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From 'Mobile' to 'Really Mobile': Mobile phones in Scandinavian Advertisements from the 1980s

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Abstract

The 1980s represented a new era in telecommunications with the development of first-generation mobile phone networks. During this decade, mobile phones were heavy and expensive, and mostly marketed for professional use. However, with the advent of more flexible pocket-size versions, the foundation of new meanings related to mobility emerged. This article focuses on cultural meanings and images of mobile phones in the 1980s as represented in advertising. Based on an analysis of functional, social and aesthetic aspects of mobile phone representations in a sample of Scandinavian advertisements from 1980 to 1989, the article identifies three key developments: 1) a displacement of the mobile phone from images of the Nordic landscape to unspecified, globalised contexts, 2) an emphasis on the importance of constant availability of the individual business consumer and ideas of freedom connected to this, and 3) an increased staging of the mobile phone as a fashionable media artefact.

Keywords

Mobile phone history; media culture; representation; advertising; 1980s

Introduction

Since the introduction of first-generation analogue mobile (or cellular) phones to the consumer market in the 1980s, mobile phones have become smaller and lighter and been provided with more and more communicative features. With the advent of digital mobile telephony in the beginning of the 1990s, mobile phones become more widespread. Studies have described new or altered cultures related to the use of mobile phones in everyday life, involving changed patterns of communication and social interaction with text and multimedia messaging, increased availability and opportunities to connect, coordination of everyday activities and ensuring security.[1] Compared with the shared fixed line phone in the home or in the streets, mobile phones have emerged as personal items to be carried along

everywhere, and the mobile phones are advertised with promises of a new sense of freedom. As noted by Lacohée, Wakeford, and Pearson: 'Much of the imagery and talk of the mobile telephone (particularly in early advertisements) reinforce the claim that it serves to free us from the need to be bound to a specific location.'[2] Accordingly, mobile phones are not merely functional artefacts offering consumers a range of services while being on the move, they are endowed with social and cultural meanings. In this connection, mobile phones have also become aesthetic artefacts. Consumption of mobile phones has been demonstrated to involve functional as well as aesthetic aspects connected to the advertising of mobile phones as markers of style, fashion and identity.[3]

While such developments are mainly associated with – and have been studied in relation to – the more widespread diffusion of mobile phones among private consumers beginning in the first part of the 1990s with digital second-generation mobile phone technology (2G),[4] this article will take a step further back in media history and examine how analogue first-generation (1G) mobile phones were introduced to consumers in advertising in the 1980s. At that time, mobile phones were usually installed in cars, they were expensive, and mostly marketed at business consumers.[5] The mobile phone was considered a status symbol and a privilege for the few.[6] However, during the 1980s, more flexible pocket-size mobile phones were also introduced in the market, thus laying the foundations for new or altered meanings related to 'being mobile'. Such meanings are important to consider as *preparing* discourses further evolving in the decade that follows with mobile phones increasingly playing a role in everyday life beyond business. Goggin states that the 1980s and 'the decisive shift to a stand-alone portable telephone in this decade of the first-generation analogue mobile phone provided the material basis for a set of new affordances and design features that are now regarded as standard for a cell phone.'[7] With that in mind, representations of early mobile phones in advertising offer a significant insight into the material and cultural provenance of meanings of mobility. Although historical accounts of mobile phones provide illustrative examples of advertisements during this period, studies of the cultural meanings of mobile phones based on systematic analyses of samples of advertisements or other media representations from the 1980s seem to be lacking. In considering how first-generation mobile phones were represented in advertising with regard to relations between functional, social and aesthetic aspects, this article aims to provide an empirical and analytical basis from which to, firstly, explore the cultural meanings of the new mobile phone technology and, secondly, to discuss how early mobile phone advertisements related to advertising and consumer culture in the 1980s.

Based on a sample of Scandinavian mobile phone advertisements from 1980 to 1989, the article is delimited to a Nordic context where the analogue cellular network NMT, the Nordic Mobile Telephone system, was deployed in the beginning of the 1980s in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland.[8] The approach of the study is text analytical and concerns the multimodal semiotic resources applied to represent mobile phones *as media* in advertising. The first-generation mobile phones are in this way examined through the lens of media representations,[9] considered as offering an insight into a popularised 'cellular imagination'.[10] The following will illustrate the procedure used for collecting material for a historical study of mobile phone representations in advertising. Next, the analytical approach will be outlined, followed by a presentation of the analytical findings in relation to three dominant meaning patterns identified in the sample of advertisements: 1) the Nordic and the global context, 2) understandings of availability and freedom, and 3) the staging of the mobile phone as a fashion item. Finally, the findings will be discussed in relation to trends in advertising and consumer culture in the 1980s.

Locating mobile phones in advertising: Collection of material for historical research

Finding mobile phone advertisements from the 1980s is not a straightforward matter. Advertisements of interest potentially exist in various media formats such as newspapers, magazines, or television programming, some of them available in public media archives including print, videotaped and/or digitised material. Moreover, dependent on media format, archives provide different search entries and categorisations, and advertising content is not always searchable per se. To decide where to find, how to find, and how to select material is therefore an important first step to take while balancing concerns of the research interest and the archival resources available. The materials found and selected thus form the basis of a particular construction of media and advertising history[11] – a history that may be told differently by involving alternative procedures of collection, such as materials from other archives, media contexts or by using other search strings. For this study, several archival approaches were tested prior to the chosen sampling procedure. Various magazines were screened for relevant material, and the advertising archive at the Royal Danish Library, which comprise Danish cinema advertisements (up to 1995) and television commercials (from 1988), was searched for mobile phone advertisements. Surprisingly, no cinema advertisements or television commercials from the 1980s were found. The lack of results may be due to shortcomings of the archive in relation to content available, categorisation and metadata, or

the possible fact that neither cinema nor television were much-used media for mobile phone advertising in Denmark in the 1980s.[12] As such, for the purpose of this study, magazine advertisements were selected as the primary 'cultural documents'[13] for exploring early mobile phone culture. Although the aim is to include a range of advertisements from different mobile phone manufacturers and providers (e.g., phone companies or retailers), the objective of the analysis is not quantification. The analysis examines how mobile phones were represented in advertising and will not focus on the frequency of characteristics manifested in the collected material in quantitative or statistical terms. For this study, mobile phone advertisements are defined as advertisements in which mobile phones or mobile phone systems are promoted as products. This definition excludes advertisements in which mobile phones appear as props in advertisements for other products and advertisements merely promoting mobile phone accessories.

Mobile phone advertisements have been collected from the former inflight magazine *Scanorama* published by Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS). The magazine was selected because of its travelling (Scandinavian and international) audience potentially in need of a mobile phone.[14] Advertisements displayed in *Scanorama* were collected by manually looking over copies available at the Royal Danish Library from 1980 to 1989. The magazines from which advertisements were collected include 76 out of 97 published issues from February 1980 to December-January 1989-1990 (see overview in Table 1).[15]

All in all, the sample consists of 44 unique mobile phone advertisements (doublets excluded) from mobile phone manufacturers and providers during the 1980s. In line with the language of the inflight magazine, all advertisements are in English.

Year	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Issues available	6	10	10	10	8	5	10	0	10	7
Issues not available	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	10	0	3
Mobile phone advertisements found	1	5	5(6)	2	3	4(3)	7(5)	-	13(6)	4(11)

Table 1. Overview of available issues of Scanorama and the distribution of the collected mobile phone advertisements (doublets in brackets).

Representations of mobile phones: Analytical approach

The collected advertisements are considered as multimodal representations of mobile phone culture in the 1980s. The approach is text analytical[16] and explorative and merely concerned with mobile phone culture as it appears through advertising by means of verbal and visual semiotic resources (images, graphics, and written texts). Semiotic resources are defined broadly by van Leeuwen as 'signifiers, observable actions and objects that have been drawn into the domain of social communication' and that have meaning potentials.[17] Such meaning potentials are shaped historically by past uses of the resource but are also context-dependent and connected to genre (e.g., conventions in advertising). The analysis will focus on the semiotic resources used to communicate three interrelated aspects of the mobile phone advertisements:

1) Functional aspects of the mobile phones as material media artefacts. As noted by Goggin, '[t]he materiality of the mobile phone is very important to how it is understood and how it bears, marks and is grasped by culture'.[18] Inspired by Brügger's description of 'media variables',[19] the analysis concentrates on expressions of variables such as matter (e.g., weight), time, space, speed, accessibility, handiness, and ease of use associated with the mobile phones in the advertisements.

2) Social aspects connected to relations between the products (mobile phones), persons and settings. Drawing on Leiss et al.'s historical study of advertising formats in *Social Communication in Advertising,*[20] the analysis examines meanings ascribed to mobile phones by the persons represented in the advertisements (e.g., are persons shown handling the mobile phone or not), and by the staging of mobile phones in particular settings (e.g., are the mobiles phones located in indoor or outdoor settings; are the mobile phones illustrated in user contexts related to work or leisure, or in abstracts settings). The presence of other significant objects (props) is also noted.

3) Aesthetic aspects related to the staging of mobile phones, including written descriptions of sensory qualities (e.g., 'elegant'), visual techniques of 'embellishment' or 'photogenia'[21] such as light, colours, perspective (angle) and distance (e.g., close-ups)[22] as well as the creation of 'storyworlds'[23] with characters and events.

While the first two aspects mainly concern *what* is represented in the advertisements, the third aspect addresses *how* functional and social aspects of the mobile phones are communicated or narrated. Thus, the three aspects are closely connected. Together the three aspects provide an analytical framework to identify significant ways of representing the mobile phone. Recurrent (as well as less dominant)

meaning patterns are identified across the material collected by comparing the advertisements and the meaning potentials connected to the applied semiotic resources. Hence, the analysis will not provide an exhaustive analysis of each advertisement, but will search for meaning patterns across the functional, social and aesthetic aspects of the mobile phone representations. The following presents the findings of the analysis in relation to three overall meaning patterns identified in the material collected.

Mobile phones in Scandinavian advertisements from the 1980s: Findings

The first mobile phone advertisement in the collected material appears in December 1980. The advertisement is from Mobira, a joint venture between Nokia and Salora, which was later taken over entirely by Nokia.[24] The advertisement introduces the Salora mobile phone and explains the Nordic Mobile Telephone system (NMT), which was introduced in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark at the beginning of the 1980s. As will be demonstrated below, the collected advertisements are aimed primarily at a business segment, possibly reflecting the audience of the inflight magazine with content combining travel and business. The material collected includes advertisements from Mobira, Siemens, ap-Nordic Mobile Telephone, Panasonic, Ericsson, NEC, Motorola, Dancall, ap radiotelefon, Nokia-Mobira, Simonsen, Philips, and Technophone. The advertisements will be referred to in brackets by indicating the company name and the issue/year in which they were published in *Scanorama*. In this way the underlying data of the findings below are documented.

The following outlines the different ways of representing the mobile phones, highlighting three overriding meaning patterns in the collected advertisements. The first meaning pattern, *the Nordic and the global context*, concerns where to use the mobile phone; the second, *availability and 'professional freedom'*, focuses on the values and social implications for the business consumer; and the third, *the staging of the mobile phone as a fashion item*, considers aesthetic aspects related to the representations of mobile phones.

The Nordic and the global context

The mobile phone advertisements in *Scanorama* in the 1980s are characterised by rather comprehensive copies explaining the functions of the mobile phone, its way of operating and the system behind it. The NMT network operating in Nordic countries at that time appears in the early advertisements presented as 'the most advanced in the world'. The advertisements also comprise one

or more images, mostly photographs, in which the mobile phone is illustrated either in isolation (sometimes with a hand holding it) or with people in various user settings.

The images in the advertisements show that the first mobile phones are big and work with a unit (a box).[25] The mobile phones are presented in close-ups with the display and keys clearly visible, thus providing a high level of information about the product and how to operate it. In earlier advertisements in particular, the mobile phone is compared to the fixed line phone, with statements such as it 'is as simple as if you were using your home telephone' (Mobira, 5/1981) and it 'does everything an ordinary telephone will do – plus a whole lot more' (ap-Nordic Mobile Telephone, 10/1981). By emphasising the connection to an older and well-known media technology in the existing 'media matrix',[26] the comprehension and appropriation of the new mobile phone is advanced. However, the collected advertisements also include examples presupposing a 'model reader'[27] with a certain knowledge of mobile phones. This is evident in phrases such as 'no need to know your location' (Mobira, 5/1981) and 'without irritating waiting periods' (Siemens, 6/1981), hereby implying a shared and common user experience with earlier mobile radio systems,[28] and, more explicitly, referring to a mobile phone model which 'is probably well-known to you' (NEC, 9/1985).

A recurrent message of the advertisements is the emphasis on *where* to use the mobile phone. Most advertisements mention or show a car,[29] with images of the mobile phone located near a car or installed and used by a person in a car while driving. Other settings for mobile phone use include boats and Scandinavian summer cottages, with a sales argument of how easy it is to move and reinstall the unit from one place to another, or to bring with you in 'a "porta-phone" case' with a battery (ap-Nordic Mobile Phone, 12-1/1981-82). Visually, such claims are backed up by pictures of mobile phones used by people on boats (Siemens, 12-1/1981-82; ap-Nordic Mobile Telephone, 12-1/1981-82) or carried over the shoulder in a 'strong carrying case' by a man (in a Nordic sweater) boarding a sailboat (Panasonic, 7-8/1982). In this context, several early advertisements highlight mobile phone use in an outdoor environment. The mobile phone is articulated as part of an 'outdoor communications system', and the mobile is 'designed not only to withstand rough treatment, but our severe Nordic climate as well' (Mobira, 12-1/1980-81). Ideas of the Nordic landscape are also expressed in context descriptions such as 'houses on lonely islands, faraway construction sites or scientist campers in the wild' (ap-Nordic Mobile Telephone, 10/1981) and in pictures showing rough weather at sea and camping in a tent in the snow (ap-Nordic Mobile Telephone, 12-1/1981-82). Mobile phone use is thus connected to meaning potentials of Nordic outdoor settings characterised

by isolated and rough places difficult to reach, hereby also 'transferring' meanings to the mobile phone system as 'tough'.

Over time, more unspecified or abstract formulations of where to use the mobile phone appear. As well as featuring specific places, which in later advertisements also include hotel rooms and restaurants, mobile phones are described as media to be used 'wherever you go' (NEC, 9/1985; Nokia-Mobira, 11/1986) or 'wherever you are' (Ericsson, 2/1988). Following the development of lighter and smaller (and later pocket-size) phones, mobility is described in terms of degrees of mobility. An advertisement even suggests that 'a mobile telephone should be mobile', i.e., 'genuinely portable' (NEC, 2/1984), and, alluding to another popular mobile medium at that time, the Walkman,[30] a mobile phone named 'TALKMAN' is described as a 'go-anywhere phone (...) one that is REALLY mobile' (Mobira, 6/1984). Concurrently, the collected advertisements also tend to move from a Nordic to an international context, emphasising the opportunity to connect with international telephone networks and to 'talk to the world' (Mobira, 6/1984) and 'phone anywhere in the world' (Ericsson, 3/1986). A pocket-size mobile phone is described as a 'take-along-phone with worldwide reach' (Ericsson, 12-1/1988-89) that 'gives you a lifeline to the whole world' (Ericsson, 2/1989). An increasingly globalised world is in the advertisements thus clearly linked to developments within mobile media technology.

The international reach represented in the advertisements also concerns the telecommunications companies and how they position themselves as providers of products and solutions on a global market.[31] Cities and places around the world in which telecommunications systems are implemented are exemplified (Ericsson, 9/1985; 3/1986; 5/1986), and the international perspective is accompanied by pictures of illuminated cityscapes at night with skyscrapers (NEC, 9/1985; Ericsson, 5/1986; 2/1988), pictures of flags and landmarks from different countries (Technophone, 9/1988; 3/1989),[32] and graphic depictions of the globe (NEC, 11/1986; Nokia-Mobira, 9/1988). It is also significant that the mobile phone is represented as part of the telecommunications business in general. Images of mobile phones are rhetorically juxtaposed[33] with pictures of telefax machines, personal computers, satellites, and other electronic equipment (NEC, 7-8/1986; 11/1986), hence indicating a connection. In this respect, the advertisements also reflect more general considerations on what communication is and how it is affected by advances in telecommunications. Communication is described in abstract terms as 'a bridge between people' facilitated by technology when distance is an obstacle (NEC, 12-1/1988-89) – a description later reflected in Nokia's slogan

'Connecting people'. Similarly, images of city environments with blurred rays of light (as if photographed with long exposure time) exemplifies 'photogenia'[34] as abstract visual representations connoting connection and communication networks (NEC, 9/1985; Ericsson, 3/1986). A changed relation between the local and the global context is also articulated as the world coming closer: 'Around the corner... or around the world. (...) With today's modern communications, time, distance and borders just melt away in a matter of seconds' (NEC, 11/1986). Globalisation is thus closely linked to the increased ease of connecting across borders and telecommunications systems and goes hand in hand with an urban aesthetics with light and electric signs.

Availability and 'professional freedom'

In the global and more connected world represented in the advertisements, the individual mobile phone user is predominantly portrayed as a businessman on the move. This is evident in the name of the mobile phone 'Cityman' (Nokia-Mobira, 5/1988), which links mobile telephony with life in the city. The people depicted in the advertisements are mostly men[35] dressed in (work) suits, but examples of more relaxed or practical clothing are also found (e.g., sweatshirts and sportswear). Time and space relations are emphasised in portrayals of people who are busy and who need to be available everywhere and at any time. Illustrated by a picture of a businessman in a hurry reaching for a phone held by a chauffeur, an advertisement states: 'To reach or be reached quickly, simply and effectively is important and in some situations decisive' (Panasonic, 10/1982). The importance of being available and taking action on business matters is also highlighted in leisure contexts. In an advertisement displaying a picture of a city skyline next to a picture of a man on a golf course, the copy explains how to combine leisure activities and work: 'There's no need to miss an important order just because you allow yourself that break you need so badly', because the mobile phone 'ensures that you receive the decisive calls – even *after* you have left your office' (Ericsson, 11/1982). Likewise, in an advertisement displaying a mobile phone on a tennis court surrounded by tennis rackets and tennis balls, the blurred boundaries between leisure and work shows in the copy accentuating the importance of being available as businessman and decision-maker in an accelerating world: 'You live in an age of fast decisions. Words are transformed quickly into action. If you're available, you can be in on that big decision' (NEC, 6/1986). Availability at work is thus represented as the main reason for having a mobile phone, but family is also mentioned in an advertisement describing the mobile phone as 'the only way for you to "get caught" by your organisation, clients, family or anybody else who wants you'

(Mobira, 6/1984). Availability is further linked to freedom and independence. In relation to work, freedom is articulated as 'a new kind of professional freedom' (Nokia-Mobira, 11/1986), and mobile communication products are claimed to 'give you greater independence and greater freedom of movement' (Nokia-Mobira, 4/1988). Time is also articulated in representations of the mobile phone as a means to avoid time wasting. The mobile phone is stated as facilitating 'Management by walking around' (Ericsson, 12-1/1988-89) as well as 'Front seat management' (Ericsson, 3/1989) – i.e., management practices that allow the travelling businessman to begin work, and thus 'make good use of that lost time in the taxi or at the airport' (Ericsson, 12-1/1988-89). The formulated practices of the new 'mobile workers'[36] are demonstrated by pictures of a businessman walking and driving while in contact with a man talking on a fixed line phone from an office. The contact is illustrated by red lines connecting the phones in the pictures, and the name of the mobile phone, 'HotLine', written in a red font, emphasises the importance of being constantly available when solutions are needed. 'Hotline' indicates a 'suggestive name' defined by Danesi as names 'that connect the brand to certain lifestyles through implication'.[37] Accordingly, constant availability by the mobile phone is suggested a part of the lifestyle of the businessman – a lifestyle here represented as desirable.

The staging of the mobile phone as a fashion item
The 'HotLine' mobile phone appears in several advertisements in the material collected, both with a unit and as pocket-size. As well as the advertisements introducing the concept of time management using a mobile phone, as shown above, the collected material includes earlier advertisements featuring the fictitious character Harry as part of a 'storyworld'.[38] Here, Harry is represented as an agent-like character wearing a trench coat and a hat so that only part of his face is visible. Harry is pictured working at night in various settings including illuminated cities (Ericsson, 2/1988; 3/1988), a dark hotel room with a neon sign of a bar outside the window (Ericsson, 4/1988) and the desert (Ericsson, 9/1988). It appears that Harry's job involves using the 'HotLine' phone, which is shown with lit-up buttons in orange or red, thus emphasising the mobile phone as a fashionable (and 'hot') artefact and as an important medium (telephone line) for receiving and sending messages. The copies accompanying the pictures – with catchy titles such as 'Pockets full of miracles' (Ericsson, 2/1988) and 'Unexpected company' (Ericsson, 3/1988) – are split into two parts: A fictitious part telling a story about Harry and his special missions, and an informative part explaining the narrative while promoting the features and benefits of the mobile phone. Even though the fictitious and the

informative parts are clearly separated by means of typography and genre features, the fictitious universe is also drawn into reality by suggesting that the consumer contact 'a HotLine dealer and ask for a demonstration. Tell them Harry sent you!' (Ericsson, 3/1988). Arguably in this way attempting to establish a brand universe from which the 'HotLine' mobile phones are provided with a narrative identity, the Harry character is gradually replaced (or played down) by advertisements showing an unnamed businessman (however, not unlike Harry and also wearing a hat) performing 'management' tasks via the mobile phone (see above). And, in the last advertisement in the material collected, 'HotLine' is articulated as a 'special brand of freedom' emphasising 'independence' and 'the freedom to be by yourself when you have some serious thinking to do' (Eriscsson, 10/1989), yet repeating significant aesthetic characteristics (in particular, colours and light) from the advertisements featuring Harry. The latest advertisement is illustrated by a large picture showing a view of a city at night and a smiling man in a casual outfit (and with a hat) talking on a 'HotLine' mobile phone with a matching 'HotLine' case over his shoulder. The phone's display and orange-red buttons light up, in this way visually rhyming the colours of the lights in the nearby city. Aesthetically, the mobile phone mirrors the scenery of the city, hence suggesting a symbolic connection.

The aesthetic staging of the mobile phone is expressed most clearly in the 'HotLine' stories featuring Harry, in which the mobile phone is narrativised. The mobile phone is endowed with aesthetic qualities fitting into the setting of the pulsating city flooded with light and neon signs. However, emphasis on aesthetic qualities is also evident earlier in the collected material. Along with the practical descriptions of material and functional design aspects such as weight, size, and handiness, the design of the mobile phone is also described as 'attractively elegant' (Siemens, 6/1981). In images of the mobile phone, lighting gives the advertised product a sense of exclusivity (Panasonic, 2/1982; Mobira, 6/1984; Nokia-Mobira, 11/1986). Likewise, the arrangement of the mobile phone on a table made of dark high-quality wood and juxtaposed with luxury items such as attaché cases in leather and a fountain pen (Philips, 9/1988) add meaning to the mobile phone as fashion item.[39] In this context, the mobile phone is also emphasised as 'the personal phone' comparable to the other personal items displayed (and mentioned) in the advertisement (e.g., 'the personal computer') (Philips, 9/1988). Moreover, the mobile phone is represented as an artefact worth closer examination and admiration. In a picture illustrating a 'New Mobira Talkman' (the name itself involving an aesthetic play with words calling for attention), a young man wearing sunglasses is seen looking intensely at a mobile phone, which is lit up by the sun's rays breaking through the clouds in

the background. Although the copy points to the young man's intense observation related to product development and innovation, 'We looked at it from every angle, and decided to give it a face-lift' (Nokia-Mobira, 11/1986), the sun's rays add a sense of something extraordinary to the mobile phone on display. The aesthetic staging plays on feelings and desire, hence suggesting the mobile phone as a design artefact to acquire not only based on rational but also on emotional criteria.

First-generation mobile phones' history through the lens of advertising: Discussion

In *Social Communication in Advertising*, Leiss et al. identify five 'cultural frames' reflecting significant characteristics of advertising and consumer culture in given time periods.[40] To each cultural frame, dating from 1890 to the present, prototypical advertising formats are outlined: 1) the 'product-information format' from about 1890, 2) the 'product-image format' from about 1925, 3) 'the personalised format' from about 1945, 4) the 'lifestyle format' from about 1965, and 5) beginning around 1990, 'demassifying' advertising formats in which products and brands are offered as props in the individual's 'mise-en-scène'.[41] Although characterising specific periods in advertising history, the formats continue to exist side by side or mixed with new formats. These formats will now provide the backdrop of a discussion of the analysed mobile phone advertisements in relation to advertising and consumer culture in the 1980s – a period characterised by the lifestyle format, but on the threshold of a new cultural frame in which aesthetics become a means of differentiation.

In the fictionalised 'HotLine' advertisements from the late 1980s, the narrative and aesthetic staging of the mobile phone in urban settings is first and foremost a way to create product and brand identity. The mobile phone is provided with a distinctive and recognisable name, and the stories of Harry add meaning to the product by drawing on plotting in fiction genres. While the consumer may be inspired to consider the 'HotLine' mobile phone as a prop in his own 'mise-en-scène',[42] late 20th century 'demassifying' culture seems only tentatively reflected in these examples. Instead, lifestyle aspects related to the stereotype of the travelling businessman – as emphasised in other 'HotLine' advertisements – seem more prevailing. The aesthetic staging of mobile phones as attractive or extraordinary by means of, for instance, lighting and colours, adds symbolic meaning to the product and serves to create images of the mobile phone's cultural values in the life of the businessman. The 'allusion to consumption style',[43] typical of the lifestyle advertising format, appear to be prevailing in the collected advertisements. Availability anywhere and anytime is

represented as an important need associated with the lifestyle of the businessman working in a globalised world.

However, a large part of the advertisements in the sample merely draw attention to functional aspects related to the mobile phone and the NMT system by means of informative copies and pictures of the mobile phone in isolation. Such characteristics point to central features of the 'product-information' format and rational marketing appeals.[44] Other advertisements include persons and settings that exemplify typical user situations. These advertisements are more image-oriented, suggesting the situated and symbolic context of the product characterising the 'product-image' format.[45] However, characteristics from both – or more – formats also appear in combination in the sample, such as integrated in the lifestyle format described above. The considerable emphasis on informative aspects may be due to the relatively early stage of the mobile phone as a product on the telecommunications market.[46] Thus, the aesthetic staging of the mobile phone cannot be considered as a more widespread trend in mobile phone advertising in the 1980s as such, but as a characteristic that turns up sporadically and becomes more distinct in the second half of the 1980s.

Compared with other advertisements in the inflight magazine at that time,[47] the highlighting of functional features also shows in relation to other technological artefacts such as copying machines or cameras, while the lifestyle-oriented format is exemplified in relation to product categories such as watches, perfume and alcohol. Yet, unlike the aesthetic staging of the mobile phone, images of personal accessories such as watches and perfume seem to be connected to a higher degree of 'sensory modality' and 'effect of pleasure'[48] represented by hyper-realistic articulations of colour, light and shadow. By comparison, the aesthetic staging of the mobile phone is more toned down and closely connected to functional features. However, considering the appeals to the consumer shaped by the semiotic resources in the mobile phone advertisements, there are signs of movements from what in marketing models[49] have been described as informational, rational or 'thinking' appeals to more transformational appeals playing on feeling and imagination.

Conclusion

The history of first-generation mobile phone culture provided through the material collected from *Scanorama* is characterised by informative as well as symbolic and lifestyle-oriented representations of the mobile phone. The mobile phone is represented as an essential communication channel for the

businessman on the move and working in a global environment. In this context, the mobile phone is stated as erasing geographic distance and as a medium to 'talk to the world'. Increased mobility provided by the more easily portable and 'really mobile' mobile phones and the infrastructure supporting them is connected to values such as availability, freedom, and independence, yet mostly in a professional context. While emphasis on aesthetic qualities related to the mobile phone is sporadic, especially in the early 1980s, an aesthetic staging of the mobile phone is more prominent in the second half of the 1980s as a means of symbolising the mobile phone's connection to the modern city and to the lifestyle of the travelling businessman. Although the sample of advertisements analysed in this article cannot be considered as representative of first-generation mobile phone culture in general, not even in a Nordic context, the article sheds light on recurrent meaning patterns related to the mobile phone in the 1980s, which are further evolved in the decades that follow with the more widespread use of digital mobile phones in contexts beyond work and business.

Statement

Notes

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7.   Gerard Goggin, "Adapting the Mobile Phone: The iPhone and its Consumption," *Continuum* 23, no. 2 (2009): 231.

8.   Garcia-Swartz and Campbell-Kelly, *Cellular*, 51.

9.   Media representations form an important part of du Gay et al.'s pioneering study of the Walkman as cultural artefact, cf. Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay and Keith Negus, *Doing Cultural Studies. The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

10.   Rahul Mukherjee, "Imagining Cellular India. The Popular, the Infrastructural, and the National," in *Global Digital Cultures: Perspectives from South Asia*, eds. Aswin Punathambekar and Sriram Mohan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 79.

11.   Cf. Chris Wharton, *Advertising: Critical Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2014).

12.   It should be noted that commercials first appeared on national Danish television from 1988.

13.   Cf. John F. Sherry, "Advertising as Cultural System," in *Marketing and Semiotics. New Directions in the Study of Signs for Sale*, ed. Jean Umiker-Sebeok (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987), 441-461.

14.   Likewise, inflight magazines are used as source for the study of advertisements (from 2000 to 2001) in Elizabeth F. Churchill and Nina Wakeford, "Framing Mobile Collaborations and Mobile Technologies," in *Wireless World. Social and Interactional Aspects of the Mobile Age*, eds. Barry Brown, Nicola Green and Richard Harper (London: Springer, 2002), 154-179.

15. The following issues were not available to the researcher at the time of collection: 4/1984, 12-1/1984-85, 2/1985 to 6/1985, 2/1987 to 12-1/1987-88, 6/1989 to 9/1989. From 1981 to 1989, *Scanorama* was published with 10 issues a year, in 1980 only with 6 issues.

16. Text is here considered in a broad sense as multimodal text.

17. Theo van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics* (London: Routledge, 2005), 4.

18. Goggin, "Adapting the Mobile Phone," 232.

19. Niels Brügger, "Theoretical Reflections on Media and Media History," in *Media History. Theories, Methods, Analysis*, eds. Niels Brügger and Søren Kolstrup (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2002), 48 ff.

20. William Leiss, Stephen Kline, Sut Jhally, Jaqueline Botterill and Kyle Asquith, *Social Communication in Advertising* (New York: Routledge, 4th ed., 2018), 120 ff.

21. Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 23.

22. Theo van Leeuwen, "Semiotics and Iconography," in *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, eds. Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), 98.

23. Marie-Laure Ryan, "Story/Worlds/Media. Tuning the Instruments of a Media-Conscious Narratology," in eds. Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 29-45.

24. Goggin, *Cell Phone Culture*, 44; Garcia-Swartz and Campbell-Kelly, *Cellular*, 72.

25. Cf. Garcia-Swartz and Campbell-Kelly, *Cellular*, 80.

26. Brügger, "Theoretical Reflections on Media and Media History," 54.

27. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of the Text* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 7.

28. Garcia-Swartz and Campbell-Kelly, *Cellular*, 25 ff.; Ling, *The Mobile Connection*, 6 ff.

29. The sample includes 10 (out of 44) advertisements *not* mentioning or showing a car. These advertisements are published in the period from 1986 to 1989.

30. Cf. du Gay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies*; Jesper Verhoef, "The epitome of reprehensible individualism: The Dutch response to the Walkman, 1980–1995," *Convergence*, 28, no. 5 (2022): 1303–1319.

31. For an overview of mobile phone manufacturers and standards, see Garcia-Swartz and Campbell-Kelly, *Cellular*, 75 ff.

32. As an anticipation of future smartphones, an advertisement from Technophone (3/1989) includes pictures of mobile phones in which the forefronts are replaced by images of landmarks from places around the world (e.g., the Statue of Liberty in New York, Big Ben in London and the Sydney Opera House). Except from the antenna, the mobile phones bear a striking resemblance to modern smartphones.

33. Cf. Barbara J. Phillips, and Edward F. McQuarrie, "Beyond Visual Metaphor: A New Typology of Visual Rhetoric in Advertising," *Marketing Theory* 4, no. 1/2 (2004): 113-136.

34. Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, 23.

35. 3 out of 44 advertisements depict women, and only one woman is seen using a mobile phone. By comparison, men are represented in 31 of the advertisements collected. A similar finding is reported in Lacohée, Wakeford, and Pearson, "A Social History of the Mobile Telephone," 205.

36. Cf. Churchill, and Wakeford, "Framing Mobile Collaborations and Mobile Technologies," 154.

37. Marcel Danesi, "Semiotizing a product into a brand," *Social Semiotics* 23, no. 4 (2013): 467.

38. Cf. Ryan, "Story/Worlds/Media."

39. Cf. Katz, and Sugiyama, "Mobile Phones as Fashion Statements."

40. For a schematic overview, see Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, 15.

41. Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, 126 ff.

42. Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, 304.

43. Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, 146.

44. Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, 129 ff.

45. Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, 130 ff.

46. Cf. Giachetti and Marchi, "Evolution of Firms' Product Strategy over the Life Cycle of Technology-Based Industries," 1134.

47. Evaluated on the basis of the following sample of issues: *Scanorama* 12-1/1980-81; 9/1985; 10/1989.

48. Van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 170.

49. Cf. marketing models such as the FBC grid and the Rossiter-Percy grid, see Patrick De Pelsmacher, Maggie Geuens and Joeri Van den Bergh, *Marketing Communications: A European Perspective* (6. Ed.) (Harlow: Pearson, 2017).

Biography

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