How Can Consumer Research Contribute to Increased Understanding of Tourist Experiences? A Conceptual Review

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the conceptual debate on tourist experiences. The article aims to give an overview over main lines of research on consumer or consumption experience and discuss how "the experiential turn" could contribute to a wider understanding of tourist experiences. We argue that movements in the early 1980-ties have been imperative for the now comprehensive focus on experiences within consumer research. We discuss the essential traits of two main perspectives, which we label consumer research and consumption studies, and discuss how these may contribute to a further conceptual understanding within tourism.

Key Words: Tourist experiences, experiential turn, consumer experiences, consumer research, tourism.

Introduction

Tourist experience has gained increased importance within tourism research (Uriely, 2005) and is regarded as the locus of value creation within the tourism industry (Prebensen, Chen, & Uysal, 2014; Volo, 2009). In the wake of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and experience marketing (Schmitt, 1999), there has been a focus on how experiences can be conceptualized and applied within various fields. The approaches vary, and the tourism literature demonstrates a wide-range and perplexing set of definitions and theoretical meanings (Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011a). Although important reasons for this are to be found in the multidisciplinary nature of tourism, its varying contexts, and complex scientific positions, there is a need for contributions that focus on theoretical perspectives of tourist experiences.

Reviews of conceptual developments show that a majority of research on the tourist experience have its origin in sociology and psychology (see Dann, 2014; McCabe, 2005; Ryan, 2010; Uriely, 2005; Walls et al., 2011a). As the former has contributed with overall structural frameworks of tourist experiences, the latter has offered empirically based conceptualizations on micro level. In studies of experience in tourism research there are several references to the "experiential turn" in consumer research (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Chan, 2009; Jennings et al., 2009; Prebensen & Foss, 2011; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009; Volo, 2009; Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011b), and the most popular seems to be Holbrook and Hirschman (1982). Unfortunately, there have been limited attempts of bridging the gap and of obtaining better integrations between different schools of thoughts on travel motivation and experiences in tourism research, first of all between the primarily individualistic psychological orientation and the wider sociological social orientation (Dann, 2014; Jamal & Lee, 2003). Ritchie and Hudson (2009) point at the basic challenges "to reach a consensus concerning the true meaning of the tourism experience through thorough assessment of relevant theories" (p. 123). This seems to be needed to fully understand "the linkages between the experiential worlds of home and away" (Dann, 2014, p. 49) and to unite tourism as production (macro) with tourism as consumption (micro). In this article we hope to contribute with filling some of the gaps in tourism research on tourist experiences by introducing perspectives of the experiential view of consumer research.

Since the early 1980s experiences has been an important research topic in consumer research, especially among researchers who were subscribing to interpretive methodologies in opposition to mainstream quantitative approaches who had difficulties in studying experiential dimensions of consumer behavior. Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) contribution on experiential aspect of consumption is perceived as the classical work on this topic. However, there have been many new and groundbreaking studies on experiential consumption in consumer research over the last three decades. We will later go into some of these and elaborate on how experiential consumption has been studied in consumer research. There are similarities in how experiences have been studied in tourism research and how it has been treated in consumer research. The micro and macro divide between psychological and sociological approach is also at stake in consumer research. Researchers like Holbrook and Hirschman came with a quantitative psychology background and turned their focus into

qualitative and interpretive perspectives on how the single consumer consumed experiences. Later researchers with a sociological background began to study experiential consumption as a cultural and societal phenomenon (e.g. Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988; Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; McCracken, 1986; Sherry, 1990). A decade ago these different perspectives were labeled "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007). Experiential consumption is one of the key topics in the research done from a CCT perspective and consuming experiences is now an integrated part of consumer culture theory.

In this article we want to explore to what extent perspectives within the field of CCT research can contribute to further development of the study of tourist experiences within tourism research. Since the literature on experiences from a tourism and consumer perspective is vast, a complete literature review is beyond the scope of this paper. First, we outline some of the seminal contributions on tourist experience within tourism research, primarily from tourism sociology and psychology research. Second, we present a review of the two main perspectives of CCT research. Finally, we discuss how the development and the major perspectives within CCT may contribute with new perspectives and entrances for the conceptualizing of tourist experiences.

Tourist Experiences within Tourism Research

There are different perspectives on the concept and the phenomenon of tourist experiences within the tourism literature. Some of the sociological perspectives possess a somewhat critical view (Pearce, 2011), especially in association to mass tourism (Boorstin, 1964; Bruner, 1991; Cohen, 1979, 1988, 1995; Dann, 1996; Eco, 1986; Lash & Urry, 1994; MacCannell, 1976; Uriely, 2005; Urry & Larsen, 2011). A more "positive" view are prominent within marketing and psychology (Björk, 2014; Jennings et al., 2009; Jensen, 2014; Larsen, 2007; O'Dell, 2007; Pearce, 2011; Prebensen et al., 2014; Quan & Wang, 2004; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009; Ritchie, Tung, & Ritchie, 2011; Volo, 2009). Authors in tourism sociology have categorized different sets of structural characteristics embedding tourist behavior and have identified some types of primarily socioculture-generated motivations (Dann, 1981), symbols and meanings associated with such behavior (see Uriely, 2009). A limitation of this research is that it seldom goes deeply into what tourist experiences actually are epistemologically, despite its descriptions of different modes of tourist behavior and tourist travel motivations.

Subsequently some of the basic approaches in tourism research with focus on tourist experiences will briefly be identified.

Examples of Micro-Oriented Frameworks for Understanding Tourist Experiences

Within tourist psychology research there have been some empirically based analysis leading to conceptual understandings of tourist experiences, first of all from cognitive psychology (Larsen, 2007; O'Dell, 2007; Pearce, 2011; Vittersø, Vorkinn, Vistad, & Vaagland, 2000). These contributions are associated with contexts where people are travelling and visiting other places and/or sites. The central conceptual elements will typically focus on the handling of some cognitive pre-dispositions, on immediate responses on travel or visitation episodes, and on long-term memorizing throughout tourist experience process. For example, Larsen (2007) argues that tourist experiences are individual mental processes, mainly memory processes, and proposes a definition where a tourist experience is regarded a past personal travel event, emotionally "strong enough to have entered long-term memory" (Larsen, 2007, p. 15). Travel events with particularly or extraordinary strong emotional impacts have earlier been denoted "serendipitous moments" (Cary, 2004) which can be characterized as a kind of "flow" experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). Larsen's definition shares, moreover, many similarities with the definition of memorable of experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011) and both definitions indicate that the "actual" experience first of all is regarded the ex post memory experience with emphasis on memory formation and retention. Furthermore, criteria for the estimation of tourist experience value have been discussed, for example, by Prebensen, Wu, Chen and Uysal (2013) with parallels to categorizations of experience value by Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991) and Williams and Soutar (2009).

Several authors distinguish the experience concept by referring to the German terms "Erlebnis" and "Erfahrung" (Boswijk, Thijssen, & Peelen, 2007; Jantzen, 2013). Jantzen (2013) provides a comprehensive discussion. He argues that "Erfahrung" embrace different forms of cognitive knowledge and practical skills (habitual), while "Erlebnis" can be understood as an act of sensing and feeling (short term) or be something that have imprinted memory as autobiographical knowledge. Larsen's (2007) definition of experiences as an ex post phenomenon is, according to the "Erlebnis" - "Erfahrung" distinction, questioned by Jantzen (2013). Experiences based on practical skills (habitual), cognitive capabilities, and autobiographical memory are all states following from past experiences. However, observing (new) knowledge and the process of sensing and feeling refer to meanings that occur in present tense. Consequently, understanding tourist experiences may be defined in past and present tense, or a combination.

From a dynamic perspective, the focus on the tourist experience will explicitly be on dispositions and processes that occur throughout different phases before, during, and after tourist interaction with tourism environments (Aho, 2001; Chen, Prebensen, & Uysal, 2014; Jennings, 2006). During different phases of the experience process various drivers of tourist behavior can furthermore be identified (Chen et al., 2014). As tourists' search of confirming their own self-image for their choice of destination, denoted as "self-congruity" (Sirgy & Su, 2000), is not directly linked to tourist experiences it exemplifies an important type of pre-disposition that will have an influence on the tourist experience on a later stage. Pearce (2011) states that attitudes created after the travel may be influenced by narratives within social networks, such when the telling of stories from a travel to friends and acquaintances, and this

directs the attention to tourist as narrative subjects (Cary, 2004). Pearce (2011) also argues that tourist experiences also can be viewed as embodied processes that involve physical surroundings, for example the manner in which material and space dimension influence experiences when tourists visit historical and cultural heritage sites (O'Dell, 2007). Richards and Wilson (2006) suggest that by leaving creative space for the consumers one can help tourists to create their own travel narrative of their surroundings in according with their own perspective.

Main Sociological Macro-Oriented Frameworks Linked to Tourist Experiences

The "classical" discussion in tourism sociology has been extracted by, among others, Dann (1996, 2014) and Uriely (2005, 2009). In Cohen's (1974) simplified "analytical" approach to discussing the tourist role he suggests at set of grading criteria for this purpose. As accepting that the tourist role can be a flexible one, the criteria describe a "pure" tourist as a person traveling temporarily from a normal place of living ("home environment") to another place where the experiences of some "unique" features of this place (another/an "unfamiliar" environment) is the main purpose of the trip and at some point in time there is a final return to the point of departure. The basic elements of a tourist travel are the stay element (a place) and the mobility elements (movement). These two elements can be perceived as building bricks in an effort to differentiate tourist experiences from more general leisure experiences, such as expressed by Aho (2001) who associate tourist experiences to processes linked to moving people (on voluntary basis) between places. As demonstrated by Dann (2014), several types of binary relationships of tourist experiences and drivers (push/pull factors) for traveling have been presented. Not unlike Turner's structure - anti-structure thesis (Turner, 1969), Cohen's evolving framework of tourist's familiar/unfamiliar environment (Cohen, 1972a, 1972b) and the home environment (The Centre)/strangerhood (the Centre "out there") (Cohen, 1979; Turner, 1969, 1973) represent a major point of reference in the framing of this dichotomy perspective. As a contrast to the stress on tourists' deliberate search for strangerhood is the suggestion that for many tourists the travel reason is leaving home just to get away (MacCannell, 2001). A critical question will, moreover, be: To what degree it is actually possible for a tourist to experience "otherness" (MacCannell, 2001; Urry, 1990).

The point of departure and the initial sociocultural frame of reference for the tourist remains in her/his home environment (the "Centre" of her/his values, identity and sociocultural norms), and the tourist experience occurs throughout the temporary movements between the home environment and the strange environment offering some degree of novelty and/or change (Smith, 1979; Turner & Ash, 1975). Cohen (1972a, 1979) describes how different *modes* of tourist experiences may occur in the zones between these two types of life arenas and how these modes will be influenced by the person's actual affinity to and dispositions to identify her/himself with respectively home environment and strangerhood. The bonds to the home environment can metaphorically be compared with the length and elasticity of a dog's run string limiting its range of operation in its endeavor to explore its surrounding terrain. However, the tourist travel experiences can be colored by the magic that occurs through open

and spontaneous social relationships, such as between fellow travelers on a tourist resort (Selänniemi, 2001; Turner 1969). On a wider level a tourist's travel experiences could also be seen as emerging from the meeting between two worlds and as an encounter between a host society and a guest "society" where cognitive and social pre-dispositions among those involved on both sides would influence the character of the encounter-processes (Robinson, 1999; Smith, 1989). This illustrates the comprehensive socio-cultural complexity frequently embedding such visiting processes.

As MacCannell's (1976) authenticity seeking tourist remains as a milestone within the tourism literature, this position has increasingly been challenges by others, such as Wang (1999) who extends MacCannell's objective authenticity concept to include tourist's own role in the experience setting (constructive authenticity) as well as contributions to the life of the tourist as a being (existential authenticity). However, MacCannell's (1976) initial semiotic perspective on mass tourism with tourist as members of a collective "leisure class still plays an important role. This includes the definition of tourist sites/sights as signs with established structural meanings or manipulated meaning by the tourism industry, and tourists' involvement is further conceptualized through the distinctions between a tourist's site-involvement (in the actual object) and sign-involvement (rather in the pre-established meanings and associated values than in the objects as such). It generally reveals the distinction between the experience and the representation of it (Cary, 2004). As for the emerging postmodern move within tourism sociology towards subjectivity, the attention to tourists' search for fun as an explicit goal for their consumption (Boorstin, 1964; Urry, 1990) remain quite central components. This can, for example, also include imaginary attractions becoming quite "real" for tourists who, anyway, do not bother about this point as long as it is fun or they can escape from everyday mundane life for a while (Cohen, 1995; Dann, 1996; 2014).

Lash and Urry (1994) claim that mobility is responsible for altering how people appear to experience the modern world (in terms of subjectivity, sociability, and in aesthetic appreciations). In postmodern terms they state that tourists are dis-embedded, that is, "lifted out" of social relationships of local involvement (Uriely, 2005). This view moves the attention from objectivity to subjectivity as a basis for regarding tourist experience and it also embraces "the tourist subjective interpretation of meanings as a determinant of the experience" (Uriely, 2005, p. 206). Moreover, Lash and Urry emphasize the problematic difference between representations and reality and also state that "some of the difference between the cultural object and the audience dissolve" (Urry, 1990, p. 272). Furthermore, as objects and features can be perceived as "signs" that need to be interpreted, tourists also become hermeneutists, and frequently even quite skilled ones.

Among the more comprehensive reviews of perspectives within tourist experience-related sociological research, Uriely's (2005) "postmodern forms of theorizing" by categorization of different conceptual developments could be referred to for a more differentiated illumination of the field. Nevertheless, Dann (2014) claims that various types of categorizations from tourism sociology are rather like heuristic devices than theoretical frameworks as they primarily describe and do not explain or predict a behavior. As recognizing this point we still

choose to remain with Cohen (1972, 1979) as a specific frame of reference considering it to be one of the most comprehensive and recognized macro-oriented perspectives in tourism sociology and suggesting that this easily can connect to other modern/postmodern conceptualizations and perspective as well as to findings from consumer research.

Two Perspectives on Consumer Experiences

The Experiential Turn in Marketing

Experiences were not a phenomenon at the agenda in the early textbooks in marketing from the 1960s (e.g., Kotler, 1967). It was not thought of as something that could be consumed. The focus was on consumer behavior, and since experiences are not necessarily demonstrated through behavior, this was not a topic in consumer research, since the dominant paradigm was behaviorism and quantitative methods. Experiences as a consumption phenomenon became relevant when Kotler and Levy (1969) introduced a broader understanding of marketing, where all kind of organizations should implement marketing as a part of their managerial toolbox. Market research was no longer limited to traditional products like soap, canned beans and knifes, but consumption at a museum or an opera became legitimate topics. This created some trouble in the discipline, since it was difficult to measure e.g., what was consumed during an opera. Kotler (1972) could argue that "the marketer's problem is to create attractive values", and that "value is completely subjective and exists in the eyes of the beholding market" (Kotler 1972, p. 50). Consequently, products could also be characterized by esthetics and intangibility just as they could be physical. This is also the theme for the first marketing conference on "Consumer Esthetics and Symbolic Consumption", which was organized by Hirschman and Holbrook (1981). For the first time since the 1950s, the consumer was regarded subjective when creating meaning during consumption, and soon after could Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) publish their legendary article on "Experiential Aspects of Consumption".

Research on "a new experiential perspective" in consumer research started as a revolt against the dominant paradigm based on behaviorism and information processing (Bode & Østergaard, 2013, pp. 179-180). It is argued that there was a lack of explanatory power in the dominant paradigm, when it came to explaining consumption of experiences such as an opera or a festival (Østergaard & Jantzen, 2000). The new perspectives on the consumption of experiences was elaborated by symbolic and hedonic aspects of experiences (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). These mainly theoretical elaborations were later researched empirically based on qualitative methods e.g. in what was called the "Consumer Behavior Odyssey", which Belk initiated in 1986. The goal was to investigate consumption from a broader cultural framework with the aim of naturalistic methods (Belk, 1991; Belk et al., 1989). In line with this development within consumer research, or what later has been referred to as the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007), two main streams of experiential research can be outlined; individual consumer experiences, which is based on a social-psychology ontology, and sociocultural consumption, with an ontological position in a cultural perspective.

Individual Approaches to Experiences

Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) focus on "fantasy, feeing, fun" refers to a psychological state where the individuals seek an experience during consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982, p. 132). Although the authors argue that "all products can be hedonically experienced by consumers" (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, p. 96), they nevertheless distinguish between utilitarian (e.g. toothpaste, detergent) and esthetic products (e.g. ballet, sport, concert, art and theater). They emphasize that feelings, fantasies and fun distinguish products characterized by high degree of intangibility. In this kind of contexts are consumption often intense and involving and it can have a long lasting impact on the consumer. Even though Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) are preoccupied with product usage experiences (which was a dramatic change from the mainstream focus on just buying), later contributions from the authors on symbolism extend the experience to embrace fantacies before and after the consumption (e.g. Holbrook, 1995, 2005).

Thompson, Locander and Pollio (1989) propose an existential-phenomenological perspective. They argue that products and commercial activities are pervasive in people's lives, and it is therefore difficult to distinguish between consumer and human experiences. By rejecting the dualist scientific position (the Descartian legacy), Thompson et al. argue that consumer experiences instead could be viewed as "first person descriptions of lived experiences" (Thompson et al., 1989, p. 144). This perspective is in line with existential-phenomenological philosophy, especially the legacy of Heidegger and an ontology where the consumer is perceived as being-in-the-world. According to Thompson et al. (1989) is the symbolic meaning of an experience linked to a particular situation and context. This perspective is questioning the more general approaches to study of experiences, and Thompson et al (1989) is claiming that the meaning of consumption is always depended on the concrete situation and context.

The question of identity is forwarded as important for understanding consumer experiences. Belk (1988) shows how consumers' use and relationships toward both tangible (e.g. watches) and intangible possessions (e.g. places) can be significant for identity, or for what he refers to as "extended self" (Belk, 1988, p. 139). He emphasizes that consumers tend to express themselves through their possessions with consequences such as happiness and nostalgia related to past experiences with things and others. Thus, he argues that consumer possessions may explain who consumers are, "where [they] have come from, and perhaps where [they] are going" (Belk, 1988, p. 160).

Researchers have developed Belks (1988) notion of the "extended self" by connecting product use and consumption to the notion of "narrative identity" (Ahuvia, 2005; Thompson & Haytko, 1997); i.e. how identity is structured through narratives. These researchers show that consumption and identity concur when the context signifies involvement, and perhaps intense, experiences. Some products may symbolically support individuals who strive for certain

roles; for example when Rolex is used in financial milieus. Thompson and Haytko (1997) show how fashion may aid young consumers in their strive for belonging to a certain social group but at the same time wish to be "unique".

In consumer research there are also studies dealing with topics that are directly relevant for tourism research. Arnould and Price (1993) are studying extraordinary experiences which they define as "intense, positive and intrinsically enjoyable experiences" with a sense of newness of perception and process (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 25). Based on results from multiday river rafting they show how experiences can be magical when the tourists experience personal growth and self-renewal, "communitas" or connecting to others, and harmony with nature (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 31). This stream of research relies on the structure - anti-structure thesis of Turner (1969), and argues that consumption is made up of immersion into enchanted, multifaceted and spectacular experiential moments (Firat & Dholakia, 1998). Carù and Cova argue that immersion depends on the process where the consumer becomes "plunged in a thematized and secure spatial enclave where they can let themselves go." (Carù & Cova, 2006, p. 5). Thus, consumer transformation and the dynamics of experiences are highlighted (Gaviria & Bluemelhuber, 2010). Celsi et al. (1993), studying skydiving, argue that high-risk identity is developed through reciprocal dynamic processes in which risks are normalized and motives are escalated.

It can be argued that consumer research has developed in a direction where some researchers acknowledge that experiences belong to the individual sphere, but in a manner that exceeds the previous functional and utilitarian focus. The review shows that popular topics from traditional consumer research, such as consumer information processing, are no longer central because symbolic meaning predominates. For example, it is not the processing of quality attributes that are at stake in Belk's (1988) research, but rather the meaning of product (possessions) symbolism in a person's life. The consumer's lifeworld is regarded as the most important resource for understanding the significance of products and services. By focusing on the dynamic process of consumption (everydayness-immersion-magic) and the consequences experiences have on identity this stream of research may be viewed as an attempt to open up the qualitative and emotional dimensions of consumer experiences.

Sociocultural Approach to Experiences

While the individual perspective on consumption primarily is influences by psychology, and to some extent philosophy, a parallel perspective is developed based on sociology and anthropology. McCracken (1986, 1988) is one of the proponents for what could be referred to as the cultural turn in consumer research. This approach shares the view of the individual approach that experiences cannot fully be explained by the functional and utilitarian view of marketing and consumer research. For McCracken "culture is the 'lens' through which the individual views phenomena" and it co-ordinates social action and specifies objects and behavior (McCracken, 1986, p. 72). The significance of products "rests largely in their ability to carry and communicate cultural meaning." (McCracken, 1986, p. 71). This means that symbolic meaning do not belong to the individual contexts, but instead to cultural contexts.

Each culture establishes meanings, or a special version of the world, that distinguish perception of time, space, nature, persons, ideas, and values. Thus, McCracken (1986) suggests that meaning resides in three locations; the culturally constituted world, the products, and the consumers, and that advertising, fashion, and rituals are examples of the means by which meaning is transferred between the locations. It is suggested that the consumer metaphorically can be understood as a "tribe member" who strives for recognition within the "tribe" or aiming for dissociation from other "tribes" (Østergaard & Jantzen, 2000).

The "Consumer Behavior Odyssey", a project with the aim to explore American consumption via qualitative methods on a road trip from Los Angeles to Boston, identified cultural meanings by studying contexts such as swap meet, antique shop, art exhibition and parades, boat cruise, amusement park, hotel and souvenir shop (Belk, 1991). The research group applied ethnographic field work, and identified experiential dialectics such as freedom versus rules, structural boundaries versus role transitions, competition versus cooperation, and sacred and profane aspects (Belk et al., 1988). They compared the sacred with religious experiences, and concluded that "Religion is one, but not the only, context in which the concept of the sacred is operant." (Belk et al., 1989, p. 2). Sacred processes were identified through cultural rituals that transform products by adding different kind of symbolic meaning. Examples of such sacred processes are gift giving and pursuing a hobby, or traveling to places that are viewed as extraordinary. Belk et al. are not primarily preoccupied with the individual experiences of sacred objects, places or past events. Instead, they try to identify the cultural meanings that are demonstrated through rituals and practice. Sherry's (1990) analyses of "Midwestern American Flea Market" shows how a marketplace symbolically may be viewed as a "museum", where the buying process is regarded "sacred", how bargaining can give peak experiences, and how certain forms of consumption take place during rituals (e.g. going to church) (Sherry, 1990, p. 24-26).

In the wake of the "cultural turn", seminal contributions direct focus onto experiential fields such as consuming a theme (Fırat & Ulusoy, 2011), spectacular retailing and shows (Kozinets et al., 2004; Peñaloza, 1999, 2001), integration and classification during spectator practices (Holt, 1995), myth consumption (Belk & Costa, 1998), subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), and hyper community (Kozinets, 2002). Holt (1995), who studied baseball spectators at Wrigley Field, Chicago, shows that experiences are never merely a subjective experience, and that investigating cultural and institutional frameworks are necessary for understanding what is going on during consumption practices. Schouten and McAlexander (1995), studying Harley Davidson subcultures, show how passion towards brands can be important for status, rituals and meaning created in social groups. Belk and Costa (1998), studying "mountain man" event in the Rocky Mountain, shows how myths and fantasies can create transformative experiences into a fantastic time and space, and Peñaloza (1999), at Nike Town Chicago, finds that experiences are dynamically co-created in-between various layers of meaning, for example corporate images (e.g. "Just do it"), competitive spirit, sport ideals, and fitness and outdoor life ideology.

The sociocultural approach is concerned with the "cultural meanings, sociohistoric influences, and social dynamics that shape consumer experiences and identities in the myriad messy

contexts of everyday life." (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 875). With Arnould and Thompson (2007) one may argue that the cultural turn initiated theoretical and empirical interest into topics such as ideological shaping of consumer identity (e.g. Belk & Costa, 1998; Holt & Thompson, 2004), structure-agency tensions during experiences (e.g. Kozinets, 2002; Peñaloza, 2001), glocalizaton in-between global flows and local shaping of consumption (e.g. Ger & Belk, 1996; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006), and market-mediated networks and embedded consumption (e.g. Fırat & Ulusoy, 2011; Holt, 2002; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009).

Contrasting and Common Traits by the Two Directions in Consumer Research

While the individual approach relies on an individual criterion for understanding experiences, the sociocultural approach focuses on how the culture provides the "truth". Individual meaning is replaced by cultural meaning as interpreted through consumer imagination, traditions, rituals, ideology, social processes and practice. Rich empirical studies, and ethnographic methods, inspire multi-method approaches, and researchers would "inhabit" consumption contexts and interpret practices through extensive, or "thick" descriptions. This is how sociocultural researchers try to avoid an individual focus and instead try to incorporate the social and cultural sphere of consumption experiences.

The "experiential turn" developed within the individual perspective is reinterpreted and further developed within Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007). Although CCT addresses both individual and sociocultural perspectives on experiences, the latter approach dominates research either directly or indirectly. As such, we argue that cultural imaginary, and how it shapes consumption practices and experiences, are an important aspect of CCT research today. Some suggest a focus on the sign economy for understanding consumers and markets (Venkatesh, Peñaloza, & Firat, 2006), while others suggest imagination as a driving force of contemporary consumption (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003; Campbell, 1987; McCracken, 1988). This means that experiences to a large extent are determined by a sign economy through which individual imaginary is created by media, businesses, social groups and others. Researchers tend to explicate imagination as a rather future oriented desire (e.g. Belk et al., 2003), suggesting that fantacies and day dreaming about experiences drive attempts to materialize consumption. Others refer to emotional regimes of consumer culture to explicate how hedonism places emphasis on pleasure, sensory and "inner" experiences (Jantzen, Fitchett, Østergaard, & Vetner, 2013). Consequently, a premise for the socialcultural approach is that such emotional regime in culture, through its ethics of continued pleasure in a modern life, is a precondition for understanding why experiential consumption are essential to consumers today.

Our review shows furthermore how changes in the scientific view within the field have provided changes in ontology, epistemology, methods and conceptual focus. What the individual and sociocultural researchers have in common is a willingness to work towards a broader and more thoroughly understanding of consumption of experiences. This is in contrast to the traditional focus on buying and consumer behavior. These researchers reject the

ontological view of humans as primarily rational and instrumental and thereby the epistemological ideal of true science, objectivity and consequently the hypothetic-deductive methodology. According to Belk (1995) and Holbrook (1995), this break was necessary for the conceptual change towards experiences instead of buying, exchange and behavior. Some even argue that a positivistic ideal is not suited for studying experiences because it is incapable of embracing the context, relationships and dynamics in a sufficient manner (Buhl, 1990).

Discussion of CCT's Contribution to Tourist Experience Research

The previous review clearly proves that there has been a considerable development in CCT research, within both the individual and the sociocultural orientations, since the time that Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were "discovered" by tourism researchers (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). In the subsequent sections we will briefly discuss and offer some tentative suggestions of how CCT could contribute to complement or extend the conceptual entrance to the research on tourist experiences.

There is much support for the assumption that tourist consumption is vital for understanding how many people structure their lives around multiple realities. For example, CCT research have pointed out how realities can be centered around Star Trek as a "religion" or myth (Kozinets, 2001), how consumers organize their lives and identities as Harley Davidson bikers (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), how consumers enact fantasy experiences of a primitive mountain men (cowboy) reality (Belk & Costa, 1998), and how people construct multiple realities in dramatic fashion (e.g. car racing) structured by a masculine ideology (Holt & Thompson, 2004). All of these contexts could be compared with tourism, and it is thus reasonable to ask questions like: What is the role of tourist experiences in the multiple realities of people? How do people move in and out of identities as tourists? How do myths and fantasies influence tourist experiences?

The evolving perspectives within CCT research open up for extending the understanding of what type of processes the tourist as a consumer can go through during her/his movements within the time- and space dimensions and between home environment and strangerhood. A travel occurs as just one of several arenas for experiences in a person's life and the influences one is exposed to after returning back from the travel will continue to form the experiences through various sources of influence (Jantzen, 2013; Pearce, 2011). In a mental sense the tourist will be transformed during the process of travelling as moving between (in and out of) the home environment and strangerhood, and the role performance will vary depending on how one copes with the tourist situation (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). Among the central aspects of consumer research is how the consumer searches for meaning in encounters and incidents in the consumption process and how s/he tries to interpret the environment related to her/his own role and position in the actual experience process. The tourists do not primarily engage in experiences for functional reasons, but also for social, symbolic and emotional reasons. Thus, reinventing oneself in order to take on the role of "the other" becomes central for understanding how tourists consume meaning and experience (see Holt, 1995). However,

contrary to an individual/psychological approach of reinvention, a central contribution from CCT is the assumption that individual, social and cultural forces shape tourism practices, however primarily by sociocultural forces (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Although a certain amount of tourist research is based on the Turnerian thesis (Turner, 1969) it tends to be positive and somewhat romantically founded (Tumbat & Belk, 2011). It is expected that experiences are characterized by negotiations and tensions in-between individual projects and sociocultural boundaries (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Numerous studies have shown how cultural meaning imprint experiences (for extensive review, see Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007), such as the significance of communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009), subcultures (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Schouten, McAlexander, & Koenig, 2007), and ideologies (Martin, Schouten, & McAlexander, 2006). Consequently, although tourists may account for experiential meaning and value as a personal and internal process, it will always be both an internal and external process.

Generally, the illumination of elements and the process of meaning creation for tourists as consumers, and the demonstration that decisions, value and experiences are contextually influenced (Arnould, Price, & Malshe, 2006), remain a central contribution from CCT. Findings about narrative identities (Ahuvia, 2005), experiences as identity expressions (Belk, 1988), significance of meanings with emphasis on the symbolic sphere of products (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and the dynamic process of consumption (Celsi et al., 1993) are examples of conceptual elements that extend the entrance to the understanding of the tourist as consuming experiences. The introduction of the "clan" perspective, and consumers' belonging and identification within the "clan", offers a complementation to the analysis of the home environment. Likewise the inclusion of the consumers' lifeworld in order to understand tourist experiences, as well as the now numerous studies of "strange" contexts (e.g. Arnould & Price, 1993; Belk & Costa, 1998; Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Belk et al., 1989; Holt, 1995, 2006; Kozinets, 2001, 2002; Peñaloza, 2001; Tumbat & Belk, 2011) are easily transferable to, and extends Cohen's frameworks. The idea from tourism literature that the tourist carry a number of pre-dispositions from her/his own life in the home environment should also include opinions, believes, perceptions, fantasies, symbols, emotions as well as social belonging to the social group or "clan" from whom one wishes to receive recognition (Østergaard & Jantzen, 2000). Further complementary contributions would be McCracken's (1986) proposition that symbolic meaning rather belong to the cultural context than to the individual context, as well as his dynamic perspective on the "force" of the culture implying that since culture is constantly changing so are the individuals. These few examples demonstrate that CCT offers, in particular, an anthropology-based enforcement to the understanding of tourist experiences.

By focusing on the multi-faceted process a tourist is going through while travelling one could suggest that the home environment and the strangerhood to a certain extent would merge when the tourist faces touristic consumption. This means that the tourist would be unable to fully distinguish between the two "worlds" with regard to significant value, identities, symbols, clan-belongings, and ritual meanings. From a CCT point of view it is a home-environment-dominant merge that is distinguished by market structures and cultures such as subcultures and ideologies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). From a tourist sociological

perspective this merge is first of all influence by push factors (Dann, 1981, 2014). However, as the tourist experience process can be considered multi-faceted and distinguished by fluctuations, it is proposed that tourists might be transformed in and out of various roles (or between all three sectors of home environment, strangerhood and the merging sector). The time and space mobility dimensions (Lush & Urry, 1994) and liquid borders of actual presence of the tourist (Bauman, 2000) will be determinants for the nature, including the speed, of these transformations.

Conclusion

The question that has guided this conceptual inquiry was, besides offering an overview of the developments within the field of CCT, to suggest how this research could contribute to alternative and complementary ideas for conceptualizing tourist experiences as presented in tourism literature, and perhaps respond to the challenge for documentation of the evolution of research "that contribute to our understanding of the experience […] through a thorough assessment of relevant theories" (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009, p. 123; see also Cary, 2004; Tribe, 2001). We have in the previous review introduced tourist experiences as, first of all, inspired by a psychological and a sociological perspective, and have simplified the choice of references to definitions preoccupied with how people travel in time and space (Lash & Urry, 1994) and move between home environments or familiarity/strangerhood or "the other" (Cohen, 1972, 1979). We are suggesting that the CCT research can offer significant contributions to extend the understanding of tourists' movements in time and space between different experience arenas. Currently, the idea of home as a stable, private or familiar place still seems to dominate although a more portable, nomadic notion also may exist (Bardhi & Askegaard, 2009). It is also recognized that the tourist may alternate between competing roles (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015) and different bodily and mental presence during a travel or at the stay in a destination (Bauman, 2000; Urry & Larsen, 2011). This also supports the assumption of liquid frontiers between what can be identified as home and strangerhood as well as "postmodern" mobility traits (Baumann, 2000; Lash & Urry, 1994) with implications for tourists' various ways of accessing different "strangerhood experience arenas".

Quite central for a CCT platform for understanding tourist experiences would be the assumptions that tourist experience is about how meaning is created and, though the tourist may interpret and account for the experience as a personal process, meaning creation is constituted by a mixed configuration of individual, social, and cultural meaning. Within this configuration cultural meaning is dominating over individual meaning. As tourism remains such a wide and complex social and cultural phenomenon that is quite interwoven into the life of ordinary people, it covers a variety of experiential fields targeted by consumption research. In the future it would be appropriate to be able to identify more distinctively which experience areas of the world of tourists that could be illuminated more genuinely through the CCT research, both ontologically and epistemologically. By acknowledging the comprehensive range of approaches and literature that can be associated with the world of tourists (Ritchie et al., 2011; Tribe, 2001), tourism researchers could benefit by increased awareness and

implementation of approaches and findings, such as those from CCT research on consumption experiences.

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