The Glocalization of Brand Myths: An Examination of Volvo Discourses from a Swedish and an American Consumer Perspective

Anna Lundahl and Emma Lanzky

The Glocalization of Brand Myths: An Examination of Volvo Discourses from a Swedish and an American Consumer Perspective

by Anna Lundahl & Emma Lanzky

Master Degree Project in Marketing and Consumption
University of Gothenburg, School of Business, Economics and Law
June 2016
Supervisor Benjamin Hartmann

This article examines how global brand myths take on localized meanings in different localities. The global car brand Volvo is used as context to identify global brand myths and study the local variations in how Swedish and American consumers interpret these myths. This knowledge is needed due to the increasing globalization of brands, which makes the issue of brand myth interpretation across borders an important one. We suggest that glocalization in the specific context of brand myths has been given to sparse attention in previous research. Moreover, understanding of brand myths is essential for transforming a brand into an iconic brand. Our analysis demonstrates that consumers use Volvo discourses in a number of localized ways that reproduce glocal brand myths constituting structures of common difference. Our findings indicate that there are four global myths with local variations: myth of Volvo as safe, myth of Volvo as transformed, myth of Volvo as Swedish, and myth of Volvo as transforming me. We show that Thompson's (2004) interpretative framework allows us to analyze Volvo's brand myths as gnostic and romantic and we propose that brand myths stretching between the gnostic and romantic mythological ends can be a way to create an iconic brand.

Iconic brands are some of the most powerful brands in the world, accounting for nearly half of the 100 most valuable brands in the world (Holt, 2005). Holt (2004) gives Coca-Cola, Nike, Jack Daniels and Apple as examples of iconic American brands. Iconic brands are consumer brands that have become "consensus expressions of particular values held dear by some members of a society" (Holt, 2004, p. 4) They are of high value both for companies and consumers, as consumers are flocking to these brands that embody the ideals they admire and help them express who they want to be in their everyday life. Iconic brands have become cultural symbols and are the most successful in delivering identity value to consumers (Holt, 2005).

In the process of transforming a brand into an iconic brand, one of the strongest influences is the importance of myth making (Holt, 2004). The term "myth" is defined as a narrative "tale or story" (Stern, 1995, p. 165) and as a "tale commonly told within a social group" (Levy 1981, p. 51). As Stern (1995, p. 165) notes, "the central cultural role of a myth stems from its function in explaining the nature or the world and the rationale for social conduct in a given culture". Examples of myths in previous research are manliness (Holt & Thompson, 2004), freedom (Peñalosa, 2001), femininity (Diamond et al.,

2009), progress (Kozinets, 2008), well-being (Thompson, 2004), beautification (Giesler, 2012), cosmopolitanism (Thompson & Tambyah, 1999), fashion consciousness (Thompson & Haytko, 1997) and consumer lifestyle (Üstüner & Holt, 2010). Advertising practitioners and theorists have been particularly attuned to the importance of myth making in constructing competitively advantageous brand images (Holt, 2003; Johar, Holbrook & Stern, 2001; Mark & Pearson, 2001; Randazzo, 1993). The ability to build valued myths into a brand often distinguishes success from mediocrity (Holt, 2004). The fast growing number of studies on myths (Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013) reflects the academic interest in the topic. However, Brown et al. (2013) argue that important questions still remain unanswered, such as what makes some myths especially meaningful to consumers. We will contribute to get closer to answering this broad question by illustrating brand myths taking a consumer perspective.

Given the increasing internationalization, the issue of meaningful and prevalent brand myths (Brown et al., 2013) on a global level and the creation and interpretation of brand myths from a global perspective become even more important. As brands from various companies in different countries are introduced to virtually all of the world's markets almost on a regular basis, it is

interesting to study how consumers in different localities interpret and create meaning of brand myths. Academic researchers have entered into this cultural conversation about the consequences of globalization (Thompson & Arsel, 2004). Hannerz (1996) and Miller (1998) mean that consumers often appropriate the meanings of global brands to their own ends, creatively adding new cultural associations, dropping incompatible ones, and transforming others to fit into local cultural and lifestyle patterns. From this perspective, the interjection of global brands into local cultures paradoxically produces heterogeneity as global brands take on a variety of localized meanings (Ger & Belk, 1996; Miller, 1998). More generally, these theorists contend that local cultures and the forces of globalization are thoroughly interpenetrated and co-shaping; hence, the effects of globalization on everyday cultural life, via global brands, fashion, and mass media, are more accurately described as a process of "glocalization" (Robertson, 1995; Wilk, 1995). However, we suggest that glocalization in the specific context of brand myths has been given to sparse attention in previous research. Therefore, we find it interesting to study how global brands interjected into local cultures give rise to glocalization in the context of brand myths.

The present article examines how global brand myths take on localized meanings in different localities, or in other words the glocalization of brand myths. We do this by means of investigating the global car brand Volvo to explore and illustrate Volvo's brand myths and how they can be understood from a Swedish and an American consumer perspective. Hence, our first objective is to identify Volvo's global brand myths and the second to study how consumers interpret these global brand myths with local variations. We pursue these objectives by conducting phenomenological interviews with Swedish and American consumers and investigating their conventional ways of talking about Volvo (i.e., Volvo discourses). Volvo is chosen because it is a global brand, suitable when glocalization is of interest. Since the car is an emotional item (Merritt, 1998; Sandqvist, 1997) having a central role in many consumers' everyday lives (Parment, 2008) we assume that a rich discourse context can be provided. We interview consumers from Sweden and the US as Volvo is cited as an iconic brand there (The

Huffington Post, 2014; Teknikensvärld, 2014), which speaks for a myth-infested brand (Holt, 2004).

In addition to adding on to research on brand myths, this article contributes to the academic field of glocalization (Thompson & Arsel, 2004; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006) taking a brand myth perspective. Since consumer interpretation of brand myths in different localities is studied we also add on to research on interpretation strategies within consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Before we can explore glocalization of brand myths, we first need to attend to the theoretical underpinnings and explain what are brand myths and what are consumers' role in the interpretation and creation of these myths. The following theoretical section is dedicated to a closer review of theories concerning brand myths, consumers as active myth agents and finally glocalization of brand myths.

Brand Myths

Myths are stories that people rely on to structure their understanding of themselves and the world (Holt, 2004). A number of theorists have posited that cultural myths exert a significant influence on the stories consumers tell and, hence, the meanings they ascribe to their experiences (Arnould, Price & Tierney, 1998; Levy, 1981; Stern, 1995). Myths are neither fact nor fiction; they are neither arguments that must be tested for veracity, nor stories from which we learn moral lessons (Holt, 2004). Rather, myths present a way of understanding the world so convincing that believers feel it must be true (Holt, 2004). Because myths are narratives rather than rational arguments, their ideological effects work through the magical elision of facts and ideals (Holt, 2006).

Myths work to support fragile worldviews and identities, and what was previously the work of the great religions has been taken over largely by commercial substitutes, where the brand is one important type (Holt, 2004). Just as literature or film create or popularize myths, popular brands can serve as the foundation for creating new

myths, where the brand helps consumers carry on the belief in the myth so that they behave according to its rules (LaTour, LaTour & Zinkhan, 2009). Whereas an iconic film must be regularly re-watched to play a ritual function, myth-infused brands provide a distilled and less-involved means of experiencing the myth via consumption (Holt, 2004). And whereas iconic politicians or actors or athletes are mediated entities, far removed from everyday life, brands offer a more accessible form of iconicity that attends to people's desires to directly experience valued myths (ibid). Holt (2003) claims that iconic brands are the result of various events; the consumer interaction with the brand, the "breakthrough performance" of the brand, and the stories that consumers share about their experiences with the brand; which eventually become mythic. Holt (2003) means that a brand myth exists to resolve contradictions in society, and by touching a collective desire or anxiety, iconic brands develop a status that goes beyond and exceeds functional benefits. Brown et al. (2013) argue that ambiguity in its multifaceted forms is integral to outstanding branding and consumer meaning making, as well as myth appeal more generally. In their study they identify a spectrum of mythical ambiguities, from confusion through contradiction to cumulation, that contribute to make the brand of Titanic iconic.

The brand myth provides consumers perspective in which to enter the illusion to help make sense of everyday life (Woodside, Sood & Miller, 2008). Myths help people create purpose in their lives and merge their desired identity in place when it is under stress, and over time, as the brand performs its myth, the audience eventually perceives that the myth becomes an intrinsic part of the brand and its markers; the brand becomes a symbol, a material embodiment of the myth (Holt, 2005). Thus, as a customer drink, drive or wear the product, he or she experiences a bit of the myth. In modern societies the most influential myths has the ability to address people's identities, and the consumers who make use of the brand's myth for their identity create tight emotional connections to the brand (Holt, 2004). Previous research commonly mean that individuals are drawn to a consumption practice or iconic brand because its associated myths help them to incorporate ideals into their identity projects,

being an iconic resource for identity construction (Diamond et al., 2009; Holt, 2002, 2006; Kozinets, 2001; Thompson, 2004). On the other side, Thompson and Arsel (2004) argue that consumers can experience a marketplace myth as a threat to the value of their identity investments in a field of consumption.

According to Holt (2004) brand myths are performed primarily through advertising, and through all facets of marketing; product design, retail environment, packaging, public relations, product placements and service delivery. However, Thompson (2004) argues that mythologies are not just for advertising anymore but emphasizes the stories consumers tell about their interactions and experiences with the brand. Following Thompson (2004), we conceive of consumer discourses as a possibility to discuss how glocalization is reflected in brand myths.

Consumers as Active Myth Agents

In consumer culture theory studies, consumers are conceptualized as active and interpretive rather than as just passive recipients (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Previous research on consumer interpretation find that people have the ability to make their own meanings and to construct their own culture within, and often against, that which the industry provides them with (Fiske, 1987). Consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings, or material goods to manifest their particular personal and social circumstances and further their identity and lifestyle goals (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2001, 2002; Mick & Buhl, 1992; Peñaloza, 2000, 2001; Ritson & Elliott, 1999; Scott, 1994). Thus, consumers are conceived of as interpretive agents whose meaning-creating activities range from those that tacitly embrace the dominant representations of consumer identity and lifestyle ideals portrayed in advertising and mass media to those that consciously deviate from these ideological instructions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Consumers' role is to adjust the brand's myth to fit personal life and to use ritual action in order to experience the myth when using the brand (Holt, 2004). The marketplace provides consumers with an expansive and heterogeneous palette of

resources from which to construct individual and collective identities (e.g., Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Murray, 2002; Schau & Gilly, 2003). In turn, consumers bring to their viewing of mass media vehicles a wide range of unique personal experiences and a variety of socially derived knowledge grounded in their occupation, gender, age, social class, and ethnicity (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997). Using these internally based instructions, consumers actively construct the meaning of motion pictures, magazine articles, television programs, print and broadcast advertisements, billboards, and so on from their particular vantage points (Morley, 1980; Turner, 1992). Brand myths are created through a complex interaction among businesses, consumers, influential actors and popular culture (Holt, 2004). They are not just "out there" ready to be interpreted by consumers; rather consumers are active agents participating in the creation of them through the stories they tell (Thompson, 2004). Thus, myths depend on consumers and consumers depend on myths, establishing a complex co-constitutive process.

Glocalization of Brand Myths

Glocalization implies that the global always become localized and the local globalized (Thompson & Arsel, 2004). Holt (1997, 1998) emphasizes how consumers are reliant on their predominantly class-based, sociocultural resources for negotiation global meanings and practices in their daily lives. Jenkins (2004) demonstrates how the process of appropriation and recontextualisation of mediated imagery across cultures often leads to metamorphoses of meanings that make these meanings both unpredictable and contradictory in relation to their origin of broadcasting.

Appadurai (1990) analyses the global cultural economy by using the landscape metaphor to illustrate global cultural flows within five "scapes": "etnoscapes" (the flow of people), "technoscapes" (the flow of technology), "finanscapes" (the flow of finance and capital), "mediascapes" (the flow of mediated images) and "ideoscapes" (the flow of ideas and ideologies). These flows increase the availability of symbols and meanings in consumers' everyday lives in such a way that much of what is available in one place is also available in any other place (Waters,

1995). They can also lead to an increasing globalization of fragmentation (Firat, 1997) in which the consumer has at hand a multitude of resources for dealing with everyday life. The globalization processes constituted by these flows shape sociocultural reality in dialectical processes between the consumer and consumer culture (Holt, 2002) and more generally between the local and global (Friedman, 1990; Giddens, 1991).

The concept of glocalization can be viewed as structures of common difference (Wilk, 1995), which refers to the adaptation and objectification of these structures in local contexts. Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) studied the glocalization of youth culture and found common structures through which the diversity of accounts of locally embedded youth culture was organized. Identity construction was one of the common structures rearticulated in local versions. According to Holt (2004), iconic brands provide extraordinary identity value because they address the collective anxieties and desires of a nation, and iconic brands perform identity myths that address these desires and identities. Hence, myths serve a conservative political function, smoothing over contradictions and challenges to ideology, and at an individual level, myths are key source material for stitching people to national identities, imbuing personal identity with the solidity, status, and friendship that comes from the felt participation in collective ideals and achievements (Holt, 2006).

METHOD

To examine how global brand myths take on localized meanings, we investigate consumer discourses in an empirical context using a qualitative research approach. The ontological assumption in this research is that reality is subjective and an output of social and cognitive processes. Also the epistemological view is subjective, with the implication that reality is viewed as socially constructed and knowledge as available only through social actors (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). A subjective view is well suited since myths according to Holt (2004) are neither fact or fiction but ways of understanding the world. The main philosophical position is hermeneutic, referring to the necessary condition of interpretation and understanding as part of the research process (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The present study adopts an existential-phenomenological view to explore and illustrate Volvo's brand myths and how they can be understood from a Swedish and an American consumer perspective. An existential-phenomenological view can be used to study consumer experience and rather than separating the objectifying aspects of the life-world, the purpose of the paradigm is to describe human experience as it is lived (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Myths exert a significant influence on the stories consumers tell and, hence, the meanings they ascribe to their experiences (Arnould, Price & Tierney, 1998; Levy, 1981; Stern, 1995) and it is the stories consumers share about their experiences with the brand that eventually become mythic (Holt, 2003). Inspired by Thompson (2004) and Stern (1995), we view brand myths as discursive constructions and through studying consumer brand narratives we can identify brand myths. Discourse is here seen as a system of statements that constructs an object, supports institutions, reproduces power relations, and has ideological effects (Parker, 1990). Along with the existential-phenomenological view, it therefore makes sense to conduct phenomenological interviews with consumers to study the discursive representation of brand myths that is reflected in their stories about lived experiences and interactions with Volvo. The goal of a phenomenological interview is to attain a first-person description of some specified domain of experience (Thompson et al., 1989).

Context selection

The focus on consumer discourses requires the selection of an empirical context that helps facilitate theoretical insights (Arnould, Price, & Moisio, 2006). We selected the car brand Volvo as context for this study. As Volvo is a global brand and well-known in more countries than in Sweden, its country-of-origin, it is suitable when want to emphasize the concept of glocalization. Volvo was established in 1927 and is today one of the most well-known car brands in the world, producing premium-segment car models sold in about 100 countries, with American presence since 1950s (Volvo, 2016). The particular industry was chosen seeing that the car is a product that has a central role in many consumers' everyday lives (Parment, 2008) and to many people an emotional item (Merritt, 1998; Sandqvist, 1997), which makes it ideal for a study where rich and full descriptions of thoughts and experiences are critical for theoretical development.

The research is studying two localities, Sweden and the US. We selected these countries as Volvo often is cited as an iconic brand there (huffington.com; teknikensvarld.se). Using an iconic brand as context makes sense when want to study brand myths, as strong myths are a strong influence distinguishing a brand from an iconic brand (Holt, 2004). To answer the research questions, we thus use a context where it can be assumed that the brand is myth-infested and a rich discourse context can be provided. In principle, any global, myth-infested brand and any set of countries could be used as sampling sites for studying the phenomenon of glocalization of brand myths, each of course with its own historical and sociocultural contexts that shape the particular outcomes.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

This is not a cross-cultural study. By definition there will be different communalities across borders. As we aim to explore and illustrate global brand myths with local variations and not conduct a comparative study analyzing similarities and differences, the study is designed to go beyond the discussion of whether Swedish and American consumers are alike or not. The data in this study was collected from 16 phenomenological interviews whereof 8 were conducted face-to-face with Swedish consumers and 8 via Skype with American consumers. We identified informants by combining the two non-probability sampling methods of snowball and convenience sampling (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). To get access to both Swedish and American consumers we used our personal contacts and through a snowball effect found suitable informants. With phenomenology, participants are selected because they have ¨lived" the experience under study, and therefore sampling is planned and purposive (Goulding, 1999). Thus, the recruitment criterion was that the participant is aware of Volvo and has had some kind of experience with the brand. If the consumer answered yes to the question, "are you aware of Volvo?", we considered him or her as a suitable candidate. In qualitative studies, accessibility and suitability of the research

participants are more important than statistical generalization (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) and likewise in this study.

Table 1 provides a list of the participants and a brief description of their backgrounds. Pseudonyms are used to assure the informants' anonymity. The recruited participants were Swedish and American consumers, women and men, students and employed, ranging in the age from 20 to 55 and fulfilling the recruitment criterion. The similarities in demographic characteristics among the different groups will increase the likelihood that our findings are due to the culture of the localities rather than from other variables (Malhotra, Agarwal & Peterson, 1996).

Table 1   Participant Description

	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation
Sweden	Andreas	Male	25	Entrepreneur
	Jennifer	Female	26	Student
	Oskar	Male	27	Entrepreneur
	Elisabeth	Female	50	Nurse
	Henrik	Male	30	Entrepreneur
	Jan	Male	55	Banker
	Petra	Female	23	Student
	Martina	Female	42	Engineer
US	Steven	Male	55	Doctor
	Jacob	Male	25	Student
	Sophia	Female	22	Student
	John	Male	55	Financial Manager
	Eric	Male	30	Banker
	Olivia	Female	40	Teacher
	William	Male	25	Student
	Nicole	Female	25	Student

Before the interviews began informed consent was attained. The informants were told that the purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of their thoughts and experiences of the car brand Volvo, that the interview will be recorded, and that their anonymity is assured. Each interview session began with asking the informant to introduce him or herself. In phenomenological interviews, the interviewer has no a priori questions concerning the topic with the exception of an opening question. Thus, the course of the dialogue was set largely by the informant with the intention to yield a conversation and a circular dialogue rather than a linear (Thompson et al., 1989). The opening question was formulated

"When you think about Volvo, what comes to mind?" and thereafter we let the following questions and probes depend on the course of the dialogue to open and mediate discussion. The probing questions were descriptive and formulated like: "You said that... can you please describe it further?" "How did you feel when...?" "Can you tell us more about that?" and "What do you mean with...?". The purpose of this structure is to bring out fuller and more detailed descriptions of the experience, considering the respondent as an expert of it (ibid). The role as interviewers was to be non-directive and non-dominative listeners. However, we encouraged participants to describe actual experiences related to the Volvo brand, asking them to tell about experiences and interactions they have had with Volvo, whether it be talking about the brand with someone, owning or riding a Volvo. The interviews aimed at exhausting experiences with Volvo and ended when repetition in responses was apparent. The interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and at the end we summed our understanding and checked with the informants if we had understood them correctly in order to get their feedback. We saw saturation effect after 10 interviews but decided to end at 16 interviews. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

The analysis of the interview transcripts involved an iterative process. We started by reading the transcribed interviews several times to become as familiar as possible with the content and conducted an open coding process (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) where we thought about and noted the meaning of each statement in the margin. Then we coded and labeled the annotations and related the codes to each other into categories to identify common patterns and global themes, i.e., important thematic orientations emerging across interviews (Thompson et al., 1989). Each interview was interpreted separately and after that related to each other, noting similarities across the transcripts that have been analyzed to find global myths. We identified global myths by, following Levy (1981), looking for commonly told tales across the localities, which together constituted a myth. In these global myths we then looked for local variations in the discourse, seeing Sweden as one locality and the US as one locality.

A methodological limitation of the study is the translation issue. All interviews were carried out in the informant's mother tongue, which was Swedish for the Swedish participants and English for the American. A problem exists in the translation of interviews from Swedish into English where rewriting Swedish phrases into English phrases might imply a loss in shades and some local expressions such as "Svensson" and "villa, Volvo, dog" lack accurate English translation. Therefore, we are careful in explaining these concepts in proximity to the quotations in the analysis to bring out the intended meaning.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents our findings from the empirical material and our analysis. We first describe the identified global brand myths and then illustrate the local variations in these myths from a Swedish and an American perspective respectively. Thompson (2004) argues that a conflict exists in the relationship between nature and technology and uses gnostic and romantic mythos when analyzing marketplace mythology in the context of natural healthcare. The same conflict applies to our findings and we have therefore used the same interpretive frame when analyzing our results. According to Thompson (2004), the gnostic mythos reveres science, the rational, and the productive use of technology. Contrastingly, the romantic mythos reveres the natural, emotive style of living, and imagination.

In Table 2 our findings are summarized. The table follows Thompson's (2004) framing and is organized around four global myths; myth of Volvo as safe, myth of Volvo as transformed, myth of Volvo as Swedish, and myth of Volvo as transforming me, and the local variations in the discourses.

GNOSTIC MYTHS

Global Myth of Volvo as Safe

> When driving around in a Volvo XC90, the entire car starts to beep (OSKAR)

One prominent theme in the interviewed consumers' stories about Volvo is in both localities safety. Safety is one of the first things that come to mind of almost all the informants when asked to say what they think of when thinking about Volvo. "Volvo was the first car brand offering three-point seatbelts", "Volvo is ranked highly in safety tests and consumer reports", "Volvo is equipped with a lot of safety features" and "Volvo won't crumble apart in a crash" are statements commonly told. These mentions reinforce Volvo as a machine and as the myth of Volvo as safe is based on technological aspects and discussed in a rational way, we, following Thompson (2004), discern the myth as a gnostic myth.

The global myth of Volvo as safe can be distinguished into two discourses. The first

Table 2   Overview of discourses of Volvo's brand myths

	Global Myth	Local Variation in Global Myth
GNOSTIC MYTHS	**Myth of Volvo as safe:** a safe brand in terms of being at the forefront when it comes to safety features and technical engineering infused by safety. Also safe in that providing safety in terms of "you know what you get" and "you know that it won't break down".	**Swedish perspective:** Volvo's special understanding of the Swedish conditions makes it superior in handling the Swedish state of roads in a safe way. **American perspective:** something one had grown up with and thus inherent in the culture.
	Myth of Volvo as transformed: Volvo is transformed from something to something better due to changes in design, material and technical features.	**Swedish perspective:** transformed from a "Svensson" car to a car that can be used as a tool for standing out. **American perspective:** transformed from a "soccer mom car" to a car for a younger audience.
ROMANTIC MYTHS	**Myth of Volvo as Swedish:** Volvo is a Swedish brand with strong connections to Sweden.	**Swedish perspective:** a Swedish heroic brand doing something good for its country. **American perspective:** a dreamlike and mystical imagery of Sweden which is transferred onto Volvo.
	Myth of Volvo as transforming me: imagination of Volvo as a source to freedom, nature and relaxation and tool that can be used to attain a desired state of balance and personal transformation	**Swedish perspective:** a transformation to an active style of living. **American perspective:** a transformation to a state of personal success.

discourse is the myth of Volvo as a safe brand in terms of being at the forefront when it comes to safety features and technical engineering infused by safety. The second discourse concerns Volvo as being a safe brand and providing the informant with safety in terms of "you know what you get" and "you know that it won't break down". The first discourse can be named "Volvo - safe to drive" and is illustrated by Steven who talks about the technical features when describing Volvo as a safe car:

> *Interviewer:* When you think about Volvo what comes to mind?
> *Steven:* I think the first one would be safety.
> *Interviewer:* Can you describe a bit more what you mean by safety?
> *Steven:* Like the technologies in the cars are safe, whether it be airbags or crash protection. The computer sensing stuff, I think they have a self-braking car. The safety features for driving kind of puts them (Volvo) in the front. Consumers are kind of comfortable with the brand because the Volvo name will give them that extra leg of safety that say a different brand won't.

The technical tools that Steven describes convey the mythic promise that Volvo will give the consumers more safety than other brands. In line with Haraway (1997), science and technology, in this context reflected in safety features, overcome the constraints and limitations posed by embodiment; airbags help the driver's body to survive in collisions in far from natural speeds, and self-breaking features overcome the limited reactivity of man. Steven's prevalent use of technical metaphors is far away from unique. The informants' use of technocratic rhetoric and references to scientific safety testing and product development provide a rational license for consumers to believe in Volvo. John further represents this:

> *Interviewer:* What comes to mind when thinking about Volvo?
> *John:* Safety, Volvo has always been known for safety. It was a perfect car when the kids started to learn to drive. It feels good to put the kids in it. The Volvo reputation is great safety.

Interviewer: Can you describe what you mean by "great safety"?
John: By great safety I mean that you hear in nation consumer reports that it has the highest safety ratings and goes through the tests. Consumer reports carry a lot of weight. It was the first car with airbags, and side airbags. The seats are constructed to be safe, to be strong. Also good steel construction, more safety than most cars in the US. When my sister was looking for a car I told her about Volvo since it's safe.

As the discussion with John illustrates, he and also several other informants tell that they have recommended Volvo to relatives and friends when they are about to purchase a new car since it is safe and which they feel safe putting their family in. The explanatory rationale behind this is the solid engineering and construction of the car and the many safety features such as airbags, collision warning, and blind spot information system, which further reinforce the myth as a gnostic one. However, just like Holt (2004) argues, we find that myths are neither fact nor fiction but floating in between. This is interesting because even if John and other informants use rational arguments based on fact such as consumer reports to explain the myth of Volvo as safe, others such as Elisabeth expresses that "Volvo has safe cars, but actually I don't know if it's true, but I think so, you just know it". Hence, as suggested by Holt (2004) myths present a way of understanding the world so convincing that believers feel it must be true, regardless of the existence of facts to base the belief on or not. The second discourse we can distinguish the myth of Volvo as safe into, can be named "Volvo: safe to purchase and own". Here the Volvo brand and its myth function as a seal of quality:

> I think of quality, it's a car that lasts. You don't have to leave it on expensive reparations; the seats last for years (JAN)

> The car is able to maintain. It's built to stand punishment. It's easy to repair. So even if mechanical failure, there are low costs to own a Volvo (JOHN)

> About Renault you said "four screws and a bolt". Behind a Volvo it's much more

work, it's quality. It's a good car for the money. It won't break down halfway (ELISABETH)

As these consumer quotations illustrate, the informants highlight that the high quality and solid engineering helps them reduce risk and save money since they know that the car will last year after year and that they do not have to leave it on expensive reparations. Thus, Volvo brings safety to the consumers in being a safe purchase. Giesler (2012) refers to the gnostic perspective as discourses concerning productivity gains and in his study of technology ideologies in consumer narratives, Kozinets (2008) identifies a "work machine" discourse that idealize technology as enabling efficiency. Likewise in this study, we find that the informants talk about Volvo as a high-quality machine that delivers cost savings and cost-effectiveness causing a reasonable cost-benefit ratio over time.

Another finding that emerged is that even though some informants have had bad experiences with the Volvo brand, the myth of Volvo as safe in terms of quality and their positive sentiment remained as Nicole's story illustrates:

> My dad actually owned a Volvo. He had like a very bad one. So his experience wasn't good. But even if his experience wasn't good he still think it's a great car because, he knows everyone says it's a good car. Everything went wrong, it stalled, brakes ran out, the windows didn't work, one time it stalled and he tried to push it, and pushed into a pole, everything that could go wrong went wrong. But he's still think Volvo is great, he just got a bad one (NICOLE)

Previous research has found that brands with strong brand myths are easier to forgive by consumers and fair better after disasters (LaTour et al., 2009; Aaker, Fournier & Brasel, 2004), which Nicole's story is an example of. Even though her dad got a bad car, he and also Nicole herself forgive Volvo. Nicole says that "he just got a bad one", offering the excuse that it was some kind of bad luck, an exception. Martina has a similar strategy when describing her bad experience with a Volvo that often stalled. She does not blame Volvo for her defective car and

argues that the technical incident was not specific for Volvo: "I had a Volvo that stalled while driving, but it didn't change my perceptions of Volvo. It could have happened to any car". The strong myth of Volvo as safe seems to function as a rule that overcomes the exceptions and we propose that the myth of Volvo as safe works as a safety net for the Volvo brand; a safety net that retain the brand within the myth when something occurs that is not in line with it, leaving Volvo virtually untouched.

Local Variations in Global Myth of Volvo as Safe in a Swedish Context

Among the Swedish informants a local rationale behind the myth of Volvo as safe is that Volvo still has a large part of its production and development in Sweden. The interpretation is that the engineers vicinity to Sweden leads to a brand with a special understanding of the Swedish conditions as regards icy roads, heavy rain and strenuous weather, which is taken into account when designing the cars. The following consumer statements illustrate common ways in which Swedish informants elaborate on the importance of the Swedish connections and origin:

> I think of the brand's connection to Sweden. It's made for the Swedish conditions and the climate. If you should go to the ski mountains in North, you take the Volvo. It can handle the difficult road conditions (ANDREAS)

> It's Swedish. It's built for the Swedish conditions, with corrosion protection and such. For the winter landscape, Volvo makes it way well in snow and slosh. Good AWD, it fights on. The Swedes are good in producing cars (OSKAR)

> Volvo is Swedish; it means a lot to me that Volvo is Swedish and developed in Sweden. The engineers sits here, they now our conditions, what's needed for us here in Sweden (JAN)

Through constructing Volvo as having technological superiority in handling the Swedish road conditions due to development in Sweden, the informants are able to understand themselves as having a rational basis for agreeing the

legitimacy of the myth of Volvo as safe. The distinctive interpretation of Volvo as safe due to its Swedish connection also finds expression when some informants mention the Chinese ownership. Even if it still is the Swedish origin that is the permeating myth living on, the question "Is a Chinese engineer capable of understanding the driving settings in Sweden and can they produce quality cars as the Swedes?" emerges when entering the discussion of Chinese ownership. Conforming to Giesler's (2012) reference to the gnostic perspective as discourses that deliver betterment, the Swedish technology is in this local context understood as implying technological betterment in terms of handling tough road conditions. In summary, the discourse of a Swedish origin that assures that Volvo is a rationally preferred alternative when it comes to safety is a local variation within the global myth of Volvo as safe.

Local Variations in Global Myth of Volvo as Safe in an American Context

The American informants' discourses reveal that the myth of Volvo as safe is something that has always been around and is part of culture as indicated by Eric's statement:

> When looking for a safe car I automatically go to Volvo. It's part of popular culture here. When I was a little kid my next-door neighbor's mum had a Volvo. We always hang out together. His mum was always driving us around, to school, to friends and football practice. Growing up you always knew that Volvos are safe cars (ERIC)

Eric underlines that the myth of Volvo as a safe car is something that he has grown up with, starting from when he was riding around in his friend's mother's Volvo. Also Jacob shares his memories of going in the family's Volvo as a child in connection to discussing Volvo as a safe brand. LaTour et al. (2009) propose that early childhood memory stories are useful for developing brand myths and providing relevance to iconic brands. In their article they found that memories from early childhood are more predictive and insightful for understanding current brand attitudes than memories coming from adolescence. Likewise in this study, we find that

childhood memory stories are underlying brand myths, in this case the myth of Volvo as safe, and a rationale behind the attitude of Volvo as the car turning to when looking for safety.

Global Myth of Volvo as Transformed

> Now Volvo is more of a premium brand than before. Before Volvo was for blue-collars but it has stepped up all the time. The most recent models have entered the more exclusive, like more precious design, more precious material, no plastic, and being more expensive. It's a much more luxurious feeling when entering the car. Before it was a simple and cheap car taking you from A to B, a generic car that everyone owned. Now it's more aggressive and modern design, like the premium feeling. I would feel great driving a new Volvo, it stands out. The typical old Volvo driver was a half-boring person with an office work, more conservative. The new Volvo driver is flashier, like the previous owners of Porsche Cayenne, BMW and Mercedes, the more luxurious cars. They dare to stand out, and to try something new and fun (OSKAR)

A global theme that emerged throughout the interviews is the interpretation that Volvo itself is transformed, constituting the brand myth of Volvo as a transformed brand. Due to the more elegant design, luxurious look and feel, the investments in electric and self-driving cars, and innovative features, the story goes that Volvo has gone from a brand that "it didn't happen very much around", to "a brand with new thinking vibes" for a more "fastidious clientele". Oskar's jargon is far from unique and both Swedish and American informants distinguish the Volvo brand as "Volvo before" and "Volvo now" and that Volvo was something but now has become something better. Informants asking us questions like, "which Volvo do you mean, the old one or the new one?" also indicate the perception of a transformed brand. Some informants even mention that Volvo is a "double brand" since the old and the new brand speak different languages and contradicts each other, which implies an ongoing transformation. Prior research informs us that the ambiguities of confusion, contradiction and

cumulation are important elements in consumer meaning making and myth appeal (Brown et al., 2013). Here, we find that the myth of Volvo as transformed speaks to two of these three ambiguities, namely confusion and contradiction. This since some informants are confused by the different car models they are exposed to on the streets and experience a contradiction: is Volvo a "boxy coffin" or a luxury car?

Following Thompson (2004), the myth of Volvo as transformed resonates with the gnostic mythos since the technological changes dominate this mythic discourse. As summarized in Oskar's citation, the myth stems from changes in technocratic and scientific qualities in terms of design, materials and innovations. This physical transformation of Volvo has in turn lead to changes in the immaterial connotations and perceptions of the brand and of the type of people buying and driving the brand. The discourse follows that the owners and drivers of Volvo has gone from plain and commonplace average workers, to flashier and more daring personalities. Now, Volvo has taken up the race on competitors such as BMW, Audi, Mercedes and Porsche that stand for premium and high quality cars at the forefront of technological engineering.

A metaphor Oskar and also other informants use, is that Volvo now "does more than taking you from A to B". This discourse is made up of two facets indicating that Volvo nowadays provides more than a mode of physical transport. On the one hand, the new technology, material and design, are by the informants narrated as enabling the Volvo owner or driver to stand out and express status. As previous research have documented (Diamond et al., 2009; Holt, 2002, 2006; Kozinets, 2001; Thompson, 2004), myths help consumers also in our study to construct their identities. Giesler (2012) notes in his discussion of the gnostic perspective that new technology delivers social and individual betterment, and correspondingly the informants talk about Volvo as a status symbol to showcase. On the other hand, the informants tell that Volvo now offers a driving experience like never before meaning that the transport from A to B has more and more become a trip of entertainment. The informants talking about the improved driving experience emphasizing the new technical features such as the 360° camera, autonomous parking, etc. as

making the ride facilitated and improved. This facet resonates with Davis (1998) gnostic discussion that human capabilities are enhanced by technologies since these features that enhance the experience support and improve skills, efficiency and effectiveness of the driver. Overall, the stories across the localities contend that Volvo is transformed from a common, standard car for the many to a premium car brand experience, providing more than a means of transportation.

Local Variations in Global Myth of Volvo as Transformed in a Swedish Context

> Volvo has gone from a Svensson brand to a more exclusive one. Before it was a car for everyone, now it's not. It has gone from a standard car that everyone could afford, quite boring and plain. A Svensson car, that was how I thought about it before, like "villa, Volvo, dog". The latest time they have put more time and effort into design, they have invented a digital speedometer in the front rear and a lot of other special functions (JENNIFER)

A local variation in the interpretations of how Volvo has transformed over time, is the Swedish informants' frequent usage of the local concept of "Svensson". As the excerpt from the interview with Jennifer implies, "Svensson" is used as a way to describe something that is commonplace, quite boring, un-unique and that everyone has. In accompaniment with "Svensson" Jennifer uses the local metaphor "villa, Volvo, dog", which is alluding to a preset expectation or template on how a family in Sweden should be constructed; a large house, a Volvo car and a dog. When asking Petra what she means by "Svensson" she replies:

> Like a usual Swede; living in a medium-sized town, has a good job but nothing special, row house, dog, two kids, vacation to Mallorca sometimes. An average person in Sweden. No extravagant things, just ordinary life in a midsize city (PETRA)

Being "Svensson" is talked about in a negative sense, which leads us to suggest an interpretation in society that it is undesirable to be average and like everyone else. The phenomena of

anticonformism is recurring also in Thompson and Haytko's (1997) and Kjeldgaard and Askegaard's (2006) studies, where informants were distancing themselves from what they considered mainstream, striving for uniqueness, to stand out, to differentiate and to be something special. Nevertheless, in contrast to Thompson and Haytko (1997) and Kjeldgaard and Askegaard's (2006) findings, the strive to at the same time blend in and conform is not apparent in our informants' discourses. However, consumer discourses are rarely treated as fixed (Roper et al., 2013) and myths are constantly renewed to fit contemporary life (Stern, 1995) and Volvo is no longer connoted as "Svensson". Rather the discourse is that Volvo has transformed from a "Svensson" brand towards a brand that instead can be used as a tool to stand out. We understand the informants' use of "Svensson", as a strategy to interpret the transformation of Volvo from a Swedish perspective. Volvo now is perceived as leaving "Svensson" behind with help of new design, features, and technology. Again, Volvo instead delivers social and individual betterment; in line with Giesler's (2012) allude to the gnostic perspective.

Local Variations in Global Myth of Volvo as Transformed in an American Context

When the American informants talk about Volvo as transformed, a local variation lies in their expressions that Volvo has turned from a "soccer mom car" to a car attracting a younger generation. "Soccer mom car" refers to a car commonly used by mothers to transport the children to sporting events and other activities. The local concept is used when interpreting what Volvo was and now has become as in the following quotes:

> In the US, maybe ten years ago, it was soccer moms that drove Volvos. Like moms driving their children to school, soccer and stuff. Now younger and more stylish people are driving them. The style of the cars has changed, in the 90s, Volvo was like a box, rectangle, ugly, now it's more cool, aerodynamic, still safe but good looking (ERIC)

> The stigma of Volvo has changed a lot in the last couple of years. When I was in high school, 8, 9 years ago the typical Volvo driver was like soccer moms staying at home taking care of the kids, like taking your kids to soccer practice kind of car. Then they did a huge overhaul and redesign of all their cars, to more sporty looks, more stylish, more engine power and better handling. More luxurious. The car itself looks very sleek and the interior, leather, sound system, they have upgraded a lot different elements of the car. It's rivaling BMW and Mercedes. 10 years ago, at least in America, it wasn't on that level (STEVEN)

The quotes serve to illustrate the American consumers' discourse of Volvo as a "soccer mom car" until Volvo transformed. The transformation is connected to the redesign and enhanced performance of the car and the informants emphasize the change of the design as from looking like a coffin and being boxy to being sportier and more appealing to younger and stylish consumers. In this sense, technology is not so much dominated in functionality and versatility of the car, but rather technology in terms of design and features. "Soccer mom car" is thus a local way to interpret Volvo's transformation in a US context. The mystical identity of "soccer mom" in the US and "Svensson" in Sweden, is similar to the Southern white identity myth in Thompson and Tian's (2008) article, containing stigmatized constructions of poor white Southerners in that all are stereotypical portrayals in a mythic context. In both the Swedish and American localities, the informants relate to a standard, mediocre identity myth, but do it in different ways. Thus, similar to Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006), we find that identity is a common structure, in which the way identity is articulated varies.

ROMANTIC MYTHS

Global Myth of Volvo as Swedish

> It's Swedish. If you should put something next to a Swedish maypole, it would be a Volvo (HENRIK)

Predominant in the informants' narratives of Volvo are the Swedish connotations that embed the brand, constituting the global myth of Volvo as Swedish. Almost all informants mention

Sweden when asked to describe what comes to mind when thinking about Volvo and the recurrent quotes "it's a Swedish brand" and "Volvo is from Sweden" indicate the brand's strong connections to Sweden and fortification as a Swedish brand. However, the discourses of Volvo as Swedish go beyond Sweden as the country of manufacturing and rather referring to mystical fantasies of Sweden and Swedishness. The cultivation of imagination is rooted in the romantic mythos (Giesler, 2012), which makes the myth of Volvo as Swedish go along the line of romanticism.

Local Variations in Global Myth of Volvo as Swedish in a Swedish Context

The Swedish informants' discourses of Volvo as Swedish were generally found to be organized around Volvo as being a Swedish heroic brand doing something good for its country since the brand creates jobs and puts Sweden on the world map. Elisabeth discusses Volvo's significant role in Sweden and demonstrates Volvo's superiority by comparing it to another Swedish car brand:

> Volvo has always been a major employer in Gothenburg. I don't think Gothenburg had survived without it. It gives many jobs. Volvo is a fighter that moves forward, not like SAAB that just disappeared. If it weren't for Volvo, we wouldn't have a car industry in Sweden (ELISABETH)

The excerpt from the interview with Elisabeth, echoing the discourse of the Swedish informants, captures the tale of Volvo as a Swedish hero. The hero stereotype is a central characteristic of the romantic mythos (Stern, 1995). Volvo is understood as a warrior that unlike SAAB survives year after year, providing jobs and considerable weight is placed on the belief that Volvo is the reason that the Swedish car industry and the city of Gothenburg remain. By embedding Volvo in this context the consumers construct the brand as a hero. A local variation in the myth of Volvo as Swedish is thus that the Swedish informants feature Volvo as an idealized hero and central character in the plot who engages in the progress and preservation of Sweden and overcomes the tough international competition that blocks the success and through employing

overcomes the obstructive villain and continue to support the country's prosperity (Stern, 1995). This plot is similar to Holt and Thompson's (2004) findings in their study of heroic masculinity in everyday consumption, meaning that iconic heroes are the ones who have enough strength to defeat whatever villain in threatening the social order, saves society and then takes a well-deserved seat at the pinnacle of the hierarchy; just like Volvo in the story of Sweden.

Local Variations in Global Myth of Volvo as Swedish in an American Context

The American informants' discourses of Volvo as Swedish were characterized by stories and fantasies of Sweden signified by a dreamlike and mystical imagery of the country, touching both on the Swedish atmosphere and way of life, such as "pure", "clean", "beautiful", "environmentally-aware" and "free". Consider the following snippets from the American informants' narratives of Sweden:

> In Sweden everything is clean, pretty, blue sky, cool air, very pure (ERIC)

> I think Sweden is a peaceful country, not very competitive, just very relaxed and easygoing (SOPHIA)

> We have a positive view of that region, it's one of the happier places in the world (STEVEN)

The conceptions of Sweden are expressed as romanticized and desirable and when interpreting the myth of Volvo as Swedish the informants use these beliefs and transfer them onto the Volvo brand. In other words, the consumers let their embellished clichés and mythologies of Sweden and Swedish culture mirror their stories of Volvo and interweave their discourses of the brand. Stern (1995) means that romantic values celebrate ideal states - a world of beauty or of peace marked by the absence of conflict, which has clear parallels to the American informant's discourse of Volvo as a brand from a state imagined as beautiful and harmonious. The local variation in the myth of Volvo as Swedish is thus that the American informants imagine Sweden as a beautiful and harmonious country and transfer their associations

of Sweden and Swedishness onto the Volvo brand.

Global Myth of Volvo as Transforming Me

> I am not a nature person, but I want to be when I think of Volvo. Like back to nature. Driving along the coastline, go hiking. The Volvo XC90, it's the car you drive to your summer house placed on a small archipelago, taking your boat out there, regardless of being autumn or summer, of course the house is located on a small archipelago. The American cars you drive in cities, on long highways, Volvo you are driving to Åre with skis on top. I think of Norrland, driving there and hike despite I have never been there before; Volvo kind of brings out new sides of me and a sense of freedom (HENRIK)

Henrik's account is a reflection of a frequently drawn imagination in both localities of Volvo as a source to freedom, nature and relaxation. The discourse is characterized by a representation of Volvo as a tool that the informants imagine themselves using to attain a desired state of balance and personal transformation; to a free and relaxed state of mind and style of living, which creates the global myth of Volvo as transforming me. As another informant, Steven, depicts, Volvo connotes a relaxed mode in a scenery closer to nature: "I think of having a relaxed lifestyle, you are not on the go all the time, not stressed, like casual, you enjoy your drive and life, probably on the countryside". The informants' descriptions of mountains, fjords, snow and forests carry natural significations and nature is referred to as something that provides "wellbeing", "freedom", "calmness" and "joy". If owning or driving a Volvo, one imagines oneself as being transformed, to a free and relaxed person being in tune with nature. The imaginative scenario of driving a Volvo to the countryside, to the mountains or other locations close to nature invoke the idea of being magically transported from the hectic and stressful modern city life to a calmer, natural and free place. According to Thompson (2004) the romantic mythos implies a return to nature and a cultivation of a natural, emotive style of living wherefore this myth aligns with the romantic mythos.

Local Variations in Global Myth of Volvo as Transforming Me in a Swedish Context

Among Swedish informants the discourses of Volvo as transforming them centered much on being transformed to an active style of living; active in the sense of using the body and practicing outdoor sports. Skiing, hiking, biking, surfing, golfing and hunting are activities that emerge in several stories about Volvo. Oskar expresses the following:

> I just want to drive in the snow in an XC90, in full speed and then go hunting, skiing and such, out in the nature, in the snowy landscape. Just pack the skis and some other sports stuff, the surfboard, the golf clubs and then go (OSKAR)

Oskar describes how he sees himself driving a Volvo in the snow. In addition to an escape to a place in nature characterized by a snowy landscape, he portrays the Volvo XC90 as a means of being transformed to a state that enables practice of sports and leisure activities. Oskar's description represents the local variation of the myth of Volvo as transforming as the desire of a transformation to an active lifestyle and the local discourse of nature and outdoor activities conveys the idea of being in harmony with nature. In contrast to the gnostic perspective, where science and technology enable mankind to achieve his dominion over nature and to overcome limitations posed by embodiment (Thompson, 2004), the human body is in the Swedish locality used to align with nature in accordance with a romantic view.

Local Variations in Global Myth of Volvo as Transforming Me in an American Context

> *William:* I can see myself driving through woods, with a lot of trees around, there's snow around, driving over the edge of a fjord and looking out over the water. It leaves me with a good feeling, and almost like, it sounds weird to say, but kind of conquering feeling.
> *Interviewer:* Can you elaborate a little bit more on what you mean with a "conquering feeling"?
> *William:* Like you are on the top of the world when you drive this car. It sets

you apart in terms of society; in America some associate BMW and Audi cars of being a jerk car, cocky people drive these. Volvo leaves you with a much better feeling, not a superior feeling but kind of "you made it" when you have a Volvo. You are on the top of the world but not in a negative sense.

William's description implies the myth that Volvo is transforming him to an imaginative place with connotations to the Nordic nature, but he also describes another type of transformation prevalent among American informants that reveals a local variation in the myth. William explains that he experiences Volvo as transforming him to a state of mind where he is "on top of the world" and thus transforming him into a person who "has made it". In contrast to car brands like BMW and Audi, he states that Volvo leaves him with this conquering feeling in a positive and humble rather than arrogant sense. He refers to the conquering feeling in two dimensions: both as a metaphor to nature where he stands on the top of the mountain but also as a feeling of accomplishment, that he has succeeded. Also Sophia describes how Volvo gives her a feeling of personal fulfillment and when thinking of driving a Volvo she imagine herself as doing well in life. Thus, this romantic myth ends in the imagination that Volvo takes the informants to a position as better and richer than the present (Stern, 1995), and the local variation revolves around the imaginative state of personal success.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to examine how global brand myths take on localized meanings in different localities. We studied this glocalization of brand myths by means of investigating Volvo to explore and illustrate Volvo's brand myths and how they can be understood from a Swedish and an American consumer perspective. Hence, our first objective was to identify Volvo's global brand myths and the second to study how consumers interpret these global brand myths with local variations. Based on these objectives we have identified four global brand myths; myth of Volvo as safe, myth of Volvo as transformed, myth of Volvo as Swedish and myth of Volvo as transforming me. Following Thompson (2004), his structure of gnostic and romantic mythos

allows us to talk about Volvo's brand myths as gnostic (myth of Volvo as safe and myth of Volvo as transformed) and romantic (myth of Volvo as Swedish and myth of Volvo as transforming me). Our analysis demonstrates that consumers use Volvo discourses in a number of localized ways that reproduce glocal brand myths. Myth of Volvo as safe in the Swedish context was related to a core discourse of Volvo's vicinity to Sweden and thereby engineers with a special understanding of the Swedish conditions. This leads to a local interpretation of Volvo as superior in handling the Swedish roads in a safe way. In the American context, a local variation was due to the commonly told childhood memories, which unfolded the myth of Volvo as safe as something one had grown up with which intensified their rationale of Volvo as a safe brand. The myth of Volvo as transformed was in the Swedish context expressed as a transformation from a "Svensson car" to a more unique one that can be used as a tool to stand out. In the American context the interpretation was that Volvo is transformed from a "soccer mom car" to a car for a younger audience. The Swedish variation in the myth of Volvo as Swedish was organized around Volvo as being a hero doing something good for the country and ensuring the country's prosperity. The local variation in the American informants' discourses of Volvo as Swedish was the fantasies of Sweden, signified by dreamlike and mystical imageries of the Swedish atmosphere and way of life, which were interwoven into their stories of Volvo. The discourse of Volvo as transforming me in the Swedish context centered around Volvo transforming its owner or driver to an active style of living; active in the sense of using the body and practicing outdoor sports. In the American context the myth of Volvo as transforming me is talked about as an imagined state of personal success when owning or driving a Volvo.

Our theoretical contribution is threefold. Firstly, by revealing how consumers interpret and create global brand myths to fit into their local contexts we add onto the field of glocalization taking a brand myth perspective. The glocalization of brand myths implies a coexistence of dimensions of similarity and difference. We demonstrate that there is brand myth similarity since the global brand myths of Volvo are universal and evident in both the Swedish and American context. Further, there are local contextual differences that

determine the particular way the consumers engage with the myths in the different localities. Thus, likewise Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) who also study glocalization, we have in this context of brand myths also found structures of common difference (Wilk, 1995) in that the identified myths are similar in the studied countries but how the similarities are mirrored is different.

Secondly, since consumer interpretation is studied we also contribute to the field of interpretation strategies within consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) taking a glocalized brand myth perspective. We find that on the one hand, the interpretation goes from the global brand myth to the consumers where consumers interpret the global brand myth with local variations. On the other hand, we find that the global brand myths are created through the consumers' interpretation, which due to the discourses with local variations constitutes the global brand myth. Thus, the glocalization of brand myths is an on-going complex two-way process where consumers, as suggested by Arnould and Thompson (2005), are active and interpretative, both interpreting and creating the global brand myths simultaneously. As consumers interpret and talk about the global brand myths in localized ways in the different localities, we endorse Stern's (1995) suggestion that the shape that the consumer chooses for an articulation of an experience, or the sociocultural vocabulary, can tell us as much about the consumer and the local culture as it does about the occasion or product under study and thereby what myths are about in a localized context.

Thirdly, we have shown that Thompson's (2004) interpretative framework allows us to analyze Volvo's brand myths as gnostic and romantic. Thompson (2004) argues that there is a conflict in the relationship between nature and technology and we find this true also in our findings, which reveal that there exists a tension in what the informants view as desirable and strive for in their discourses. On the one hand, there is a common desire to head to the future where technology drives the change and where success is defined as increased efficiency, effectiveness and technological innovations (Thompson, 2004). This can clearly be seen in the myth of Volvo as safe and the myth of Volvo as transformed were the

discourses implying that improvements enabled by technology are worth striving for. On the other hand, there is a common desire to go back to nature, implying a technophobic ideology defining nature as the supreme good (Giesler, 2012). This longing for nature is revealed in the myth of Volvo as Swedish and the myth of Volvo as transforming me where informants praise the beauty and calm in nature. Thus, there exist a contradiction in the informants' discourses between wanting new technology and change and wanting nature and constancy, meaning that Volvo is situated in a struggle for a progressive-oriented, technical transformation and at the same time in a struggle for a regressive-oriented return to nature. However, we suggest that Volvo can be interpreted as, by means of the identified brand myths, stretching itself between the gap of the two ends and binding them together due to having both gnostic and romantic myths. We argue that this stretch between gnostic and romantic leads to Volvo being a versatile brand, appealing to consumers both from a rational, gnostic perspective and emotional, romantic perspective, and which consumers find meaningful in that both ends of their desires are perceived as being able to be satisfied by Volvo. This is in line with Brown et al. (2013) who argue that ambiguity in its multifaceted forms is integral to outstanding branding and consumer meaning making, as well as myth appeal more generally. We mean that this gnostic versus romantic tension is an ambiguity among consumers, which brand myths can manage. By arguing that a brand whose brand myths stretches between the gnostic and romantic mythos can make a brand especially meaningful, hence not necessarily the brand myth per se, but rather a combination of brand myths, we address the knowledge gap Brown et al. (2013) bring forward concerning why some consumer myths are especially meaningful. Our statement resonates with Holt (2003), who means that a brand myth exists to resolve contradictions in society, and by touching a collective desire or anxiety; iconic brands develop a status that goes beyond and exceeds functional benefits. We show that Volvo manages to resolve contradictions in societies and touch collective desires across borders, due to the glocalization of its gnostic-romantic spanning brand myths.

In addition to a theoretical contribution, our identified discourses offer marketing managers

useful insight into how consumers can interpret and create brand myths in different localities. This is important since myth making is one of the strongest influences when transforming a brand into an iconic brand (Holt, 2004) and due to the increasing internationalization of brands. Knowing that brand myths are glocalized, one as manager should be aware of the local variations in order to communicate with consumers in a relevant and effective way. We find that phenomenological interviews with consumers from different localities are useful to identify global brand myths with their local variations. As we show that consumers have a significant function not just in interpreting but also in creating myths through their stories, managers should not underestimate consumers' role in the process of brand myth glocalizaton. We also show that a brand with brand myths that stretches over the spectrum of gnostic and romantic appears as meaningful, and to manage the gnostic-romantic tension among consumers can thus be a step in building an iconic brand.

Future research that investigates other brands and other sets of countries may contribute to our understanding of glocalization of brand myths. The questions remains: How come that there is a structure of common difference in the myths, where the global myths are similar to each other but with different local variations? Is it because of marketing is similar, or because of human way of thinking is similar, or maybe a combination? We confirm Stern's (1995) suggestion that the analysis of myths across consumer stories is a promising direction for future research on brand myths. We insist on the necessity to include the consumer perspective when performing studies on brand myths to facilitate a deep understanding of brand myths, as consumer discourses have a central role in the interpretation and creation of them. Our study illustrates the applicability of Thompson's (2004) interpretative framework of gnostic and romantic when studying brand myths. To confirm our proposition that brands with brand myths stretching between the gnostic and romantic mythological ends are meaningful for consumers and a way to create an iconic brand, additional research is needed that compares brands and studies whether gnostic and romantic brand myths can be found in most brands or if this is something that characterize especially meaningful or iconic brands.

REFERENCES

Aaker, J., Fournier, S. & Brasel, A. S. (2004), "When Good Brands Do Bad," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 31, pp. 1-16.

Appadurai, A. (1990), "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy," in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization, and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone, London: Sage, 295–310.

Arnould, E.J., Price, L.L., & Moisio, R. (2006). "Making Contexts Matter: Selecting Research Contexts for Theoretical Insights", In R.W. Belk (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing* (pp. 106–125). Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar.

Arnould, E., Price, L. L. & Tierney, P. (1998), "Communicative Staging of the Wilderness Servicescape," *Services Industries Journal*, vol. 18, pp. 90-115.

Arnould, E. J & Thompson, C. J. (2005), "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research, *Journal of Consumer Research*," vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 868-882.

Brown, S., McDonagh, P. & Shultz, C. J. (2013), "Titanic: Consuming the Myths and Meanings of an Ambiguous Brand," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 40, pp. 595-614.

Davis, E. (1998), "*Technognosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information,*" New York: Three Rivers.

Diamond, N., Sherry, J. F., Müniz, A. M., McGrath, M. A., Kozinets, R. V. & Borghini, S. (2009), "American Girl and the Brand Gestalt: Closing the Loop on Sociocultural Branding Research," *Journal of Marketing,* vol. 73, pp. 118–34.

Eriksson, P. & Kovalainen, A. (2008), "*Qualitative Methods in Business Research.*" Sage Publications, London.

Firat, A. F. (1997), "Globalization of Fragmentation: A Framework for Understanding Contemporary Global Markets," *Journal of*

International Marketing, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 77–86.

Fiske, J. (1987), "British Cultural Studies and Television," in *Channels of Discourse,* R, Allen, ed,, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, pp. 254-289.

Friedman, J. (1990), "Being in the World: Globalization and Localization," in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization, and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone, London: Sage, pp. 311–28.

Ger, G. & Belk, R. W. (1996), "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the Less Affluent World," *Journal of Consumer Policy*, vol. 19, pp. 271–304.

Giddens, A. (1991), "*Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age,*" Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Giesler, M. (2012), "How Doppelgänger Brand Images Influence the Market Creation Process: Longitudinal Insights from the Rise of Botox Cosmetic," *Journal of Marketing,* vol. 76, pp. 55–68.

Goulding, C. (1999), "Consumer Research, Interpretive Paradigms and Methodological Ambiguities", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 33, no 9/10, pp. 859 - 873.

Grayson, K. & Martinec, R. (2004), "Consumer Perceptions of Iconicity and Indexicality and Their Influence on Assessments of Authentic Market Offerings," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 31, pp. 296–313.

Hannerz, U. (1996), "*Transnational Connections,*" New York: Routledge.

Haraway, D. (1997), *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience,*" New York: Routledge.

Hirschman, E. C. & Thompson, C. J. (1997), "Why Media Matter: Towards a Richer Understanding of Consumers' Relationships with Advertising and Mass Media," *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 26, pp. 43–60.

Holt, D.B. (1997), "Poststructural Lifestyle Analysis: Conceptualizing the Social Patterning of Consumption in Postmodernity", *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 326-50.

Holt, D. B. (1998), "Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 25, pp. 1–26.

Holt, D. B. (2002), "Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding", *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 70-91.

Holt, D. B. (2003), "How to Build an Iconic Brand" *Market Leader*.

Holt, D. B. (2004), "*How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding,*" Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Holt, D. B. (2005), "How Societies Desire Brands: Using Cultural Theory to Explain Brand Symbolism," in S. Ratneshwar and David Glen Mick (eds) *Inside Consumption*. London: Routledge.

Holt, D. B. (2006), "Jack Daniel's America: Iconic Brands as Ideological Parasites and Proselytizers," *Journal of Consumer Culture,* vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 355–377.

Holt, D B., & Thompson, C. J. (2004), "Man-of-Action Heroes: The Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity in Everyday Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research,* vol. 31, pp. 425–440.

Jenkins, H. (2004), "Pop Cosmopolitanism: Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence," in *Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium*, ed. Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Desiré̇e Baolian Qin-Hilliard, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 114–140.

Johar, G. V., Holbrook, M. B. & Stern, B. B. (2001), "The Role of Myth in Creative Advertising Design: Theory, Process, and Outcome," *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 30, pp. 1–25.

Kjeldgaard, D. & Askegaard, S. (2006), "The Glocalization of Youth Culture: The Global Youth Segment as Structures of Common Difference, " Journal of Consumer Research, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 231-247.

Kozinets, R. V. (2001), "Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meaning of *Star Trek*'s Culture of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 28, pp. 67–88.

Kozinets, R. V. (2002) "Can Consumers Escape the Market? Emancipatory Illuminations from Burning Man," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 29, pp. 20–38.

Kozinets, R. V. (2008), "Technology/Ideology: How Ideological Fields Influence Consumers' Technology Narratives," *Journal of Consumer Research,* vol. 34, pp. 865–81.

LaTour, M. S., LaTour, K. & Zinkhan, G. M. (2009), "Coke is It: How stories in childhood memories illuminate an icon," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 868-882.

Levy, S. (1981), "Interpreting Consumer Mythology: A Structural Approach to consumer Behavior," *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 45, pp. 49-61.

Malhotra, N.K., Agarwal, J. & Peterson, M. (1996), "Methodological issues in cross-cultural marketing research: a state of the art review," *International Marketing Review*, vol. 13, no. 5, pp. 7-43.

Mark, M. & Pearson, C. (2001), "*The Hero and the Outlaw: Building Extraordinary Brands through the Power of Archetypes*," New York: McGraw-Hill.

Merritt, P. (1998), *"Gendered Mobility: A Study of Women's and Men's Relations to Automobility in Sweden*," Department for Interdisciplinary Studies of the Human Condition, Gothenburg.

Mick, D & Buhl, C. (1992), "A Meaning-based Model of Advertising Experiences," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 19, pp. 317-338.

Miller, D. (1998), "Coca-Cola: A Sweet Black Drink from Trinidad," in *Material Culture: Why Some Things Matter*, ed. Daniel Miller, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 169–87.

Morley, D. (1980), *"The "Nationwide" Audience,"* London: BFI,

Murray, J. B. (2002), "The Politics of Consumption: A Re-inquiry on Thompson and Haytko's (1997) "Speaking of Fashion"," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 29, pp. 427-440.

Parker, I. (1990), "Discourse: Definitions and Contradictions". *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2/3, pp. 189-204.

Parment, A. (2008), "Distribution Strategies for Volume and Premium Brands in Highly Competitive Consumer Markets", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 250-265.

Peñaloza, L. (2000), "The Commodification of the American West: Marketers' Production of Cultural Meanings at the Trade Show," *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 64, pp. 82–109.

Peñaloza, L. (2001), "Consuming the American West: Cultural Meaning and Memory at a Stock Show and Rodeo," *Journal of Consumer Research,* vol. 28, pp. 369–98.

Randazzo, S. (1993), "*Mythmaking on Madison Avenue*," Chicago: Probus.

Ritson, M. & Elliott, R. (1999), "The Social Uses of Advertising: An Ethnographic Study of Adolescent Advertising Audiences," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 26, pp. 260–277.

Robertson, R. (1995), "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in *Global Modernities,* ed. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, London: Sage, pp. 25–44.

Roper, S., Caruana, R., Medway, D. & Murphy, P. (2013), "Constructing Luxury Brands: Exploring the Role of Consumer Discourse", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 47, no ¾, pp. 375-400.

Sandqvist, K. (1997), "*The Appeal of Automobiles—Human Desires and the Proliferation of Cars*," KFB Rapport: 21.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2009). "*Research Methods for Business Students*" (5th ed.). Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Schau, H. J. & Gilly, M. C. (2003), "We Are What We Post? The Presentation of Self in Personal Webspace," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 30, pp. 385–404.

Scott, L. M. (1994), "The Bridge from Text to Mind: Adapting Reader- Response Theory to Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 21, pp. 461–480.

Stern, B. B. (1995), "Consumer Myths: Frye's Taxonomy and the Structural Analysis of Consumption Text," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 165-185.

Teknikensvärld (2014), Volvo 240 fyller 40 år idag, Retrieved 2016-04-20 at http://teknikensvarld.se/volvo-240-fyller-40-ar-i-dag-156913/

The Huffington Post (2014), 9 Iconic Brands That Could Soon Be Dead, Retrieved 2016-04-20 at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/22/failing-brands-2014_n_4604534.html

Thompson, C. J. (2004), "Marketplace Mythology and Discourses of Power", *Journal of Consumer Research,* vol. 31, pp. 162–80.

Thompson, C. J. & Arsel, Z. (2004), "The Starbucks Brandscape and Consumers' (Anticorporate) Experiences of Glocalization," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 631-642

Thompson, C. J., & Haytko D. L. (1997), "Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings," *Journal of Consumer Research,* vol. 24, pp. 15–42.

Thompson, C. J. & Hirschman, E. C. (1995), "Understanding the Socialized Body: A Poststructuralist Analysis of Consumers' Self-Conceptions, Body Images, and Self-Care Practices," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 22, pp. 139–53.

Thompson, C.J., Locander, W.B. & Pollio, H.R. (1989), "Putting Consumer Experience Back into Consumer Research: The Philosophy and Method of Existential-phenomenology", *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 133-146.

Thompson, C. J., & Tambyah, S. K. (1999), "Trying to Be Cosmopolitan," *Journal of Consumer Research,* vol. 26, pp. 214–241.

Thompson, C. & Tian, K. (2008), "Reconstructing the South: How Commercial Myths Compete for Identity Value through the Ideological Shaping of Popular Memories and Countermemories", *Journal of Consumer Research,* vol. 34, no. 5, pp. 595-613.

Turner, G. (1992), "*British Cultural Studies: An Introduction,*" New York and London: Routledge.

Üstüner, T. & Holt, D, B. (2010), "Toward a Theory of Status Consumption in Less Industrialized Countries," *Journal of Consumer Research,* vol. 37, pp. 37–56.

Volvo (2016), Om Volvo Cars, Retrieved 2016-03-12 at http://www.volvocars.com/se/om-volvo/foretaget/om-volvo-cars

Waters, M. (1995), "*Globalization,*" London: Sage.

Wilk, R. (1995), "Learning to Be Local in Belize: Global Systems of Common Difference," in *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*, ed. Daniel Miller, London: Routledge, pp. 110–131.

Woodside, A., Sood, S. & Miller, K. E. (2008), "When Consumers and Brands Talk: Storytelling Theory and Research in Psychology and Marketing." *Psychol Mark*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 97-125.