

A SCANDINAVIAN VIEW OF THE MANIFEST AND LATENT
THEMES IN HOME VIDEO ADVERTISEMENTS

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Abstract

This paper uses a Scandinavian approach to analyze the content of Danish home video advertisements. The content analysis identifies manifest and latent themes incorporated into the advertisements. The paper also discusses the home video technology in Denmark in terms of the diffusion of innovations paradigm.

Introduction

Although the home video technology is a prominent feature in American society, countries in Western Europe have only recently witnessed the widespread adoption of this technology. Many reasons have stimulated the early adoption of the video technology by U.S. consumers. Among these reasons, two have great importance. First, Americans have a great fascination with new technology for the household, and second, households have greater available purchasing power compared to most countries. Americans are commonly regarded as eager to adopt an innovation that gives them greater control over their lives. In the case of home video, American households became more independent viewers and less dependent on regular TV programming and movie theaters for their entertainment.

The experience of the Danish market with home video is different compared to the U.S. Because Denmark has a high standard of living, the casual observer would expect that the Danish household would have been likely to adopt video when first introduced. Such was not the case. In fact most of Europe was subject to sluggish adoption rates of this technology. If American business is to understand the nature of marketing in Western Europe, it is important to investigate case studies. This paper examines the diffusion of the home video technology in Denmark. Reasons as to why the typical Danish household rejected home video when first introduced are developed. A content analysis in the Danish tradition of video advertisements from 1980 to 1982 shows that different manifest and latent themes were used during this period to make the video technology seem more acceptable to Danish lifestyle. The paper concludes by giving the implications of the study to marketing.

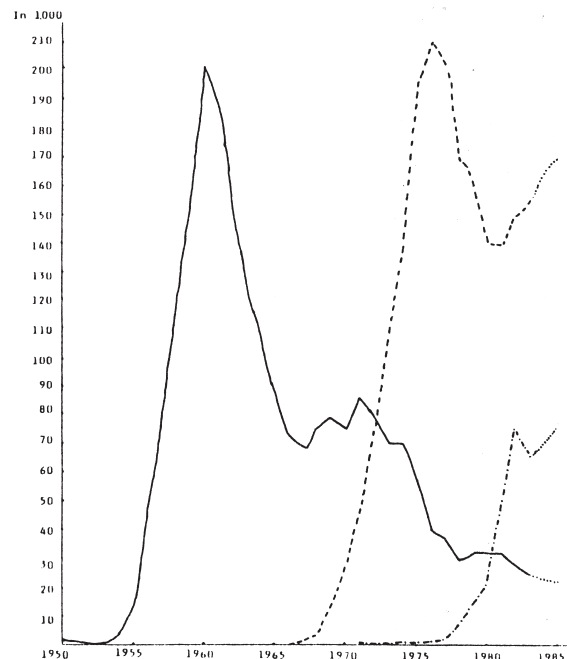
History of the Home Video in Denmark

Video technology was first introduced in Denmark in the early 1970's. As a new medium to Danish society, it was sold as a supplement to the TV set and super 8 movie technology. This initial introduction, however, failed. Institutions rather than households were more eager to adopt this innovation. Through the 1970's many private firms, universities and public schools acquired video for their collection of AV equipment. The technology was mainly used for educational purposes and as

creative medium in art and alternative communications. The semi-professional U-Matic system (not intended for household use) was preferred in the early period of video in Denmark. There were two principal reasons why the Danish consumers were not keen about this product. First, the lack of compatible software from video rental stores made this product less appealing. Second, color TV sets were owned by a minority of households in the early 1970's. As a consequence, consumers had to choose between two innovations; most chose to acquire a color TV set.

The beginning of the 1980's ushered in a new period for the media in Danish society and for Scandinavia and Western Europe as well. Dealers became more aggressive in promoting the benefits of home video. The conditions were now ripe for the widespread adoption of the home video. Two particular factors conditioned the 1980's as the ideal time for adoption of the home video. First, the sale of first generation color TV sets had reached its saturation point. Second, the fact that the video software market was now developed and continuing to develop also contributed to the favorability of the home video. The films released by the big American film companies served to attract consumers to this technology.

FIGURE 1
TV SALES VOLUMES FOR BLACK/WHITE, COLOR AND HOME
VIDEO UNITS IN DENMARK 1950 TO 1985
—— b/w TV ----- color TV -.-.-. home video
(1984 and 1985 sales volumes are estimated.)



The video by this time became an integral part of the available visual media for household use. It was used for a host of uses including work and leisure, instruction and education, marketing and public relations and alternative uses demonstrated in video workshops. The initial popularity of this technology experienced in the fall of 1980 suddenly "boomed" in 1982. Throughout this period from the fall of 1980 to 1982, different promotion strategies were used. **Figure 1** compares sales volumes for black/white TV, color TV and home video. **Figure 2** provides the sales volume of home video units by years. **Figure 3** illustrates the evolution of the home video concept according to periods of development.

Special reports and sections appeared in two major newspapers drawing attention to the video concept and its benefits. In several newspapers, there was a standard Saturday section commenting on the latest developments in home video. Interviews with dealers and business spokesmen in this section offered impetus for the household to purchase a home video unit. Indeed, the home video technology had become an institution in Denmark.

The Classical Diffusion Paradigm

When an innovation is introduced to a society, it often evolves through a process of adoption by members in that society. An effective way to examine this societal adoption process is through the framework of diffusion analysis (Rogers and Shoemaker 1971, Robertson 1967, Zaltman and Stiff 1973). The diffusion process can be regarded as

FIGURE 2

SALES VOLUME OF VIDEO TAPE RECORDER TO HOUSEHOLDS

Year	Number sold	Cumulative number sold	% of households owing a unit
1971	0	0	-
1972	200	200	-
1973	300	500	-
1974	300	800	-
1975	600	1,400	-
1976	1,400	2,800	-
1977	2,000	4,800	-
1978	7,000	11,800	1
1979	15,000	26,800	1
1980	21,000	47,800	2
1981	50,000	97,800	4
1982	75,000	172,800	7
1983	65,000	237,800	10
Estimated development			
1984	70,000		
1985	75,000		

FIGURE 3

EVOLUTION OF THE HOME VIDEO CONCEPT IN DENMARK

(The advertising campaigns for home video can be divided into 4 periods according to time as follows:

- PERIOD 1: Pre-introduction (1970-1980), No mass appeal, expensive equipment, little movie software
- PERIOD 2: Re-introduction (October 1980-fall 1981), Introduction of hardware as a new mass medium
- PERIOD 3: Introduction of Video Software (Winter 1981- 1982), Ready made entertainment for home video
- PERIOD 4: New systems, New technology (1982-present), lower cost units

the process by which the acceptance of an innovation (e.g., home video) is spread by communication channels (e.g., mass media, salespeople, informal discussion) to members of a social system (e.g., Danes) over a period of time. Each element in this process can be examined to understand the nature of the video innovation. The section below provides a classical treatment of each of these elements in terms of the Danish society as a market.

The Home Video Technology as an Innovation

Categorizing the newness of an innovation like the video often times is difficult. Using a product oriented perspective, the video technology can be regarded as a dynamically continuous innovation. In effect, it combined features of the super 8 home movie innovation with the television. To most Danish consumers, the video represented an extension of the television. The dominant brand was the VHS, Betamax was the next preferred and the V2000 was the least preferred system. The three different systems were not software compatible. See Appendix 1 for a description of each system.

Product Characteristics of the Video

As a new product, the video was not received enthusiastically by Danish consumers. The factors that retarded the diffusion of the video can best be understood by focussing on five factors or product characteristics as identified by Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) and examined in other studies (Shiffman 1972, Ostlund 1975).

Relative Advantage. The video's relative advantage was its superiority over dependence on main TV programming. Because Denmark has only one TV network which is state controlled and about 60% of Danish households have access to two Swedish TV networks or two West German networks (also state controlled), Danish viewers often have little choice in their selection of programs. Hence, the home video offered a unique advantage to most households.

Compatibility. The suitability of the video to the Danish mentality and way of life is a debatable point. Many households had only black and white TV sets when the video was first introduced in the mid 1970's. Color sets were becoming more popular at the time the video technology was first being promoted to the household. Furthermore, Danes do not regard TV watching as a productive way of spending one's time. An average Dane in 1981 and 1982, for example, spent one hour and 17 minutes per day in front of the TV. (Note that a typical American household spends almost 7 hours per day watching TV). Video offered a way for the household to select the most interesting movies for entertainment rather than being at the mercy of state programming. Nonetheless, the video was simply not viewed as a necessary product when first introduced.

Complexity. The video technology was easy to use and understand. Some Danish households, however, were concerned about access to video software if they purchased a unit. The infrastructure of video film supply shops was still undeveloped. As time unfolded, more shops sprang up which lessened the

complexity barrier. Most of these shops were organized into a voluntary system that pledged to observe specific rules such as the refusal to sell or rent sex movies to children. The fact that three video systems were available also created some confusion in the potential buyer's mind. Risk, therefore, was perceived (Donnelly and Etzel 1973, Sheth 1968, Popielarz 1967).

Trialability. Since Danish consumers could witness the operation of the device before purchasing it, they could easily try the product. Some stores even elected to offer an 8 day money back guarantee if the buyer was dissatisfied. Hence, this factor was not a barrier to adoption.

Observability. Like trialability, the Danish consumer could observe the operation of this device in a store or even in a friend's home. The product's benefits and attributes were easily conveyed to interested potential buyers.

The Danish Social System

Trying to qualify the aspects of a social system requires a cultural anthropological investigation. There are some basic aspects, however, that can be identified. Unlike Americans, Danish consumers have less fascination with novelty. Danish consumers are not in a continual search for the latest gadget or novelty introduced on the market. Another important factor is that Danish households do not have a high degree of discretionary income. Because tax rates can sometimes exceed 75% while 50% is the typical bracket for most individuals, less money is available for consumption of luxury products such as the video. As in most introduction periods of a new product, the early buyers of the home video in Denmark were upscale consumers (Feldman 1975, Pessemier, Burger and Tigert 1967, Taylor 1977, Robertson 1967). It was in this climate that business had to operate when first introducing the video technology to Danish households. The receptivity of the household to the home video technology was subject to change, however.

As the cost of the home video technology declined, more households could afford such an innovation. Mass advertising campaigns promoted different themes to the consumer during the early 1980's. The paper now turns to the advertising approaches used to position the video. It will become clear that these advertisements were intended to change the prevailing attitudes of the market and make them more congruent with the home video technology.

Methodology

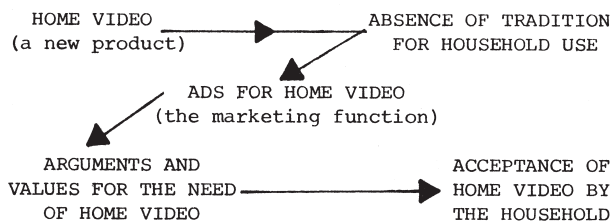
Advertisements for home video were selected from Danish newspapers, magazines and special publications mailed or given to brand dealers. The advertisements were collected from the period October 1980 to December 1982. This 15 month period represents the greatest sales volume of purchases for the home video by households. Advertisements were grouped into two categories: 1) private video-recording by the household (these ads illustrated recording, use of the video camera, and editing) and 2) use of the home video for watching movies (these ads showed the recording of

movies from TV and renting films). In general the first category of advertisements featured an active user of the product in contrast to the second category which depicted the user as a passive user of the home video unit.

The advertisements were content analyzed to detect the intended themes as expressed by ideologies, value systems, and fantasies. The metamorphosis of these themes were examined over the period selected for analysis. In effect, the analysis tried to identify the changing communication strategies of the dealers as the product diffused through society.

The content analysis approach used in this study may look peculiar and different to the way content analysis is practised in the U.S. and in advertising research. The content analysis method used here is qualitatively oriented in the tradition of German, English and Scandinavian theoretical inquiry. Such inquiry is based on qualitative techniques of phenomenology, structuralism, linguistics, and psychological theories and methods. This European tradition focusses on subjective interpretation of the content as a method for understanding a "text" (e.g., an advertisement, a TV program) in its social, economic and historical context. The conventional approach used in the U.S. is a positivistic and "neutral" content analysis. The results of such studies are often only descriptive and essentially take an inventory of preestablished coding categories. The qualitative analysis in the European approach examines how manifest and latent arguments and values create associations between the product and socio-cultural characteristics of contemporary society. This approach is often used to explain the socialization of the recipients of these advertisements (i.e., viewers) according to their subjective experience.

This kind of selective analysis is particularly suitable for analyzing new products in society. It can explain how argumentation and value systems are developed by business and society to encourage the adoption of the product and hence its diffusion. In the case of the home video, the reception situation is characterized by the following:



RESULTS OF THE CONTENT ANALYSIS

The advertisements were typified into four themes representing the main argumentation (i.e., the manifest level of the themes in the advertisement). These manifest themes are as follows:

- 1) Video as an alternative to TV
- 2) Video as a new category of entertainment
- 3) Price of the video unit and its accessories (e.g., software)
- 4) Technological developments (i.e., new models)

The first category of advertisements were mainly used in the introduction period from the fall 1980 to the fall 1981. It was necessary to draw consumers' attention away from TV and to home video. However, the use of video was at the same time dependent on TV. The home video could be used for recording TV programs for later use. The second category of themes belongs to the period where the software market became an organized infrastructure. This was during the period winter 1981 to summer 1982. During this time, the dealers were able to promise consumers something special for home video in terms of the many American films that were available on video but could not be seen on TV.

The third and fourth categories occurred from fall 1982 to the present. An oversupply of video recorders for the market generated falling prices and aggressive competition between brands. Nonetheless, new models were continuing to appear encompassing the latest technological advances (e.g., more recording time, finger-touch controls, and remote control).

Of these four categories of manifest themes in advertisements, category one and two focussed on emotional aspects about the new video technology. A socio-cultural code was employed to tell the consumers something about how to apply or misuse their leisure time by watching video versus TV programming. Advertisements reflecting categories three and four emphasized economic and technological aspects about the new media. Hard facts and scientific evidence became part of the code in the advertising messages.

Latent Themes

Manifest themes were only one component in the video ads. Viewers of the advertisements also perceived other more subtle messages. These messages, referred to as latent themes, require the selective perception of the viewer. Hence, the receiver may perceive other underlying meaning between the text and picture which may not always be intended by the advertiser. Different meanings will be decoded dependent on individual factors of the perceiver such as age, sex, income and social background. Each receiver may discover slightly different meaning from the advertisement. Nonetheless, there are some common underlying themes dealing with a common socio-cultural code which describes a relationship among human beings. These meanings operate more at the latent level.

The latent themes were grouped into three categories as follows:

- 1) Slavery/freedom
- 2) Conflict/harmony
- 3) Boredom/excitement

The majority of advertisements used all three themes simultaneously while a minority of the ads used only one or two of the themes together. Each of the themes has substantial incidental meaning which must be viewed in the total context of the advertisement. Hence, it was too difficult to generalize about the incidental themes.

A main characteristic of these themes is the duality between negative and positive values. Slavery, conflict and boredom are used in advertisements characterizing the household situation

before it acquired home video. In contrast, freedom, harmony, and excitement were used to characterize the household after it acquired video.

The slavery/freedom theme relates to media consumption, that is people's bad conscience about watching too much TV. Examples of such a theme are: "Slave of TV? Sony Betamax gives you back the lost freedom" and "Sony Betamax gives you back time as you enjoyed before TV".

The conflict/harmony theme deals with realistic everyday problems that involve family confrontation over the choice of TV channels. Exemplars of this theme are found in the following advertising slogans: "The family does not have to collide because two TV channels do" and "Why program family life after TV programming". The underlying meaning in this theme is that TV causes problems but home video can resolve this dilemma and create harmony.

The boredom/excitement theme is a subtle criticism of Danish television as being boring and not entertaining. Video is shown in these advertisements as an "exciting alternative" giving the consumer a new kind of experience and entertainment. Slogans exemplifying this theme are: "Why does a Monday evening in front of the TV have to be boring" and "Go to the cinema tonight with the whole family". Since Monday evening is often dull for many households, these advertisements try to resolve this conflict by suggesting that the home video is equivalent to the cinema.

Conclusions

This analysis did not identify specific buyers of the home video recorder. Its contribution was to show that different levels of meaning are contained in the advertising messages about new products such as home video units. Consumers look at video advertisements in different contexts (e.g., family context, leisure context, entertainment context). The common values of harmony, freedom, and excitement dominated the thematic expressions of the advertisements introducing video to Denmark. These themes serve as appeals with which consumers can identify how to satisfy their needs by buying products.

Socio-cultural codes, therefore, are used by advertisers to introduce a new product to society. After using the same codes during the two year introduction process, the home video had become accepted by society and as a part of the media structure and every day life in Denmark. The advertisements of other new products should be explored in the same way.

Appendix 1

Home video tape systems

BETAMAX -- On the market in Japan and USA in 1975 and in Europe 1978.

VHS -- (Video Home System) Introduced at the same time as Betamax.

System -- Introduced in 1979. The cassette can be 2000 turned for long playtime.

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