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**International Marketing Report: IKEA in Sweden and South
Korea**

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1. Introduction

The concept of "democratic design" is something IKEA proud of, however, the company's concept doesn't travel well, and isn't identical from one country to another. Therefore, Sweden and South Korea present themselves as a good example for determining how much of their retail model can be transferred between countries. In Sweden, we see IKEA in its home-country setting, where familiarity of the brand name, access to stores, and circularity efforts, are all part of regular consumer behavior. On the other hand, in South Korea we test the same assumptions in a dense, digitally mature, convenience-sensitive environment. This report compares the two markets through PESTEL, a Hofstede-based cultural comparison, STP, and the 7Ps, then applies Porter's Generic Strategy to South Korea, evaluates ethics through a Sweden-focused lens, and closes with recommendations and a Gibbs-based reflective account (Baack et al., 2018; Czinkota and Ronkainen, 2013; IKEA Korea, 2026a; IKEA Sweden, 2026a; The Culture Factor, 2026).

2. Company Background

IKEA's vision is to provide a better everyday life for the many people, and their business idea is to deliver a vast array of affordable home furnishings, well-designed, functional and quality at prices that allow most people to purchase them. That mission-and-vision provides reasoning behind the brand combination of democratic design principles and flat-packed goods delivered with price reductions, self-service retailing, room set designs and a large product assortment including furniture, storage solutions, kitchen products, accessories, food service, delivery services and customer planning tools. Strategically speaking, IKEA is therefore not merely a discount retailer, but rather a scale brand focused on accessibility, design consistency and operational simplicity (IKEA, 2026; Ingka Group, 2026a; Baack et al., 2018).

Sweden serves as IKEA's reference point due to its status as both IKEA's original home-country and a mature national store and order-plan location network along with second-hand retail circularity initiative. South Korea presents an alternative but equally significant context since IKEA has progressed beyond the initial entry phase into a wider physical and digital presence with stores, planning studios and online shopping combined with city-oriented formats similar to those found in Gangdong. This background clarifies what follows: Sweden provides an unequivocally favorable base market for testing new concepts or products and strategies, whereas South Korea provides a more conditional favorable setting for implementing successful local adaptation in terms of convenience features, digital integration, compact living and proximity (IKEA Sweden, 2026a; IKEA Sweden, 2026b; IKEA Korea, 2026a; IKEA Korea, 2026b; IKEA Korea, 2026c).

3. Comparative Macro-Environment Analysis: PESTEL

3.0 PESTEL Definition and Use

The PESTEL framework identifies political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal factors influencing the attractiveness of a market and how a firm's strategy should be designed to execute effectively within these environments. It is being utilized as a way of determining if Sweden and South Korea are favorable or unfavorable to IKEA's value proposition. Since an identical low price and design formula may be successful in different ways due to differences in retail space, consumer expectations, and sustainability pressures between countries (Baack et al., 2018; Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2013; Doole & Lowe, 2012), the PESTEL framework is particularly useful.



Figure 1: PESTEL framework comparing IKEA's market conditions in Sweden and South Korea

Source: author's construction based on OECD (2024; 2025a; 2025b), IKEA Sweden (2026b), and IKEA Korea (2026a).

3.1 Political and Legal Forces

In terms of politics and law, Sweden represents a very stable institutional environment for IKEA, characterized by a robust set of consumer protections and an

emphasis on ensuring that business practices support circular economies and reduce their carbon footprint. The predictability afforded by such a system reduces the level of political risk faced by IKEA. However, as the Swedish government continues to emphasize sustainability-related issues through policy, there exists considerable scrutiny of IKEA's claims regarding sustainability and the operational decisions made in response to those claims. Similarly, South Korea provides IKEA with a relatively stable institutional environment. However, while sustainability issues represent a similar type of pressure as seen in Sweden, the focus in South Korea lies in the areas of advanced retail regulations, urbanization, and increasingly sophisticated digitally-enabled consumers. As such, IKEA must provide timely, transparent, and accurate communication through all relevant channels. From a governance perspective, both countries are favorable. However, while South Korea places a great deal of emphasis on providing fast and efficient services, Sweden emphasizes the importance of creating trust and establishing credibility (OECD, 2025b; OECD, 2024; Baack et al., 2018; Doole & Lowe, 2012).

3.2 Economic Forces

Economically, Sweden gives IKEA a mature, high-income base, but not a frictionless one. The OECD notes strong fundamentals alongside growth and housing pressures, suggesting a market where IKEA's affordability remains attractive even though expansion is less about new-category discovery and more about retaining relevance. South Korea is also affluent, yet housing patterns, trade exposure, and urban cost pressures create a market in which space efficiency and value-for-money are tightly linked. World Bank data sharpen that comparison: South Korea's economy is much larger in total GDP, but Sweden remains stronger on GDP per capita and GNI per capita, while inflation in both countries had eased to low single digits by 2024. For IKEA, both markets are economically viable, but South Korea puts more weight on proving practical value in compact homes rather than simply offering low prices in the abstract (OECD, 2025b; OECD, 2024; OECD, 2025a; World Bank, 2026a; World Bank, 2026b; World Bank, 2026c; World Bank, 2026d).

3.3 Social Forces

As mentioned previously, this comparison highlights many of the largest differences between the two countries in terms of how IKEA interacts with its target market. Specifically, IKEA sells products in Sweden among a population that has been conditioned to embrace minimalistic lifestyles, DIY habits, and the growing trend toward circular commerce. Consequently, there exists no stigma attached to buying second-hand furniture or returning products for reuse. Rather than viewing self-serve models negatively, Swedish consumers view them positively as environmentally responsible options. On the other hand, compact urban dwellings combined with the large number of apartments inhabited by young couples who research products online creates an environment in which convenience, planning support, and clarity of use in relation to available space are critical components of the perceived value offered by IKEA. There is nothing to indicate that South Korean consumers dislike IKEA's self-serve model; they simply expect additional assistance and clarity in identifying how to furnish rooms to maximize limited space (Luo & Sheng, 2023; Jin et al., 2025; OECD, 2025a; Ingka Group, 2023; IKEA Sweden, 2026b).

3.3.1 Comparative Hofstede Interpretation

The Hofstede comparison is a useful starting point, though not a complete explanation of behaviour. Sweden is more individualist and less hierarchy-oriented than South Korea, which fits an IKEA environment where customers browse independently, interpret room sets for their own lifestyle, and accept a stronger do-it-yourself role. South Korea, by contrast, is more collectivist, more uncertainty-sensitive, and more strongly long-term oriented, which helps explain why planning help, service reassurance, and practical-fit cues matter more there. For IKEA, the implication is not to abandon self-service in South Korea, but to reduce ambiguity around delivery, assembly, room suitability, and channel continuity. This cultural difference also affects price and promotion: in Sweden, value can often be inferred through familiarity and self-directed comparison, whereas in South Korea the same claim works better when it is tied to practical explanation and visible support for apartment-life decision making (The Culture Factor, 2026; IKEA Korea, 2026a; IKEA Korea, 2026c; Jin, Suh and Lee, 2025; Baack et al., 2018).

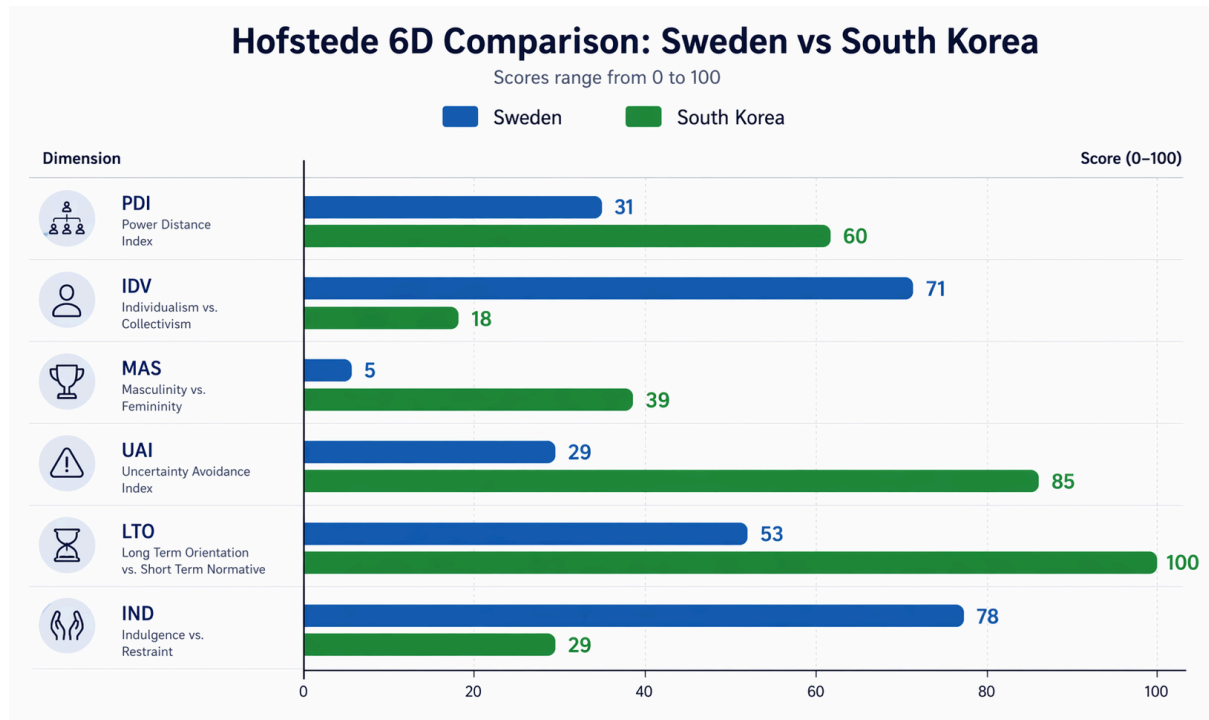


Figure 2: Hofstede-style comparison of Sweden and South Korea for IKEA consumer interpretation

Source: author's construction based on *The Culture Factor* (2026), *IKEA Korea* (2026a), and Jin, Suh and Lee (2025).

Culturally, Sweden is the more immediately favourable setting because IKEA's self-directed retail logic fits local expectations more naturally. South Korea is not culturally unfavourable, but it is only conditionally favourable: the brand works better there when cultural expectations are reinforced by stronger digital guidance, delivery clarity, and planning support rather than by product style alone (The Culture Factor, 2026; Zhang et al., 2024; Jin, Suh and Lee, 2025).

3.3.2 Advantages and Limitations of Hofstede

The main strength of Hofstede in this assignment is comparative discipline: it stops culture from becoming vague stereotype and connects value patterns to marketing implications such as navigation, service support, and price interpretation. Its main weakness, as McSweeney argues, is that national scores can become over-generalised if they are treated as fixed truths rather than broad tendencies. That critique matters in South Korea because urban retail behaviour is also shaped by omnichannel habits and city-living constraints that a country score alone cannot capture. Hofstede is therefore useful here only when triangulated with current retail

and consumer evidence (McSweeney, 2002; Luo and Sheng, 2023; Jin, Suh and Lee, 2025; Baack et al., 2018).

3.4 Technological Forces

Technology reinforces that difference. Sweden shows a mature omnichannel environment in which store formats, planning points, and circular services can complement one another without changing IKEA's core identity. South Korea, by contrast, is a retail setting where connectivity, channel coherence, and customer experience are central to brand evaluation, so digital touchpoints are part of the proposition itself. For IKEA, this makes South Korea especially sensitive to delivery clarity, planning interfaces, and consistent brand identity across online and offline channels (IKEA Sweden, 2026b; Ingka Group, 2026b; Zhang et al., 2024; Jin, Suh and Lee, 2025).

3.5 Environmental Forces

Environmental conditions favour IKEA in both countries because sustainability has become part of mainstream market expectation, yet the implications differ. In Sweden, circularity and reuse give IKEA a strong fit with public values, but they also make unsupported green claims more vulnerable to challenge. In South Korea, urban density raises attention around packaging, delivery, and the environmental cost of convenience. The result is a favourable but watchful environment in both markets: sustainability helps IKEA's positioning only when operational proof keeps pace with the message (IKEA, 2025; IKEA Global, 2026; Greenpeace International, 2024; OECD, 2025a).

3.6 PESTEL Favourability Summary

Table 1: PESTEL favourability summary for IKEA in Sweden and South Korea

PESTEL factor	Sweden	South Korea	Judgement for IKEA
Political and legal	Stable, predictable, high sustainability scrutiny	Stable, advanced, execution-sensitive	Favourable in both markets
Economic	Mature, affluent, slower-growth	Affluent, compact, strongly competitive	Favourable but more adaptation pressure in South Korea
Social	Circular-minded, DIY-familiar	Urban, convenience-led, digitally researched	More socially demanding in South Korea
Technological	Mature omnichannel support	Stronger digital intensity and channel expectations	South Korea requires sharper integration
Environmental	High fit with circularity, high scrutiny	Delivery and waste concerns in dense cities	Favourable but credibility-dependent

Source: adapted from OECD (2024; 2025a; 2025b), IKEA Sweden (2026b), IKEA Global (2026), Zhang et al. (2024) and Jin, Suh and Lee (2025).

Both countries offer institutional stability, sustainability pressure, and enough purchasing power to make IKEA's value proposition viable. The main difference is that Sweden offers home-market familiarity and stronger per-head purchasing power, while South Korea brings greater scale but more pressure around urban density, digital execution, and compact-space relevance. Overall, both markets are favourable, but Sweden is favourable because of legitimacy and maturity, whereas South Korea is favourable only when IKEA adapts its service architecture rather than assuming the home-market formula will transfer unchanged (OECD, 2024; OECD,

2025a; OECD, 2025b; Doole and Lowe, 2012; World Bank, 2026a; World Bank, 2026b).

4. STP and Positioning Analysis

4.1 Segmentation

It is necessary to take into account nationality, however, it will be insufficient alone. Effective segmentation internationally will be achieved by combining demographic, behavioral and lifestyle characteristics with country specific aspects of context, instead of choosing one over another. This has particular implications for IKEA as the company appeals to similar value-oriented households around the world and yet needs to apply different executions in each market. For example, family units, first time homeowners, and household upgrades with a focus on value, and environmentally conscious households are the primary segments of Swedish consumers. Young professionals who reside in apartments, compact dwelling size households, digitally engaged consumers and those who seek functionality and style at an entry level price point but do not enter the premium pricing tier are stronger segments for Korean consumers. International research provides evidence for this: cross-nationally transferable segments exist; however, they are limited unless the local housing structure and shopping behaviors are carefully evaluated (Wind & Douglas, 1972; Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002; Ko et al., 2007; IKEA Korea, 2026a; OECD, 2025a).

4.2 Targeting

Targeting generally follows the segment logic previously described; however, in terms of their bases it differs significantly between countries. In Sweden, there is a broad middle market in which IKEA can effectively target due to the strong recognition of the brand nationally and the extent of its national presence. Rather than establish credibility and legitimacy with its Swedish customers, the primary concern for IKEA in Sweden is maintaining relevance with them through circular practices and cost-effectiveness. In comparison, South Korea requires a far more conditional approach. Although broad targeting continues to be acceptable, the most attractive customers for IKEA in South Korea are urban households who prioritize space-saving storage solutions, planning assistance and convenience along with cost. These restrictions prevent IKEA from pursuing a niche marketing strategy;

however, these restrictions require selecting targets based upon living conditions and shopping effort rather than solely demographically (IKEA, 2026; IKEA Korea, 2026a; Zhang et al., 2024; Doole & Lowe, 2012) .

4.3 Positioning and Perceptual Explanation

In principle, IKEA's positioning is consistent in both Sweden and South Korea. However, in terms of emphasis the positioning differs. In Sweden, IKEA functions as a trusted and convenient standard solution for everyday furnishings for homes, supported by circular service options that enhance its continued relevance. In South Korea, the same value proposition must be tailored to meet the demands of urban practicality, compact living arrangements and seamless omnichannel support. Consequently, IKEA falls between the low-cost furniture providers and premium design retailers in terms of product offering—more style than low-priced offerings while less expensive than high-end brands (IKEA, 2026; IKEA Korea, 2026a; IKEA Korea, 2026c; IKEA Sweden, 2026b; Zhang et al., 2024; Jin, Suh and Lee, 2025).

Furthermore, in South Korea positioning must also mitigate perceived difficulty in addition to emphasizing style. If the brand is desirable but difficult to use or purchase then it may simply be viewed as desired rather than selected. Thus channel integration —planning support and clear delivery expectations must all become part of the total value proposition offered by IKEA (IKEA Korea, 2026a; Zhang et al., 2024; Jin, Suh and Lee, 2025; Doole & Lowe, 2012).

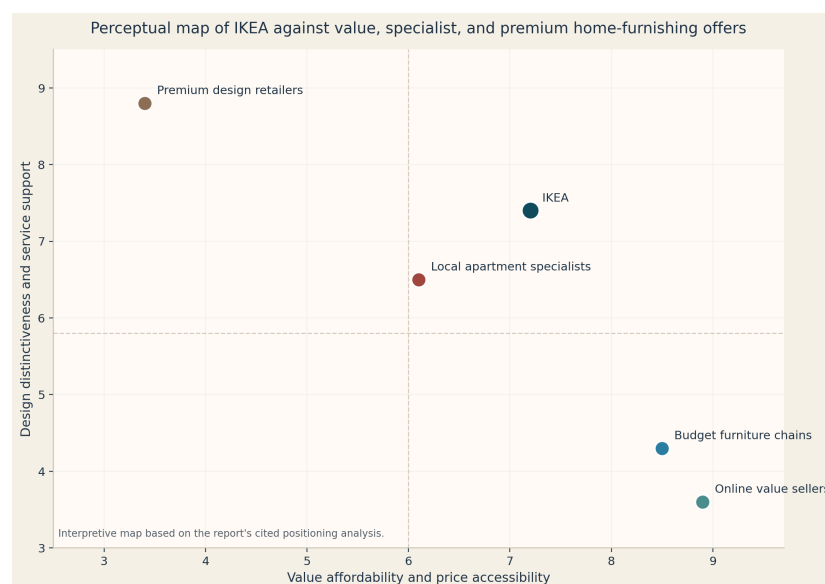


Figure 3: Perceptual map positioning IKEA against value, specialist, and premium home-furnishing competitors in Sweden and South Korea

Source: author's construction based on IKEA (2026), IKEA Korea (2026a), IKEA Korea (2026c), IKEA Sweden (2026b), Zhang et al. (2024), and Jin, Suh and Lee (2025).

5. Comparative International Marketing Mix (7Ps)

5.1 Standardised Brand Core Across Both Markets

In the first instance, one of the most obvious starting points is that IKEA wins globally based upon its standardized brand core, not by changing itself from country to country. This is evident throughout both Sweden and South Korea. Democratic Design, Low-Price Discipline, Self-Serve Experience, Room Set Inspiration, Family-Friendly Retail Identity – these elements have remained consistent across the world. However, this consistency is significant since International Marketing Theory provides warnings about overemphasizing adaptability and underestimating the importance of consistency. While there may be differences in the service and communication architecture required to facilitate the provision of a similar brand experience, the overall promise of the brand will remain the same. (Baack et al., 2018; Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2013; Doole & Lowe, 2012; IKEA, 2026)

5.2 Product

When considering product development, specific differences exist. While IKEA offers a very wide range of products across both countries — Living Room, Bedroom, Kitchen, Storage, Lighting, Textiles, Children's Products and Food — the same level of detail within each category does vary. Wardrobe Systems, Modular Storage Solutions, Kitchen Systems and Sofa Ranges provide the deeper levels of product differentiation. As an example, while IKEA in Sweden supports circular economy practices via second-hand sales and repeated purchasing habits for their consumers, in South Korea, they must focus on providing product configurations that better match small space living arrangements. (IKEA Sweden, 2026b; IKEA Korea, 2026a; IKEA Korea, 2026c; IKEA, 2026).

5.3 Price

While pricing continues to play a major role in both markets, what price represents varies. Since IKEA is already positioned at the lower end of the design spectrum in Sweden, price serves as an indicator of credibility for Swedish consumers. In contrast, in South Korea, price cannot be evaluated independently of additional fees

associated with delivery and planning services. Therefore, instead of focusing solely on price savings, in South Korea IKEA must develop clear bundles that demonstrate the total cost of ownership and emphasize convenience and delivery options. (Doole & Lowe, 2012; OECD, 2025b; OECD, 2025a; IKEA, 2026).

5.4 Place

Distribution channels/access points differ significantly between the two markets. With a mature distribution network in place in Sweden — including both online ordering and pick-up at designated locations — many Swedes can choose where and how to shop with IKEA. South Koreans, however, require easier access to IKEA locations and a more seamless shopping experience. Thus far, Gangdong represents a positive case study as it combines convenient transportation links to downtown Seoul with strong delivery capabilities and a location that speaks more directly to the nature of urban Korean living styles than a traditional large format store. (IKEA Sweden, 2026b; IKEA Korea, 2026a; IKEA Korea, 2026c; IKEA Korea, 2026a).

5.5 Promotion

Advertising/promotion should be viewed as a form of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), not simply a means of advertising. For Swedish consumers who view IKEA as an affordable option for everyday furniture purchases and as a sustainable option through circular reuse programs — IMC can build on existing perceptions of IKEA as a credible source of affordable quality furniture. On the other hand, in South Korea — due to the greater need to establish trust between consumer and retailer — IKEA must create a stronger emphasis on demonstrating how the company will assist consumers in finding furniture suitable for small apartments or rooms in urban settings and assist them in navigating the entire process from selection to delivery. In no sense do either of these represent fundamentally different brand personalities, but rather differing emphases regarding the messages being communicated. (Ingka Group, 2023; Luo & Sheng, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; IKEA Sweden, 2026b).

5.6 People

People/support personnel play somewhat different roles in the two countries. Because consumers in Sweden are accustomed to using IKEA stores as self-service facilities — Swedish employees function primarily as customer support personnel during non-routine interactions. In contrast — given higher digital expectations among consumers in South Korea — employee support becomes more integral to the brand promise as consumers seek help with planning and selecting items suitable for their homes. Similarly, while employees and planners in South Korea serve as important components of brand positioning and operational success — in Sweden employees reinforce a system that consumers are already comfortable utilizing.

5.7 Process

Processes illustrate the operational aspect of adapting to cultural and environmental factors. While Sweden can count on well-established routine patterns related to navigation through stores and collecting merchandise — in South Korea consumers expect smoother processes around planning selections prior to visiting stores and ensuring timely deliveries after they have made their purchases. As an example of how IKEA's process advantage in Korea relies not only on having sufficient inventory and competitive prices — but also on whether or not planning assistance provided by retailers is reliable from initial contact until final delivery — the successful implementation of online ordering platforms and mobile apps that allow consumers to track the status of their orders will prove critical to building long-term relationships with consumers. (IKEA Korea, 2026a; Zhang et al., 2024; Jin et al., 2025; Luo & Sheng, 2023).

5.8 Physical Evidence

Physical evidence varies as well. Familiar room displays and second-hand sale options along with other circular activities used by IKEA in Sweden serve as visual representations of a developed IKEA System. In South Korea — tangible evidence consists not only of the store environment itself — but also accessibility for urban dwellers including planning studio locations — delivery signage — and cohesiveness

between digital and in-store branding experiences. Consumers evaluate the overall South Korean IKEA offering based not only on the availability of products — but also on visible signs indicating that IKEA recognizes compact urban lifestyles — not simply visually appealing product displays (IKEA Sweden, 2026b; Ingka Group, 2023; IKEA Korea, 2026a; IKEA Korea, 2026c).

5.9 Similarities and Differences Summary

Table 2: 7Ps comparison summary for IKEA in Sweden and South Korea

Dimension	Sweden	South Korea	Adaptation judgement
Brand core	Democratic design and affordability	Democratic design and affordability	Standardised
Product cues	Broad established range with circular options	Stronger compact-living and apartment-use cues	Adapted in presentation
Place and process	Mature store network and familiar self-service	Store network plus stronger planning and delivery support	Adapted in service architecture
Promotion	Everyday life and circularity credibility	Urban practicality and convenience messaging	Adapted in message emphasis
Physical evidence	Familiar large-format IKEA environment	More importance on access, guidance, and channel continuity	Adapted in experience design

Source: adapted from IKEA Sweden (2026a; 2026b), IKEA Korea (2026a; 2026b; 2026c), Zhang et al. (2024) and Jin, Suh and Lee (2025).

The main similarity is that both markets preserve IKEA's democratic-design identity, low-price discipline, and self-service logic. The main differences are operational: Sweden works through maturity and familiarity, whereas South Korea depends more heavily on compact-living relevance, urban access, and service support. IKEA therefore standardises its philosophy but adapts the seven elements most visibly

where customer effort is highest (Doole and Lowe, 2012; Zhang et al., 2024; Jin, Suh and Lee, 2025; IKEA Sweden, 2026a; IKEA Korea, 2026a).

6. Directional Development Strategy in South Korea: Porter's Generic Strategy

6.1 Framework Definition and Rationale

Porter's Generic Strategies describe whether a firm uses a cost-leadership strategy, a differentiation strategy or a focus strategy in order to achieve a competitive advantage. Given the pressures from competitors and customers in South Korea to offer an affordable product, yet still be able to differentiate from other retailers using an attractive and convenient design while being applicable to their local market, Porter's generic strategies are especially helpful here. The central strategic issue is not simply whether IKEA can provide a cheaper product than others, but if it can maintain a broad-based value proposition while avoiding becoming involved in the type of uncompetitive pricing seen with many other retailers (Islami et al., 2020; Hendry, 1990).

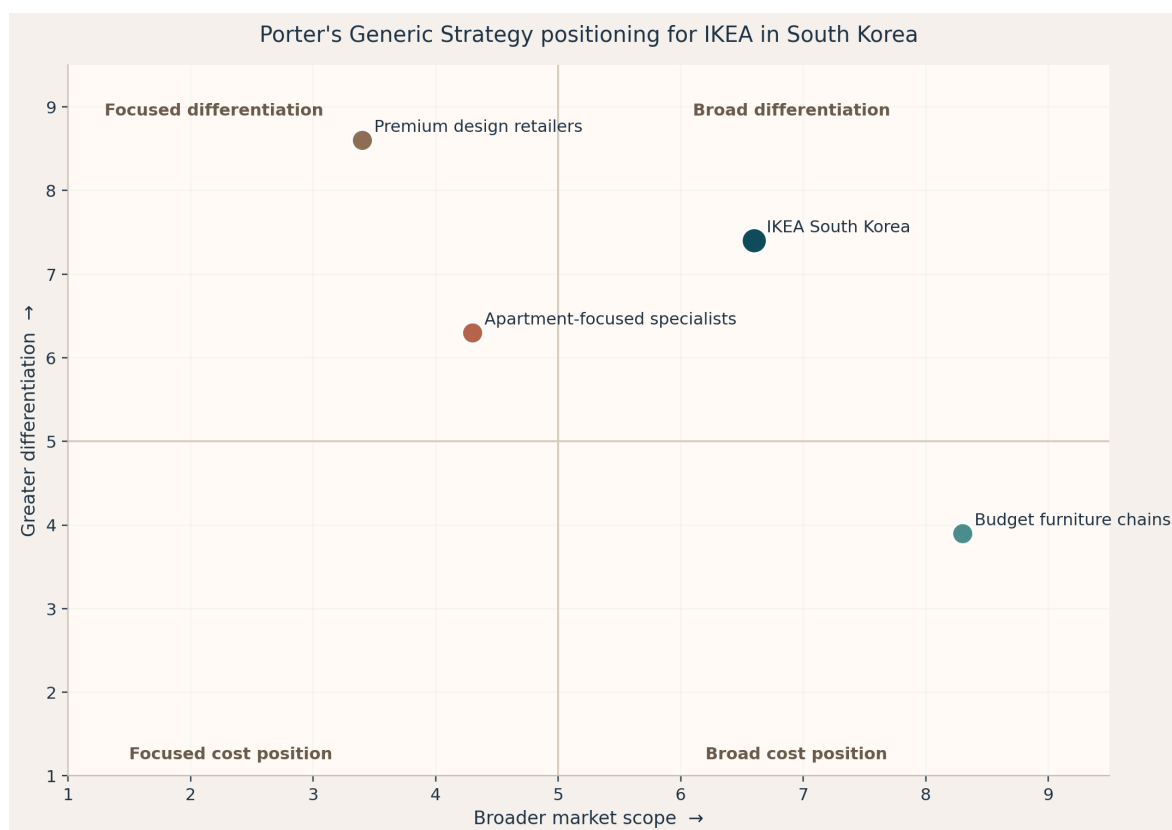


Figure 4: Porter's Generic Strategy positioning of IKEA in South Korea

Source: author's construction based on Islami et al. (2020), Hendry (1990), IKEA Korea (2026a), and Zhang et al. (2024).

6.2 Application to IKEA South Korea

The nature of IKEA South Korea can best be described as a differentiation strategy at an extremely high level, with strict price constraints. It does not operate like a pure discount retailer, but rather has combined affordable Scandinavian design, room inspiration, and a consistent retail experience with localized features such as planning assistance, delivery services, and options for compact living. While cost will continue to play a role, it serves as one element within a larger set of values provided by both experience and convenience. Rather than being separate elements (customer experience, multi-channel integration, brand consistency), they have become integral components of the strategy itself in digitalized markets (IKEA, 2026; IKEA Korea, 2026a; IKEA Korea, 2026c; Islami et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2024; Jin, Suh and Lee, 2025).

As a result, there is a balancing act: IKEA needs to provide better local support to minimize customer effort without providing enough service to significantly detract from the efficiency of its self-service business model. Therefore, in order to meet South Korean requirements, IKEA will likely need to refine their current approach rather than make significant changes to their overall strategic framework (Zhang et al., 2024; Jin, Suh and Lee, 2025; OECD, 2025a).

6.3 Critical Evaluation

Although Porter's generic strategies give guidance regarding why IKEA should not compete solely on price, they oversimplify the complexities associated with contemporary retailing strategies. As Hendry noted generic strategies can be overly restrictive when companies use multiple value propositions in order to attract consumer attention. Thus, IKEA is using pricing, design and convenience across multiple platforms (channels) and circularity to establish its unique value proposition. Therefore, Porter's framework provides some directional insights however lacks sufficient detail for a comprehensive understanding of competitive advantage. Furthermore, service systems and channel integration need to be considered as well

as the value propositions outlined by Porter (Hendry, 1990; Luo & Sheng, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; Ingka Group, 2026b).

7. Ethical Issues in IKEA Marketing Mix: Sweden Focus

7.1 Two Ethical Examples

In terms of ethics, Sweden presents a clear positive example for IKEA due to the fact that its circular strategies are based on the visible retail behaviors associated with those strategies rather than abstract claims. As a result, the Swedish second-hand marketplace allows for resale under conditions of consumer protection and incentives. Similarly, second-hand store pilot programs represent an integration of reuse into traditional retailing. Additionally, Ingka's stated progress regarding the implementation of take-back schemes and reducing emissions in the transportation of products further supports IKEA's ethical position through promoting extended product life cycles and decreased environmental damage -- primarily as a function of decision-making around where and how products are sold rather than merely as a function of promotional activity (Ingka Group, 2023; Ingka Group, 2026b; IKEA Sweden, 2026b; Murphy et al., 2017).

7.2 Two Unethical or Contested Examples

However, there are still many ethical issues. IKEA's cost-effective, high-volume business model is creating an inherent conflict when they emphasize their efforts to promote sustainable practices, while at the same time, encouraging consumers to purchase more products. As such, the environmental messages from IKEA can potentially misrepresent the actual amount of potential harm due to its large-scale production. Additionally, Greenpeace conducted research on how IKEA sources wood which suggests that the ability of forestry management to control where wood comes from may not always be successful. While IKEA addresses these concerns by emphasizing both certified and recycled wood products, it does not alleviate the need for clear, transparent, and verifiable information regarding sustainability. Ultimately, the issue in Sweden is not the absence of ethical programs, but rather that some of the positive action being taken by companies like IKEA could ultimately be diminished by supply chain problems that reduce the credibility of the company's sustainability claims (IKEA Global, 2026; IKEA, 2025; Greenpeace International, 2024; Murphy et al., 2017).

7.3 Ethics-to-7Ps Mapping

Table 3: Ethical and contested examples mapped to the 7Ps

Example	Ethical reading	Relevant 7Ps
Sweden second-hand marketplace	Extends product life and makes resale easier	Product, Place, Process
Sweden second-hand store pilot	Moves circularity into mainstream retail practice	Place, Physical Evidence, Promotion
Sustainability message versus volume retail	Risks overstating responsibility in a high-throughput model	Promotion, Price, Product
Wood-sourcing controversy	Raises doubt about whether claims fully match supply-chain reality	Product, Promotion, Process

Sources: adapted from IKEA Sweden (2026b), Ingka Group (2023; 2026b), Greenpeace International (2024), IKEA Global (2026) and Murphy et al. (2017).

8. Recommendations

8.1 Sweden

1. Use Sweden more explicitly as IKEA's proof market for mission-and-vision consistency by linking circular services, resale, and affordability claims to measurable evidence rather than broad sustainability language (IKEA, 2026; IKEA Sweden, 2026b; Ingka Group, 2023; Greenpeace International, 2024).
2. Deepen the Swedish product-and-service mix around circular extensions and household planning so the home market continues to signal relevance rather than complacency (IKEA Sweden, 2026a; IKEA Sweden, 2026b; Ingka Group, 2026b).

8.2 South Korea

1. Strengthen the compact-living proposition in South Korea through clearer apartment-life bundles that combine storage, room planning, delivery, and assembly guidance inside one value offer (IKEA Korea, 2026a; IKEA Korea, 2026c; OECD, 2025a).
2. Improve omnichannel continuity in South Korea by making channel transitions, planning support, and delivery expectations easier to interpret, because Korean market favourability depends heavily on reduced shopping effort (Luo and Sheng, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; Jin, Suh and Lee, 2025).

9. Conclusion

The comparison shows that IKEA's international marketing strength lies in keeping a stable democratic-design core while changing how that value is delivered. Sweden remains favourable because the brand is deeply embedded and circular initiatives are visible. South Korea is also attractive, but it asks more from IKEA in terms of compact-living relevance, omnichannel clarity, and service reassurance. The most defensible strategic reading is therefore broad differentiation in South Korea: IKEA should remain affordable, but compete through accessible design made easier to shop, plan, and trust in a dense urban market. Ethical credibility will also improve when Swedish circularity claims remain tied to measurable practice rather than broad sustainability language alone (IKEA Korea, 2026a; IKEA Sweden, 2026b; Islami et al., 2020; Greenpeace International, 2024; Ingka Group, 2026b).

10. Reflective Account: Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

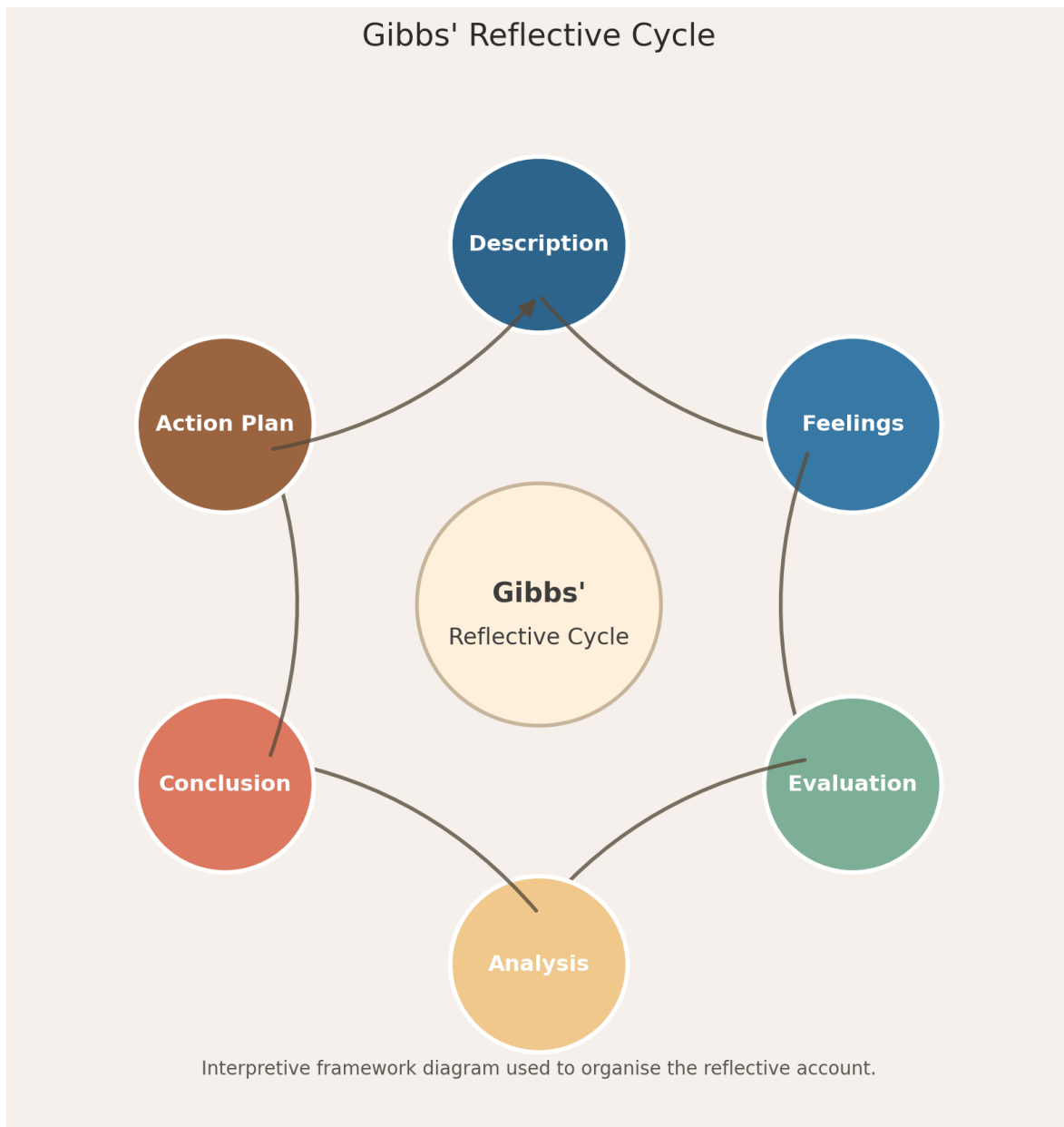


Figure 5: Gibbs' Reflective Cycle used to structure the reflective account

Source: author's construction based on Gibbs (1988).

10.1 Description

The overall purpose of the assignment was to create a reflective account that utilized Gibbs' Reflective Cycle as the structure for organizing the development of the final assignment. I found this format to be helpful as it allowed me to move from description to action planning. Once I had identified Sweden and South Korea as the

two comparative markets for comparison, I realized the assignment was going to require additional effort if I was able to demonstrate a distinction in my analysis versus prior analyses. Thus, I first organized the assignment into distinct segments. Then, I collected various types of source material, including market data, reports produced by companies, academic literature and ethical critiques. It was only after gathering all of these resources that I determined how I wanted to incorporate frameworks such as PESTEL, Hofstede, STP, the 7Ps and Porter's Generic Strategies. Using a sequential approach helped increase control over the report as each framework was used with a specific objective in mind and therefore avoided being included superficially (Baack et al., 2018; Doole and Lowe, 2012; Gibbs, 1988).

10.2 Feelings

When beginning the assignment, I believed that using Sweden as IKEA's domestic market presented little challenge since the relationship between IKEA and Sweden seemed straightforward. However, my confidence soon turned to a concern as the potential existed for me to become complacent about accepting IKEA's perspective and thus becoming susceptible to familiarity bias. In addition, I experienced some degree of uncertainty when utilizing Hofstede's model, as although it provided structure for analyzing cultures, it could potentially lead to oversimplification when applied to South Korea. Ultimately, the greatest amount of reflection occurred when I compared IKEA's claims regarding sustainability to those of Greenpeace. This led me to question whether corporate communications should ever be viewed as credible or trustworthy (Greenpeace International, 2024; IKEA Global, 2026; McSweeney, 2002).

10.3 Evaluation

There were several elements of the process that were successful. Choosing South Korea as one of the countries for comparison added considerable merit to the contrast with Sweden. Several differences in lifestyle that exist between compact living spaces and dense urban populations in South Korea compared to Sweden necessitated a deeper examination of what must be adapted. Incorporating multiple types of sources enhanced the credibility of the analysis. Data collected by the

OECD provided supporting macro-economic level data, while conducting research related to omnichannel commerce greatly increased the detail of the discussion regarding the 7 Ps. Similarly, examining circular initiatives in Sweden provided a solid foundation for examining ethics (IKEA Global, 2026; Jin, Suh & Lee, 2025; OECD, 2025a; Zhang et al., 2024).

However, there were also limitations. For example, initially I relied heavily upon information generated by IKEA primarily due to its availability and direct applicability. Therefore, this reliance may have introduced bias in my analysis. Later on, this was mitigated by incorporating external critiques and methodologies into my analysis. By doing so, I was able to achieve a better balance of my analysis and improve my ability to critically assess company claims (IKEA Global, 2026; McSweeney, 2002; Greenpeace International, 2024).

10.4 Analysis

One important lesson that I gained from this assignment is that home-market bias exists both emotionally and methodologically. Since Sweden is IKEA's country of origin, it is very easy to consider it as a "standard" against which other markets can be evaluated. Evaluating South Korea illustrated that the critical components of creating value include: channel integration, planning support and urban practicality - i.e., they are not secondary considerations. My perspective shifted from simply standardizing vs. adapting product offerings across international markets to developing an appreciation for how different retail systems operate in disparate environments (Luo & Sheng, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; McSweeney, 2002).

Another limitation that I encountered was related to cultural analysis. Although Hofstede provided a good starting point for my analysis of cultural dimensions, its limitations became evident as a lack of support from contemporary consumer behavior studies. Utilizing omnichannel research directed my attention towards processes and places associated with service experiences within the 7Ps framework. Consequently, the analysis became more concrete and focused on tangible customer interactions and market realities (Doole and Lowe, 2012; Steenkamp and ter Hofstede, 2002; Ko et al., 2007; Jin, Suh & Lee, 2025).

10.5 Conclusion

Ultimately, this project has shown that effective international marketing analysis relies on using frameworks intentionally and strategically rather than merely mechanically applying them. Through this project I developed skills to analyze company narratives critically and view cultural models as representative rather than prescriptive. Furthermore, I established practices to rely on evidence based on operationally identifiable metrics when assessing marketing strategy. Additionally, through the utilization of Gibbs' cycle, I further emphasized the necessity of structured reflection to identify opportunities for improvement in addition to identifying existing strengths (Gibbs, 1988; McSweeney, 2002; Murphy et al., 2017).

10.6 Action Plan

In future projects I will build on this knowledge base in several ways. Firstly, I will organize my source materials sooner by sectioning them to help identify research gaps prior to commencing writing. Secondly, I will construct competitor maps earlier in the assignment process to enhance positioning analysis. Thirdly, I will separate company-produced content from independent verification during initial note taking activities. Fourthly and finally, I will implement reflective check points throughout the entire project rather than only at the conclusion to ensure ongoing assessment of the efficacy of each framework utilized. Overall, this will enable me to complete a more efficiently completed project with a greater balance and critical rigor (Gibbs, 1988; Steenkamp and ter Hofstede, 2002; Ko et al., 2007; Greenpeace International, 2024; IKEA Global, 2026).

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