Berndal.



Figure 7 Examples of typefaces made by Scandinavians. Ovink, designed by Sofie Beier to the left, and Playfair Display, designed by Claus Eggers Sørensen to the right.

1.5 Scandinavian Colors

In this section, I have not been able to find any colors associated with Scandinavian graphic design specifically. However, there are resources on colors used in Scandinavian industrial and interior design, these will therefore be given in the following paragraphs.

In an interview by Svenonius (n.d.) with Berit Bergström, Senior Advisor at NCS Colour AB and chairman of the international colour research organisation AIC, she described the Scandinavian colors as toned down pastels. She also claimed that the Scandinavian nature is sometimes a reference when choosing colors; apple green, hay yellow, umbra, brownish earth color, and medium blue can be seen. Other writers (Pittel, 2014; Schoech, 2012) agree that Scandinavian colors are often based on the Scandinavian nature, and that soft pastel colors are commonly used, but that a bolder accent color can also be seen combined with whites.

Kim (2013) researched which color combinations that South Koreans related to Scandinavian design. The colors chosen the most were forestry greens, ocean blues, and achromatic colors such as black, white, and grey.

1.6 Scandinavian Motifs

Although some research has been carried out on Scandinavian motifs, none (to the author's knowledge) has been on graphic design specifically. The following section therefore describes motifs found in Scandinavian patterns.

In a study conducted by Wesslund (2013) regarding the most popular Swedish patterns, the most common motifs were depicting nature and geometrical shapes, as seen in Figure 9. McGregor (2004) describes similar motifs in a book on traditional Scandinavian knitting motifs. The traditional patterns are regularly depicting the Scandinavian landscape (snowflakes, flowers, trees, etc.) or animals (reindeers, dogs, birds, etc.). Intricate patterns as represented in Figure 10 are common. Denmark, however, often refrains from winter themes (snowflakes, reindeers, etc.), but may instead, as earlier mentioned, use motifs found in nature and geometry as seen by the works of Danish textile printer Marie Gudme Leth in Figure 11 (Fischer-Hansen, 2009).



Figure 9
Examples of Scandinavian industrial design patterns.



Figure 10
An example of a traditional Scandinavian knitting pattern.



Figure 11
A sample of Marie Gudme Leth's work.

1.7 Purpose and Significance

To the author's knowledge, studies on Scandinavian graphic design are lacking. Scientific articles and papers are scarce, and most books that cover the topic Scandinavian (and sometimes Nordic) graphic design are either coffee table books or catalogs with predominantly pictures. The Internet has some resources, but mainly from interviewers and bloggers that have an interest in Scandinavian graphic design. These are, however, often built around one person's subjective interpretation and romanticized. Furthermore, the writers regularly interview, or are themselves, Scandinavian graphic designers. They rarely get an outside perspective on how Scandinavian graphic design is perceived in different countries, which may cause the monotonous repetition of the adjectives (and their synonyms) *functional* and *simple* being used.

The aim of the present study is therefore to determine how graphic designers around the globe perceive Scandinavian graphic design in 2016 by answering these questions:

- What are the most common words used to describe the term Scandinavian graphic design?
- What layouts, colors, typefaces, motifs, photos and illustrations are being used? How are they used?
- What has been the impact of Scandinavian graphic design internationally?
- What differences are there between Scandinavian graphic design and non-Scandinavian graphic design?

Due to the increasing globalization it seems like a relevant topic to study. Scandinavian graphic designers, design bureaus, and advertising agencies have international clients and customers. Likewise, many Scandinavian graphic designers are studying and working abroad. Their work can be perceived differently, and have other connotations from what they intended in other parts of the world. I hope that this study provides insights into what these connotations might be.

2 Method

2.1 Procedure

2.1.1 Literature Review

Data for the literature review was gathered through Summon, DiVA, Google Scholar, and Libris. Furthermore, the Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and American Google search engines were used to get fairer results. The terminologies used during the search are located in Appendix 1.

2.1.2 E-Mail Interviews

The majority of contact with the participants occurred through e-mail. In some cases, such as forums or websites with the potential of attracting multiple individuals, a questionnaire was used. The reason for not using questionnaires as the main method for this study was that participants would have to go through an additional step of clicking the questionnaire link. Another reason was that participants might be suspicious of links sent to them; as links sent through e-mails or messages may be misinterpreted as scams or viruses. By sending information about the study and the questions directly, these misinterpretations were hopefully avoided.

The participants were informed about the study according to Dalarna University's template for ethical research, and were asked open-ended questions as seen in Appendix 2. Open-ended questions (such as who, where, when, why, what, which, and how) are favorable because the questioner has less influence over the outcome, and answers are usually longer in comparison to closed-ended questions. Furthermore, another e-mail reminding the unresponsive individuals to participate was sent out two weeks after the first initial e-mail.

A mentor reviewed and suggested changes to the questions; these changes were adapted before they were sent to the participants.

2.2 Participants

To qualify as a participant one had to be engaged in graphic design in one way or another: working professional, freelancer, student, author, lecturer, enthusiast, etc.

The participants were gathered from social media (LinkedIn); forums and discussion boards (DesignTalk, designContest, Australian Infront, Quora, GDF, etc.); blogs, portfolios and design bureaus' contact pages (by searching on country + graphic design bureau/portfolio/blog on Google); and other websites related to graphic design (Behance, universities).

70–75 individuals from each continent, i.e., Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, and Oceania, along with another 70–75 individuals to represent the Scandinavian countries were asked to partake in the study. Industrial countries within the continents were mainly targeted.

500 individuals were asked to participate, which resulted in 53 participants altogether. Number of participants from each continent is shown in Figure 12. Due to the small number of participants from continents outside of Scandinavia and Europe, these will in the remaining of this paper be referred to as *Others*. Although Europe includes the Scandinavian countries Denmark, Norway and Sweden, these are in this study disregarded from the European group. Moreover, the participants had an average of 9,8 years experience in graphic design, either through work, studies, or a combination of both.

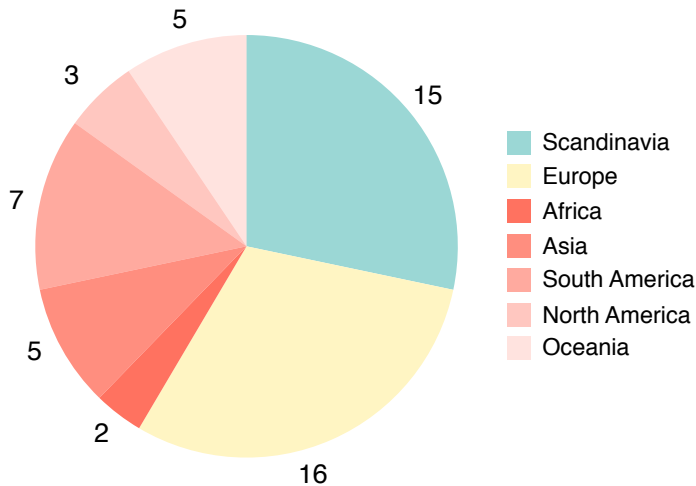


Figure 12
Number of participants from each continent.

2.3 Data Analysis

Adjectives/concepts found in the participants' answers were sorted into categories, these can be found in Appendix 3 with a description of which adjectives/concepts and their synonyms that are included in respective category.

Appendix 4 gives an explanation of the point system that was made and used in this study. This point system was used on all the participants' answers; the points were then summed up to create the figures seen in chapter 3. *Results and Discussion*.

2.4 Limitations

Due to Scandinavia being a broad term, I decided to use the original one, meaning Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Therefore the research of this paper is mainly based around these three countries. However, due to Scandinavia's comprehensive usage there is a possibility that the participants also include Finland, Iceland, and/or surrounding islands in the northern Europe in their views of Scandinavia. Additionally, the literature review may also contain the same beliefs on Scandinavia.

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine correlating fields of Scandinavian design such as, but not limited to: industrial, product, interior, architecture, and web design. Nonetheless, these fields have a tendency to overlap with graphic design, and because of the minimal resources on Scandinavian graphic design these fields have been used as supplementary resources.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptions of Scandinavian Graphic Design

When the participants were asked: *How would you describe Scandinavian graphic design?* The majority of the participants, no matter which continent they came from, described Scandinavian graphic design as simple and functional, as seen in Figure 13. These results are consistent with data obtained in the literature review (Brismar Pålsson, Skeppstedt, & Sjöwall, 2011; Klanten & Hellige, 2002; Shaoqiang, 2012).

In the category Other in Figure 13, the participants mentioned intrapersonal, madness, cold, warm, unique, positive, experimental, and not new/innovative.

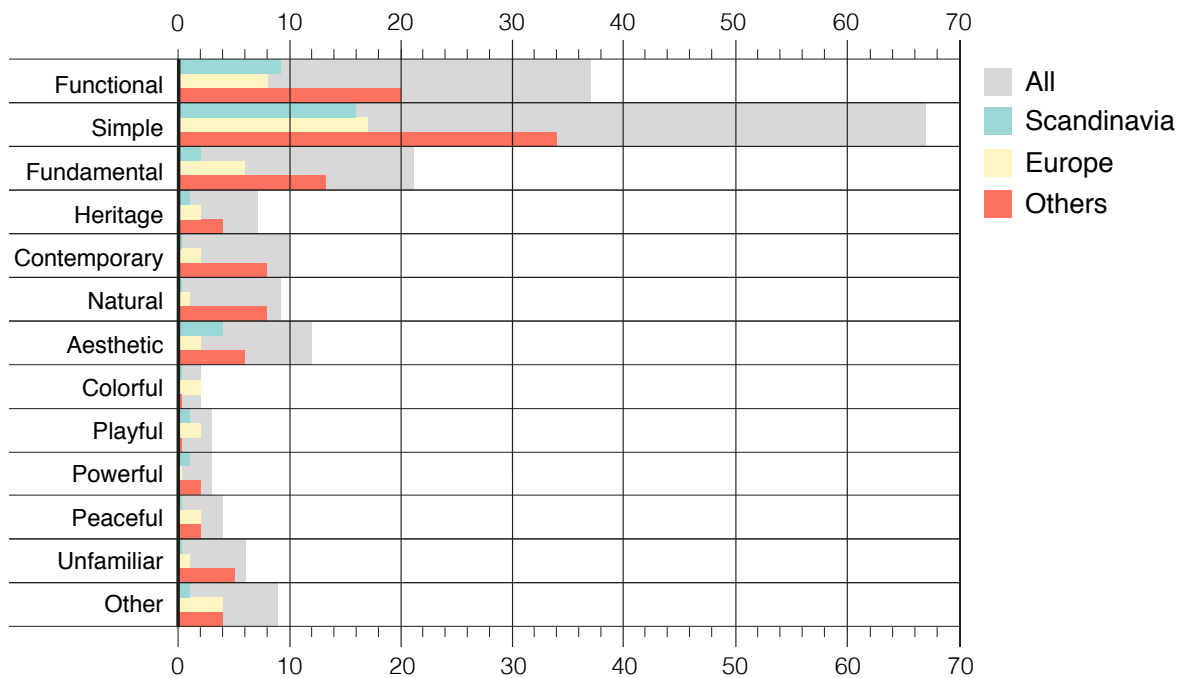


Figure 13
Most common words used to describe Scandinavian graphic design.

Many of the participants would refer to a conceptual design (which for this study was included in the category Functional). For example, one American participant wrote:

I think that the work coming out of the Scandinavian countries tend to follow certain commonalities. The work shows great understanding of Modernism, appreciation and respect for history, and a general focus towards clarity of a single idea and a deep concern for quality for each and every design artifact.

And another participant, this one from Switzerland, commented:

Clean and minimalistic. The Scandinavian graphic design has a clear message. There is no noise behind an idea. Just pure simplicity with a strong concept/idea behind itself.

These results are in agreement with Svein Haakon Lia's (Shaoqiang, 2012) comments, which were that Scandinavians do not like complicating a message; therefore the conceptual design might be a big part of the Scandinavian approach. However, conceptual/objective designs were implanted already during the Constructivism⁴ era and have lingered on throughout De Stijl⁵, Bauhaus⁶ and the International Typographic Style/Swiss Design⁷ (Meggs & Purvis, 2012). It is likely that these movements and their philosophies have influenced Scandinavian graphic design.

Although a minority in this study, a few participants saw a playful approach emerging as this Norwegian participant demonstrated:

I think it traditionally was minimalistic, precise and functional; as in the well known "form follow function"-mantra. This may be the case even today, but during the last ten years or so design has evolved to a lot more playful state; no longer tied to old conventions. I find it more experimental. I think many designers are inspired by fine art and trending sub cultures and fashion. Designers are "allowed" to make new paths, new directions, experimenting with the myriad of different techniques, both analogue and digital, that are available to us today. Maybe this is more evident in cases related to the culture sector in particular. I find the business sector a bit more conservative, i.e. primary functionality is prioritized above artistic freedom.

Similarly, Van der Toorn Vrijthoff mentioned this artistic playful approach back in 2011, but now five years later, playfulness does not appear to be the perceived characteristics of Scandinavian graphic design. Perhaps in a larger study, other results would have surfaced; perhaps the Scandinavians are just being cautious and need a few more years to develop their artistic playfulness. Maybe this new Scandinavian playful approach has not yet been successful in spreading beyond the Scandinavian borders.

⁴ Constructivism was an art philosophy emerging from Russia. The style aimed to discard self-directed art; it developed a systematic practice that intended to solve design problems through objective processes. Personal expressions were rejected; geometric reduction, photomontages, and simplified palettes were favored (Meggs & Purvis, 2012).

⁵ De Stijl was a Dutch movement that sought universal laws for balance and harmony for art. Most of the works were stripped down to the ultimate core. Sans-serifs and vertical lines were ideal; natural representations and subjective values were disregarded (Meggs & Purvis, 2012).

⁶ Bauhaus was a German-based movement; well known for the mantra form follows function. Preferred were geometric shapes and sans-serifs, and disregarded were decorations (Meggs & Purvis, 2012).

⁷ The International Typographic Style or Swiss Design, the ideal was to achieve order and clarity. Asymmetrical organizations of design elements on a grid-based layout and sans-serifs were common. The designers saw themselves as objective conduits for spreading information rather than artists (Meggs & Purvis, 2012).

3.2 Perception of the Scandinavian Graphic Design Layout

In this section of the interview/questionnaire the participants were asked the question: *What comes to your mind when speaking of Scandinavian graphic design in regards to layout?*

The majority of participants would refer to the Scandinavian graphic design layout as using few elements (simple), considered (attention to details), and with great use of the grid and white/negative space. The results obtained from the participants are represented in Figure 14. In the category Other, overlapping elements and asymmetric layouts were mentioned.

In the category Influenced, most would refer to The International Typographic Style/Swiss Design as having the greatest influence on Scandinavian graphic design. Followed by the Bauhaus movement.

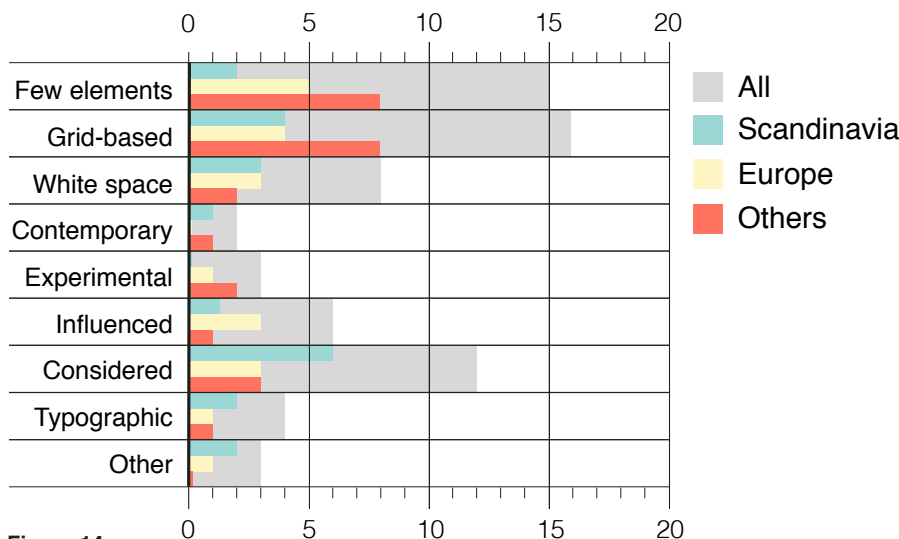


Figure 14 Participants perception of the Scandinavian graphic design layout.

3.3 Perception of the Scandinavian Graphic Design Colors

In this section of the interview/questionnaire the participants were asked the question: *What comes to your mind when speaking of Scandinavian graphic design in regards to colors?*

It can be seen from the data in Figure 15 that achromatic colors were mentioned the most. Furthermore, white + black + complementary primary color was the most told combination of color.

The use of black, white and an additional complementary color is likely rooted in earlier graphic design movements, Bauhaus and the International Typographic Style/Swiss Design in particular. But the combination may also pertain to economical reasons. It is, however,

noteworthy that the Scandinavians did not mention primary colors once while these rated fairly high for the other two groups, i.e., *Europe* and *Others*. This result is difficult to explain, but it might be related to what the participants prefer to watch when it comes to design in general. If the participants prefer colorful designs, they are maybe more likely to expose themselves to these, and therefore take greater notice of primary colors. Another possible explanation is that it has just simply passed the Scandinavians by that they use primary colors. However, by stating primaries it does not reveal anything about the chromatic content of the color and these could in fact be bright colors and/or pastels.

Second and third most mentioned color palettes were earthy and pastels. These colors may correlate to Scandinavian industrial design as mentioned in the literature review (Kim, 2013; Pittel, 2014; Schoech, 2012; Svenonius, n.d.). It is, however, an interesting finding because these color palettes do not solely correlate with earlier graphic design movements, but instead seemingly stem from Scandinavian culture and design history. Although, with certainty, other countries use nature as a source of inspiration, the pastels do not appear to be the preferred color choice by other countries as discussed in section 3.7 *Distinguishing Features of Scandinavian Graphic Design*.

Though not shown in Figure 15, a few of the participants, regardless of continent, would refer to the colors as: flat or minimalistic (without shadows or gradients), high in contrast, and that colors were few in usage (not more than three or four colors at a time). Moreover, when specific colors were declared, blue and red were stated the most after the achromatic colors.

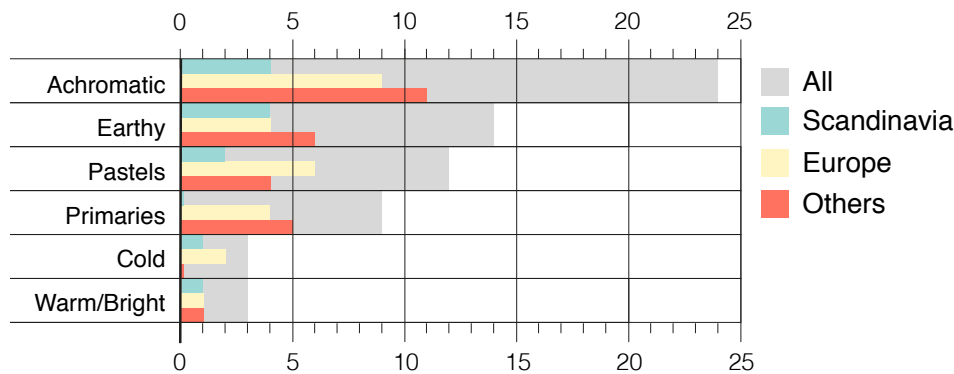


Figure 15
Participants' perception of the Scandinavian graphic design colors.

3.4 Perception of the Usage of Typefaces

In this section of the interview/questionnaire the participants were asked the question: *What comes to your mind when speaking of Scandinavian graphic design in regards to typefaces?*

Regardless of continent, most participants would indicate a sans-serif as illustrated in Figure 16. Helvetica, Storm Sans and Futura were mentioned the most when specific typefaces were given.

Six participants did not answer this question. And the remaining four omitted from Figure 16 were overlooked, as they did not specify a typeface or typeface family. These would instead mention a feeling that the typeface could evoke, such as harmonious, or mention that any typeface would be fine as long as it is simple and/or functional.

Once again, influences of Bauhaus and the International Typographic Style/Swiss Design are evident as these movements strongly favored the use of sans-serifs (Meggs & Purvis, 2012). With that said, there are also many Scandinavian type designers that choose to make sans-serifs as mentioned in the literature review. Engelhardt focused on sans-serifs already in 1923 and presently Göran Söderström does the majority of his work within the sans-serifs family. One explanation could be that sans-serifs are designed and used due to personal preference. Another explanation could be that sans-serifs seemingly fits better with the Scandinavian graphic design's description as simple, since scripts and serifs are believed to be more decorative in comparison.

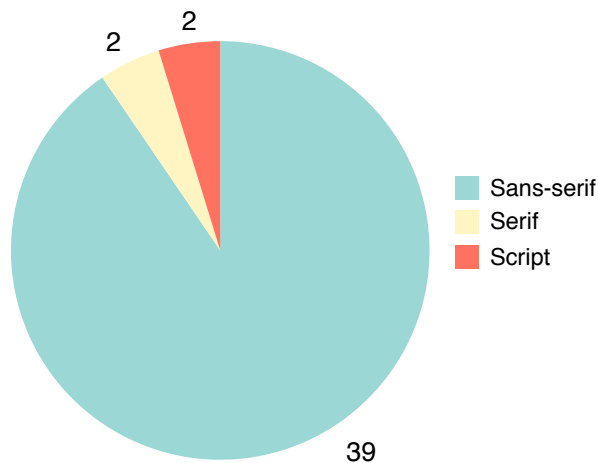


Figure 16
Typeface families indicated by the participants. All groups/continents included.

3.5 Perception of the Scandinavian Graphic Design Motifs

In this section of the interview/questionnaire the participants were asked the question: *What comes to your mind when speaking of Scandinavian graphic design in regards to motifs?*

The majority of those who responded felt that motifs relating to nature or basic geometric shapes were used the most as illustrated in Figure 17. These results are in agreement with Wesslund's (2013) findings, which showed that the most popular Scandinavian patterns depicted nature and geometric shapes. These motifs are seen throughout the Scandinavian industrial design, and have seemingly been embraced by the Scandinavian graphic design as well. A few of the participants could also see the traditional patterns being incorporated in graphic design as this British participant exemplified:

As far as I am aware the traditional Scandinavian patterns, relating to the traditional knitwear are still often worked into current design.

Geometric shapes are also common in Scandinavian industrial design, but these might also be due to influences from earlier design movements (Constructivism, De Stijl, Bauhaus and the International Typographic Style/Swiss Design), which favored basic geometric shapes.

Many believed few or no motifs were used in Scandinavian graphic design. This could correlate with the International Typographic Style/Swiss Design movement as few motifs were used and instead there was a greater focus on typography.

Eleven participants did not answer this question, or said that they did not know which motifs were being used. A few said the choice of motifs would depend on the project.

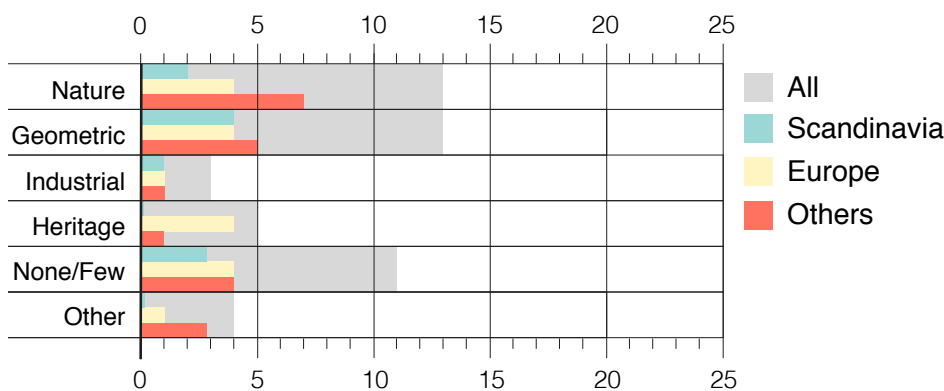


Figure 17
Participants' perception of motifs in Scandinavian graphic design.

3.6 Use of Photos and Illustrations

In this section of the interview/questionnaire the participants were asked the question: *What comes to your mind when speaking of Scandinavian graphic design in regards to the use of photos vs. illustrations?*

There were no significant differences of photos or illustrations being used more than the other, although illustrations were slightly more favored as seen in Figure 18. A possible explanation for this might be that, as some participants mentioned, it depends on the project at hand.

Illustrations might have been slightly more preferential as these pertain to the functional side of Scandinavian graphic design. Illustrations can be more economical and less time-consuming to use as these can sometimes be done by the graphic designers themselves or a professional illustrator. In comparison to photos, which might require photographer, model, stylist, retoucher, location, etc.

A few participants mentioned that the photos were often timeless, peaceful and avoiding captures of bright colors. The illustrations were thought to be simple rather than detailed.

In the category Other, the participants would answer that there were no photos or illustrations being used, or that patterns or textures were more common. Moreover, twelve participants did not answer this question.

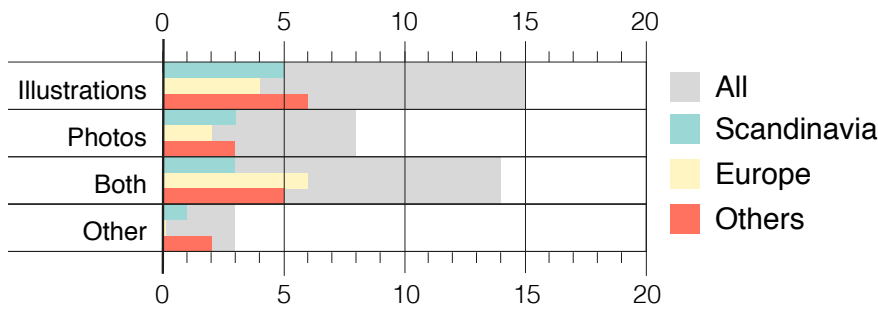


Figure 18

Participants' perception of usage regarding photos and illustrations in Scandinavian graphic design.

3.7 Distinguishing Features of Scandinavian Graphic Design

In response to the question: *How does the Scandinavian graphic design style differentiate from the style you can see in your country?* a range of responses were obtained. The most common differences were that the Scandinavian graphic design was perceived as simpler, more conceptual and used pastels/low chromatic colors to a greater extent.

Predominantly the mentioning of using less vibrant colors came from countries within Asia, Africa and South America. For instance, this South African participant wrote:

In comparison to South African graphic design, Scandinavian is a bit more refined and simplistic. South African graphic design focuses allot on bold colours and is more culturally fuelled.

These Asian participants echoed this view. A participant from the Philippines wrote the following:

Scandinavian seems to be more toned down color scheme compared to vibrant/loud colors from Phils.

And a Taiwanese participant commented:

I think the first image of Scandinavian design is like a white background with a little graphic or small text but creates a very meaningful and interesting poster or something else. But designs in Taiwan are not that style. We tend to use more content to fill the space.

In South America, the works were considered as more vibrant and colorful than the Scandinavians'. Some argued that this was because of mixed styles, international influences and a general vivacious culture.

Although few participants were negative in their responses regarding the Scandinavian graphic design characteristics, there were views that Scandinavian graphic design was predictable, dull, and not innovative as this participant from Argentina mentioned:

It's more rational, more functional, more predictable... In Latin America you don't know what you'll see next, it's not so much functional, or perfect... But it's always interesting.

The predictability is possibly due to the “form follows function”- thinking that some Scandinavians graphic designers have adhered.

In Oceania, wide ranges of opinions were given and it was hard to determine what the differences are. One Australian participant claimed that the Scandinavian graphic design was more experimental as seen below:

More evocative and free flowing. A willingness to experiment with designs as the audience is more accepting.

Additionally, a New Zealand participant believed it was more unobtrusive:

My Scandinavian design impression is pared back, refined, thoughtful, well executed ‘European’, practical vs my New Zealand impression which can be deep, passionate, sometimes dark, influenced by cultural origins and the conflicts within settlement, but also young, fresh, daring, new, unafraid.

In Europe, it depended on the country how Scandinavian graphic design was perceived. Swiss designers may recognize and see similarities as explained by this Swiss designer:

In my opinion the Swiss and the Scandinavian style are quite similar. Reduced, clean and modern. Hard to say where the difference is. Probably in use of images and illustrations.

Nevertheless, other countries within Europe could see more differences. Several European graphic designers thought that due to the general design history in Scandinavia, there was a bigger interest in all fields relating to design, and therefore more imbedded in everyday life and education. As one participant from Belgium answered:

Yes. I’m from Belgium: although we have a rich history in comic and strip cartoons, together with the presence of good designers — graphic design, or design in general, gets to little to no attention in day-to-day life. Walking in more Northern countries (The Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Scandinavia, etc) I have this feeling that design is really implemented (public spaces, magazines, newspapers, product design, etc). For example: people in Holland do know what a graphic designers is or does. In Belgium, most people don’t know, or think we’re drawing all day ;-)

A French graphic designer shared a similar view:

Scandinavian design is a lot more minimalist and savvy. The common man there has a lot more design education than in the rest of the world, and so the norm for commercial design is a lot higher.

Countries residing in Central and Western Europe believed Scandinavia has a more homogenous style in comparison to what they can see in their own countries due to influences from surrounding countries,

or because of a diverse population. For example, an English participant residing in Germany wrote the following:

English graphic design is a real melting pot, and I don't think we can have such a strong design aesthetic as say Scandinavia, as we have such a melting pot of designers. Coming from so many backgrounds and surrounded with so many international influences, the design produced is very broad. However I think London graphic design is often very commercial and the aesthetic of the final work reflects that. In Berlin where I live, there is still more of a youthful and off-centre approach to graphic design - the work is more free and often more disruptive than other places. There is a freedom here, thanks to designers still believing in design itself and having a desire to create just for the fun of it. [...] I suspect that Scandinavian design reflects the culture. As far as I have seen it is a beautiful and high-functioning place - and so the graphic design is also beautiful and very considered.

Simpler was shared by most participants regardless of continent. An American participant gave the following answer:

I find a great emphasis on clarity and simplicity in graphic design coming from Scandinavia. This can be hard to achieve if you are working within a corporate/marketing structure that only focus on short-term goals, where profitability and go-to-market is more important in what is a highly competitive landscape here in the States.

For those who would like to read more opinions and thoughts on the differences, all the respondents' answers can be received by contacting the author.

3.8 Perceived Impact of Scandinavian Graphic Design

In this segment, the participants were asked to answer the question: *How much impact do you believe Scandinavian graphic design has had on graphic design?* A variety of perspectives were expressed, which made it hard to tell how much impact Scandinavian graphic design has had on the world. This inconsistency can be explained by the participants' personal interest; the Scandinavian graphic design impact those who have an interest in it far more than those who do not. The participants who are drawn to the simple, functional layout can very well find inspiration from the Scandinavian countries as seen by this French participant:

When I was studying graphic design in Paris, our teacher was talking a lot about Scandinavian style. Even here, I hear a lot about it so I guess you guys are pretty influent.

In my own work, I know that I'm very inspired by the use of colors and grids systems (I love grids) you can find in Scandinavian graphic design. I like clean grids and bold color palette. It's also very inspiring the way Scandinavian studios introduced in early 2000 a "functionalism" dimension in the graphics design itself by adding an "interaction" with the user. Scandinavian designers always try to involve the user somehow and that's very interesting.

Some participants expressed the belief that Scandinavian graphic design had the potential to influence or impact graphic design as a field but had not yet done so. This Chinese participant gave an example:

Although Scandinavia graphic is quite cool, currently I think the area of interior design and product design in Scandinavian style have more impacts on design trends worldwide. The area of graphic design could be more influential, because the Nordic clear and clean design is one of the good resolution to deal with the chaotic information world.

Another participant, this one from South Africa, wrote:

I think all countries can learn from Scandinavian graphic design as it tends to say more and portray concepts more effectively through its simplified approach.

And a Portuguese participant who claimed the following echoed this view:

Is without a doubt a reference, whenever people think of minimalistic design, the thoughts go towards Scandinavian as a reference and way to follow.

Although Scandinavian graphic designers may advocate simplicity and functionality, the origin of simple and functional graphic designs are most likely not Scandinavian but instead coming from earlier movements. Some participants thought of it as a continuation on or an imitation of Swiss graphic design, for instance this Swedish participant wrote:

Inte speciellt stort. Jag tror att skandinavisk design är en fortsättning på schweizisk design och att det därför är den schweiziska designen som har haft störst inflytande på grafisk design överlag.

Translation:

Not that big. I believe Scandinavian design is a continuation on Swiss design, and therefore the Swiss design has had the overall biggest impact on graphic design.

None of the participants seemed to have taken notice of the awards that the Scandinavian graphic designers have managed to accumulate. However, a scarce amount were aware of which designers and design bureaus Scandinavia have as this American participant demonstrated:

I think we are very grateful for the legacy and influence by designers like Alvar Aalto, Arne Jacobsen, Kay Bojesen, Olle Eksell to name a few, and also from studios such as Stockholm Design Lab, BVD, Strømme Throndsen Design that I personally like.

Those who believed the impact has been huge said it is due to advocating simplicity and/or intertwining design fields. For example this African participant commented:

I think it has had a huge impact especially within the general arts/design community, because it does not only lie within one particular segment, it's interlinked other segments of design, whether it's architecture, graphic design, illustration and 3D design, furniture design or interior design. I look at the work that has been created now and see a one huge family that is now blood related figuratively speaking and have to support each other. So the impact has been huge.

But it is doubtful that this is a predominantly Scandinavian development as many others, particularly industrial countries, can most likely see a similar development happening in their countries. However, intertwining fields have probably been favorable within Scandinavia, at least towards the web, due to Scandinavia having a large percentage of Internet users. According to the International Telecommunication Union, the Scandinavian countries have respectively over 90% of the population using the Internet (ITU, 2015). Furthermore, the Scandinavian industrial design holds a seemingly similar visual language as graphic design, and this could probably cause them to intertwine without any major obstacles.

A participant from Czech Republic could see a rising awareness of conscious graphic design emitting from the Scandinavian countries, and that this should have quite a big impact on the world:

I think quite huge. And not only in the past but specially today. I'd say there are two ways to answer this question.

Firstly, many designers try to rather simplify things nowadays. Keeping the designs clean and minimalistic but functional at the same time. This is something Scandinavian design is very strong in. I of course don't know how much inspiration and impact designers take from Scandinavian graphic design since I can't estimate how many of them follow the trends in other parts of the world. But on the other hand the platforms are so open now and everyone can easily get to work of others based on few clicks. There are international design conferences going on all the time and from there the impact can be spread very quickly.

And secondly, when you consider for example great artist and designer Olafur Eliasson from Denmark, he should have (or hopefully has) a big impact on designers. It is due to the way he thinks - he connects art and design with business and politics, and addresses important world issues. Connecting things and overlapping disciplines is something that should become a basic role of nowadays designer (even in the graphic design field which actually becomes cross discipline). In connection to that, it is obvious that Scandinavian design always aims to constant development and thinking further.

However, it is debatable topic if graphic design has anything to do with global concerns as Nakamura (Bierut, Drenttel & Heller, 2006) discussed in the book *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design 5*. It is also beyond the scope of the present study to examine. But there is a possibility that Scandinavian graphic designers have taken interest in conscious design due to Scandinavia in general having good living conditions, which could make them focus more on world issues. In the global HDI ranking of 2014, Norway holds first place, Denmark the fourth and Sweden the fourteenth (UNDP, 2015).

The participants who believed the Scandinavian graphic design impact has been low were seemingly reasoning it is because there are too little seen or published about it as this Australian participant demonstrated:

I would say minor amount, purely because it isn't publicized as much as other fields like furniture design or industrial design.

A French participant shared a similar view:

Not that much impact history-wise I think. They have great design agencies, but I know very few of them who do work on an international scale.

Although the following section will be subjective, I share the same views as these participants. Writers who reflect on the Scandinavian graphic design field (and do so in English so it can be comprehended internationally) are lacking. I am, however, not alone in having these opinions on the scarcity of information; Aslak Gurhold Rønsen, co-founder of Yokoland, mentioned in an interview with Grafill (Ketola Bore & Raein, n.d.):

There came a time when I thought: I know so much about what has happened internationally, but I don't know anything about what has happened in Norway [...] Our lack of documentation and historical influence within Norwegian graphic design is however due to several factors. Amongst them are the facts that graphic design has been considered something trivial, as well as the late arrival of the printing tradition in Norway. As a part of Denmark and then Sweden we were slow in evolving the industry throughout the 19th and 20th century.

3.9 Summary

The association with earlier design movements became clear with many of the results obtained. For instance the description of Scandinavian graphic design being simple and functional; the grid-based layout that is using few elements, and favors the use of white space and sans-serifs. However, the results might also correlate to the Scandinavian supporters of these ideas. Eksell was concerned with the functionality aspect of graphic design, and Mollerup is currently advocating the use of simplicity. They in turn might have been inspired by the philosophies of earlier movements, other countries or people. Eksell for example, as mentioned in the literature review, had influences from the United States and his American friends Paul Rand, Lester Beall, and Alvin Lustig.

But why does the simple, functional, and grid-based layout appear to be the norm? This consistency might be due to the overall Scandinavian mindset: perhaps Scandinavians purely like the functional and simple because of historical, cultural, economical, environmental, and/or aesthetical reasons. Maybe the answers lie in the teachings of graphic design itself in the Scandinavian countries; perhaps too little focus is given to personal styles early on, which causes many to conform to the same characteristics, and only the brave dare to oppose them. There may, however, be other possible explanations.

4 Limitations of the Study

Due to the limited amount of participants, the findings may be somewhat inadequate. The original intention was to acquire enough data to see differences in perception from different continents. As seen, there was an implication in gathering responses from countries beyond Europe, which resulted in grouping together the remaining continents. However, it is important to keep these apart as they all have separate cultures, economies, etc. Furthermore, it became clear early on that Scandinavian and European countries had a larger interest in Scandinavian graphic design, as these were easier to acquire answers from and rarely mixed graphic design with other design fields. A few participants from *Others* would occasionally refer to industrial design or mention having little prior knowledge, however, these were mainly within Africa, Asia and South America.

As to why the asked individuals did not proceed to answer might have been due to language barriers, technical difficulties, and lack of time, interest, or knowledge. Perhaps a better method would have been to interview three individuals (a student, a lecturer and working professional) from each continent, and gather deeper knowledge of their viewpoints.

Another implication might be the different perceptions of words between the countries. What might be deemed as *simple* for Africans may differentiate from what Scandinavians deem as *simple*. Therefore, another possible method would have been to ask graphic designers to show/link/post works resembling Scandinavian graphic design from their countries. With this method a visual representation would have been given, and therefore a visual study could have been performed.

In the literature review, Denmark and Norway might not have been covered as much as Sweden because of the author's Swedish heritage. However, there are also beliefs that Sweden has been able to be more active when it comes to Scandinavian design due to being neutral in World War II (Donovan, 1982; Fiell, 2002). Even at the present time, a search on Google will as of March 3rd, 2016 generate more results on "Swedish graphic design" (29 200 results), than "Danish graphic design" (16 000 results), and "Norwegian graphic design" (9 750 results). These results might also correlate to Sweden having a larger coverage in the present paper.

Furthermore, the literature review may lack due to translation problem (particularity between the Scandinavian languages), and because the term graphic design was (and still is) covered by other terms such as commercial art, industrial graphics, form giving, visual communication, etc. Moreover, as stated in the introduction, scientific papers on Scandinavian graphic design are scarce, and most of the sources used in the literature review are based on subjective interpretations from one or several individuals rather than scientific facts.

A main source of uncertainty is the use of only one researcher, as this increases the risk of the paper potentially being subjective, and therefore susceptible for bias. Another potential problem is that the scope of the thesis might have been too broad.

5 Conclusion

The results of the present study showed that Scandinavian graphic design was commonly perceived/described as simple and functional. Furthermore, the Scandinavian graphic design layout was in this study seen as a grid-based layout that makes use of sans-serifs, white space, and few graphic elements. Achromatic colors such as black, white, and grey were mentioned the most when the participants were asked to describe the Scandinavian colors. Followed by earthy hues, pastels and primaries. Furthermore, motifs were perceived as not often used, but when they were, they depicted elements found in nature or geometric shapes.

Another finding in the present study is that photos and illustration were perceived to be equally in use (and determined by the project at hand), with a slight inclination towards illustrations being used more. Illustrations were considered to be simple rather than detailed, and photos were considered to be timeless, peaceful and often avoiding captures of bright colors.

The present study has found that generally Scandinavian graphic design is perceived as being simpler and more conceptual than in non-Scandinavian countries (with the exception of Switzerland). The use of low chromatic colors is also greater.

The perceived impact of the Scandinavian graphic design was wide-ranging in the present study, and no conclusive result was obtained. The reasons for conceiving the impact to be high were due to advocating simplicity and functionality, intertwining design fields, and/or raising awareness of conscious graphic design. The participants who found the impact to be low believed that too little exposure might be a contributing factor.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Search terms

Below are the terminologies that were used to search for information in the literature review. The terms were often combined with each other. Furthermore, the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish translations were also used.

Art, color, colors, communication, competition, Danish, Denmark, design, designer, differences, famous, font, fonts, graphic, history, illustration, illustrations, impact, industrial, international, motif, motifs, movement, movements, Nordic, Norway, Norwegian, pattern, photo, photography, photos, recognition, Scandinavia, Scandinavian, Sweden, Swedish, traditional, typographer, typography, visual.

Appendix 2 – Questions

Below are the questions that the participants received:

1. Would you like to be anonymous for this study?
2. Which country are you from?
3. How many years of experience (studies, work, general interest etc.) in graphic design do you have?
4. How would you describe Scandinavian graphic design?
5. What comes to your mind when speaking of Scandinavian graphic design in regards to:
 - a) Layout?
 - b) Colors?
 - c) Typefaces?
 - d) Motifs?
 - e) The use of photos vs. illustrations?
6. How does the Scandinavian graphic design style differentiate from the style you can see in your country?
7. How much impact do you believe Scandinavian graphic design has had on graphic design?
8. Would you like to receive the finished paper and/or results of the study?

For the Scandinavian participants, question 6 was omitted and replaced with: What inspire you?

Appendix 3 – Categories

The following are the categories that were established for this study, with an additional clarification to which synonyms and/or concepts that were included in the category. The categories are divided after the sections found in *chapter 3. Results and Discussion*.

3.1 Descriptions of Scandinavian Graphic Design

- *Functional*
Referring to functional aspects, a clear, considered and detailed concept or purposeful design: “practical”, “conceptual”, “considered”, “clear”, “straight to the point”, “interaction”, “purposeful”, “accurate”, “usable”, “approachable”, “precise”, “clever”, “intelligent”, “economical”, etc.
- *Simple*
Synonyms to simple or less. Such as “essential”, “minimal,” “clean”, “tidy”, “not glossy”, “flat design”, “minimalistic”, “reduced”, “controlled”, “withdrawn”, “clarity”, etc.
- *Fundamental*
Referring to fundamental principles/guidelines of design: “grid-based”, “using a lot of white space”, “typographic”, “well balanced”, “asymmetric”, “symmetric”, “geometric”, “rule-based”, etc.
- *Unfamiliar*
The respondent would state to have little knowledge or not heard of Scandinavian graphic design before being asked. Also mistaking or referring mainly to other fields within Scandinavian design such as architecture, interior, industrial and product design would fall under this category.
- *Heritage*
Referring to history or heritage of the world, graphic design or Scandinavia: Viking era, Swiss, Celtic, Bauhaus, Swiss, “care for the craft”, etc. An additional column was used to comment what heritage/style the respondent was referring to.
- *Contemporary*
Referring to the modern era, trends or something contemporary: “Fashionable”, “trendy”, “modern”, etc.
- *Natural*
Referring to the nature or environment. For instance “environment friendly”, “eco”, “pure”, “organic”, etc.
- *Aesthetic*
Personal interpretation of the style in a positive manner. “Slick”, “beautiful”, “good-looking”, “appealing” etc., were deemed as aesthetic.
- *Colorful*
Mention of using a lot of colors or stating that it is colorful.

- *Playful*
Using the word or synonyms of playful. Such as “child-like”, “lively”, “dynamic”, etc.
- *Powerful*
Using the word or synonyms of powerful. Such as “bold”, “strong”, “eye-grabbing”.
- *Peaceful*
Using the word or synonyms of peaceful. Such as “harmonious”, “calm”, “laid-back”, etc.
- *Other*
Everything else that are not included in the former categories, or concepts/adjectives that did not receive at least 2 points.

3.2 Perception of the Scandinavian Graphic Design Layout

- *Few elements*
Words that were adjectives to simple such as minimalistic, clean, uncluttered or concept referring to a simple layout such as “few objects on the page” were deemed as few elements.
- *Grid-based*
Mentioning of a grid, columns, or rows were deemed as grid-based.
- *White space*
Mentioning use of white space or negative space. “Airy” also fell under this category.
- *Contemporary*
Adjectives such as “modern”, “trendy” were deemed contemporary.
- *Experimental*
Concepts that referred to experiments or new ideas were deemed as experimental. For instance: “Experimental approach”, “testing new ideas”, etc., would belong under Experimental.
- *Influenced*
Referring to earlier design styles, trends or movements such as Swiss design, Bauhaus, American, German graphic design and their approaches to graphic design.
- *Considered*
When the participants referred to a considered design they often mentioned the thought that went into the work. Concepts such as “Well thought out”, “lots of eye for details”, etc., were included. Synonyms to considered and detailed were also included.
- *Typographic*
Mentioning specific uses of typefaces as the main focus were deemed as typographic. “Great typography” was also included.
- *Other*
Everything that was not earlier mentioned would fall under this category. Examples: Overlapping and asymmetric.

3.3 Perception of the Scandinavian Graphic Design Colors

- *Achromatic*
Achromatic colors is in this study referring to different shades of white, grey and black.
- *Primaries*
Primaries are colors when combined can make other colors. These are red, green and blue in the additive combination and cyan, magenta, yellow in the subtractive. The participants would refer to the specific colors mentioned, or just “primary” or “spot colors”.
- *Pastels*
Pastels are deemed as colors that lack strong chromatic content. Therefore synonyms such as “soft”, “light”, “desaturated”, “milky”, “shades of white”, “not intense”, “vintage” etc., were deemed as pastels. The colors baby blue/pink and mauve can also be seen as pastels.
- *Earthy*
Earthy or natural colors are colors that can be found in the nature, specifically browns and greens. Generally the participants would mention “earthy tones” or “colors derived from nature”, then these would be deemed as Earthy/Naturals. Furthermore “cardboard browns”, “beachy beige”, “forest green”, “not artificial”, etc., belong here.
- *Cold*
Cold colors are considered green, blue and purple. The participants who mentioned cold colors would simply answer with “cold colors” or “cool colors.”
- *Warm/Bright*
Red, yellow and orange are warm colors. Furthermore bright colors are colors opposites of pastels, i.e., high in saturation. Answers, which fell under this category, were often referred as “warm” or “bright”.

3.4 Perception of the Usage of Typefaces

- *Sans-serif*
Most participant would state “sans-serif” or give a sans-serif font such as Helvetica, Futura, etc. Sans-serifs often lack decorative elements and are geometrical in their appearance. Slab serif was also considered as a sans-serif in this study.
- *Serif*
To fall under the category Serif, the participant simply stated “serif” or a serif font such as Times New Roman or Georgia.
- *Scripts*
Scripts are hand drawn, calligraphic and/or often decorative typefaces. A mentioning of a script typeface or an underlying script family such as brush strokes was considered as scripts.

3.5 Perception of the Scandinavian Graphic Design Motifs

- *Nature*
Motifs referring to nature: mountains, trees, flowers, wood, etc.
- *None/Few*
Mentioning of no or few motifs being used. Also mentioning of working with white space or typography more than motifs.
- *Industrial*
Referring to industrial or man-made products, such as buildings and furniture.
- *Geometric*
Mentioning geometric shapes: circles, rectangles, diamonds, etc.
- *Heritage*
Referring to heritage or history of Scandinavia. Such as Vikings, runes, Scandinavian industrial design, Nordic patterns, etc.
- *Other*
Everything that did not fit in earlier mentioned categories. These could be art, abstract, entertainment, textures, etc.

3.6 Use of Photos and Illustrations

- *Illustrations*
Illustrations, vector images or icons.
- *Photos*
Photography, pictures taken with a camera or scanned files.
- *Both*
Mentioning of both photos and illustrations being used.
- *Other*
Mentioning of other elements being used such as patterns or textures. No elements being used were also included here.

Appendix 4 – Point system

First of all, the adjectives and concepts found in the participants' answers were picked out. A concept in this case refers to a sentence that is conveying information that could be reduced to an adjective. For example: "using design elements scarcely" is a concept that is similar to the adjective simple, and therefore would be categorized as simple.

Rule 1 – Unlimited points in an answer

Each participant's answer can belong to several categories if the participant's answer expressed a variation of adjectives or concepts instead of synonyms to an earlier mentioned adjective/concept. With other words, the participant's answer was not necessarily limited to one category, neither limited points. For example: "Scandinavian graphic design to me is functional, simple and cutting edge." These would receive one point each for the categories functional, simple and contemporary. For reference, all categories can be found in Appendix 3.

Rule 2 – If there is only one notion, there is only one point

As the headline says, if there was only one notion in the participant's answer, only one point was given. For example: "Scandinavian graphic design is simple, clean, reduced and minimal." Here we got four adjectives that would give points for the category Simple. However the category Simple would not receive four points but instead be reduced to one point, as the participant only have one notion in mind. This rule was established to prevent the score in one specific category being bumped up by one particular participant.

Similarly, if the participant for example answered: "It's simple, clean, functional and practical". There were two categories being used: simple and functional. One would believe these categories would receive two points each, but instead I chose to give one point to the category Simple and one point to the category Functional. This is partly to avoid bumping up the score in a particular category, but also because the adjectives/concepts are deemed equally important. Therefore, they rule each other out.

Rule 3 – An extra point if valued higher

In a participants answer, a category can receive a maximum of two points if the adjective/concept is mentioned more than one time and is also valued higher than another adjective/concept.

For example: "The Scandinavian graphic design is simple, clean, reduced, and sometimes playful." Here simple, clean and reduced would receive three points for the category Simple. But as established in rule 2, one notion only receives one point. However, it is evident in this participant's answer that they value simple higher than playful, and therefore simple receives an extra point to make the participant's answer fairer. With other words: the category Simple receives two points and the category Playful receives one point.

An example

Let us apply all the rules to the following made-up participant's answer:

“ Scandinavian graphic design to me is foremost simple and clean. One does not use more than necessarily on the page. It's also functional and practical. I've also on occasion seen it being used in a playful manner.”

Step 1. First we pick out all the adjectives/concepts:

Simple, clean, “One does not use more than necessarily on the page” is a concept that can be reduced to the adjective *simple*, functional, practical, playful.

Step 2. Apply rule 1: Divide them into the categories and count occurrences/points.

Category Simple: 3 occurrences/points

Category Functional: 2 occurrences/points

Category Playful: 1 occurrence/point

Step 4. Apply rule 2: One notion, one point

Category Simple: 1 point

Category Functional: 1 point

Category Playful: 1 point

Step 4. Apply rule 3: Is anything valued higher than another adjective/concept? If yes, give it a point. If not, do not give it a point. Remember that a category can only have maximum 2 points.

Category Simple: 2 points (valued higher than functional and playful)

Category Functional: 2 points (valued higher than playful)

Category Playful: 1 point (does not receive a point)