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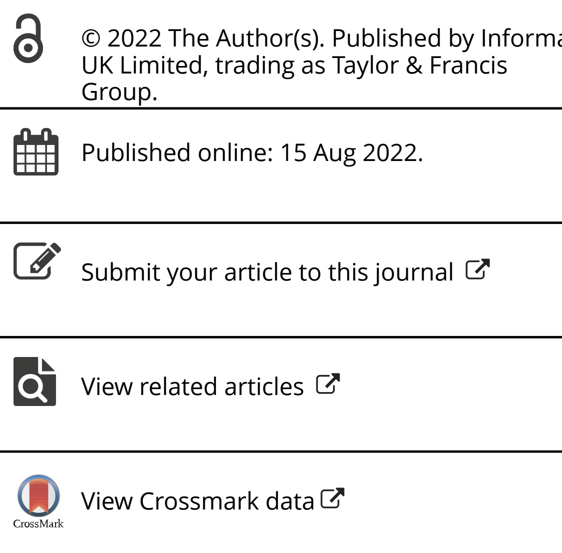

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Struggle of the story: towards a sociocultural model of story world tension in communal consumption

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the consumption of climbing tourists to Norway and Sweden to show how consumers are captured by collective story worlds in communal consumption. Whereas prior marketing research has been preoccupied with narrative transportation as a mental imagery process, we suggest a sociology of narrative approach that focuses on the institutional shaping of communities within which consumers engage in cultural formation with a shared social and historical context. Our empirical findings show that consumers in the climbing community experience two distinct story worlds, with different ethos, conventions and content rules, that structure why and how stories are told. We extend existing knowledge within marketing through a multifaceted understanding of how collective narratives operate and present a sociocultural model of story world tension in communal consumption.

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Experiential marketing; experiential consumption; collective narrative; sociology of narrative; tourist experiences; consumer culture

Introduction

It is difficult to imagine a marketplace without stories because they are regarded an ontological phenomenon that distinguish how consumers structure and make sense of their lives (Shankar et al., 2001). Whereas much consumer research has focused on how stories as texts are meaningful and how consumer identity is narratively constructed (Ourahmoune, 2016), recent contributions within marketing have suggested the concept of narrative transportation, i.e. how consumers are captured by a story and its world (Van Laer et al., 2014). This research is attentive to individual-level transportation, which represents a rather one-dimensional and functional understanding of the role of narratives.

Sociocultural inspired research suggests broadening the scope by focusing on sociality (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007) and social practices (Polletta et al., 2011) as related to consumption of experiences. Stories are then created by the interpretative community within which consumers engage in 'cultural formation with a shared social and historical context' (Yannopoulou & Elliott, 2008, p. 12). This position is in line with much marketing research that is preoccupied with how consumers seek social bonds in communities or neo-tribes that represent a connecting way of life. However, such theorisations are probably simplifications of hybrid and complex realities (Moufahim et al., 2018).

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Research shows that intra-community tensions are the norm so that focus turns towards the ways in which consumers also negotiate difference through shared resources (Thomas et al., 2013) and that the collective nature of narratives present the challenge of negotiation among multiple competing narrative articulations (Chronis et al., 2012). Consequently, the purpose of this article is to turn attention towards the collective origin of narratives in communal consumption and how intra-community or story world tensions play out.

We rely on the perspective of sociology of narrative (Ewick & Silbey, 1995) that enables the exploration of marketplace culture for understanding sub-world dynamics and marketplace tensions. We argue for a multifaceted understanding of collective narratives that focus on 'the institutional shaping of stories' and narrative practices (Polletta et al., 2011, p. 114). The focal point turns towards how a consumption community as a narrative context shape 'the whats', i.e. the story content, and 'the how', i.e. the story process (Andersen, 2015, p. 669) and 'the why', i.e. the purpose behind the story (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). This approach rejects a romanticised, mono-cultural or static view of community and allows a focus on the institutional coordination and transformation of social practices of a community's sub-worlds.

Whereas previous research has documented how 'metastories' permeate consumers' community belonging (Kozinets, 2002) and how tensions exist when consumers try to make up who they want to be (Shankar et al., 2009), little research has focused on how story worlds influence sociality and belonging in communities. For example, power, norms and values might influence story content and potentially challenge how the 'real' world is shut off during experiences (Feldman & Sköldberg, 2002). Our research context is international tourists who attend rock climbing in the granite mountains of Lofoten, Norway, and Bohuslän, Sweden, for a week or more. The climbers alternate between intense sublime moments in the wall and joining the camp with other climbers. Few studies have investigated the role of narratives and their dynamics in such contexts (Lanier & Rader, 2015), and they are suitable for studying how international tourist markets develop through consumers' innovative forms of cultural and tourism refiguration of experiences. We show how two sub-worlds of the communities, which we refer to as summiteers and mountaineers, compete over legitimate narrative practices that are anchored in competing collective narratives. We discuss how the findings contribute to consumption heterogeneity, narrative research, and marketing implications more generally.

Sociology of narrative

When consumers consume entertainment shows, social media, watch a movie or visit a museum, they often leave their everyday world behind and get lost in the story world. The story events would then transport individuals through the integrative melding of attention, imagery and feelings (Green, 2004). Narrative transportation has been a widely popular concept for capturing such phenomena in recent years (Gnambs et al., 2014). Whereas much research focuses on how attitudes and intentions are changed when consumers are entangled in a storyworld (Green, 2008; Mazzocco et al., 2010), others focus on how stories as texts can be analysed for the meanings they express (Ahuvia, 2005; Chronis et al., 2012; Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015; Stern et al., 1998; Thompson, 1997).

Moving beyond an agentic individual focus, research shows the importance of collective narratives for consumption of experiences (Chronis et al., 2012), that narratives influence consumer socialisation (Shankar et al., 2009), and that consumers are transported in and out of cultural roles during long-lasting experiences (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). Whereas much narrative transportation research models presume that story consumption occurs in isolation, despite the notion of an active consumer, sociocultural awareness (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) opens up the 'box' and turns the focus on the cultural meaning of consumption. Consequently, there is a need to focus on the narrative structures that shape sub-group identities and give rise to sub-world tensions during communal consumption.

Sociological work on narratives is attentive towards narrative practices in social acts and the interactional processes of storytelling (Andersen, 2015). Investigating collective narrative means identifying the social performances in interactions, norms and institutional regulations of story content, the time and place where the interpretation takes place, and the beliefs about what the stories are good for (Polletta et al., 2011). Research is suggested to be attentive to the 'turning point' moments in peoples' lives, such as when consumers enter communal experiences and face multiple constructed story worlds (Shankar et al., 2001).

Story world elements

Ewick and Silbey (1995) argue that four elements operate simultaneously to (re)structure and (re)produce distinct story outcomes for actors in a social context; story context, content rules, and how and why stories are told within institutional frameworks. We think these elements may aid us in identifying story world *tensions*.

First, stories are told within a specific story context that represents an already interpreted narrative resource in a consumption community. Consequently, narrating is a process that depends on shared sensing and cultural images that influence experience, embodiment and empathy (Mathew & Erwin, 2013). For example, Rickly-Boyd (2012) documents how climbers enter into a story context where the collective identity as 'dirtbags' has historical linkage to the rock-climbing culture. The context thus determines when a story is awaiting, requested, and made 'real' (Ewick & Silbey, 1995).

Second, stories are told within content rules which constitute what are regarded as accepted narratives. Since stories are socially constructed, social norms and conventions in a community would govern what is an appropriate story.

Third, the social organisation in a particular community would regulate 'how' stories are told. Research demonstrates variations of the social organisation of meanings during wilderness experiences (Arnould et al., 1998), just as variations of how the past is reconstructed in the present might influence how stories are co-created (Belk & Costa, 1998; Chronis et al., 2012).

Fourth, stories are told with a purpose ('why') and therefore can be seen as strategic (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). There are many types of stories, such as official stories, invented stories, first-hand stories, and second-hand stories which are retold by others, as well as culturally common stories that are generalised within a cultural environment (Schank &

Berman, 2002). There are also commercial and non-commercial stories. In commercial stories the aim is to persuade, while in non-commercial stories the intention is often to entertain, accuse, inform or instruct.

In sum, whereas theorisation on narrative transportation has been criticised for its one-dimensional understanding (e.g. being non-conflictual, a function of company storytelling, with consumer as receivers of mental imagery), theorisation within sociology focuses on how consumers are captured by stories during practices in consumptive acts. Consequently, we turn our attention towards a more dynamic, multifaceted and contested understanding of collective narrative in which sociocultural and historical story contexts matter for how narratives engulf consumers in story worlds. Consequently, communal consumption might involve stories that tend to articulate and reproduce existing ideologies and hegemonic relations (Ewick & Silbey, 1995), just as they might be contested by competing conventions and positional struggles (Canniford & Shankar, 2013).

Story world tensions

Communal consumption might consist of story world tensions due to variations of norms of content, rules of performance and convention structures. Narratives can create tension if consumers are unfamiliar with plotlines, if consumer sub-groups (e.g. movement groups) dislike certain stories, or if stories face wrong timing (Polletta et al., 2011). For example, Boje (1991) documents how ambiguous stories are distributed for the maintenance of power in institutions, and Polletta (2009) calls attention to plotlines for gaining support for changes that are in contrast with prevailing 'common sense'. This stream of research turns our focus towards how story world tensions might shape or distort consumption experiences, what kind of stories are silenced, and what kind of stories are encouraged (Andersen, 2015).

Tensions in consumption community are well documented in consumer culture research. Research on neo-tribes has depicted the unstable, shifting and hybrid characteristics of communities (Cova et al., 2012) within which the original linking logic (Cova, 1997) has been supplemented with sociality as a hybrid and complex reality (Moufahim et al., 2018). Chronis et al. (2012), studying tourists at Gettysburg, show how story worlds are co-constructed and negotiated differently depending on whether the master narrative is patriotism or unification. According to their theorisation, heterogeneity would depend on the interpretive processes of (re)imagination through various anchoring mechanisms, i.e. narrative structure, emotional connection, cultural values, and material entities.

Four patterns of conflicts might be relevant for story world tensions: emancipatory, ideology-advocating and authenticity-protecting conflicts (Husemann & Luedicke, 2013), and intergroup dynamics (White & Argo, 2011). First, emancipatory conflicts might happen when sub-groups construct alternative story plots because they cannot accept the grand logics or ideologies behind powerful narrative structures, such as the rise and fall of Napster or the Starbucks revolution (Giesler & Thompson, 2016). Second, ideology-advocating tensions are relevant because they call attention to consumption incompatibilities, for example when consumers belong to different story worlds due to disagreements about the consumption morality (Luedicke et al., 2010).

Third, authenticity-protecting conflicts involve struggles about how experiences are supposed to be consumed, perhaps because community members compete regarding the credibility of particular stories (Polletta et al., 2011). Fourth, intergroup dynamics distinguish between hierarchical types of story worlds and their consequences, such as between core and various non-core sub-groups (Bellezza & Keinan, 2014). Relevant for our context, Tumbat and Belk (2011) found that climbing consumers assert boundaries in which money versus personal skill and previous experiences compete within discourses of deservingness. Lindberg and Mossberg (2019) argue that core climbers rely on socio-historically shaped stories that might create conflicts when non-core climbers lay opposing claim to consumption ownership based on different culturally shaped stories. Yet, sub-groups may even 'insulate' a field of consumption by refuting myths for protecting social and cultural capital from being devalued (Arsel & Thompson, 2011).

Method

In this study, narratives are both the object of inquiry (narratives are produced and communicated by consumers) and the method of inquiry (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). The study's method is based on an ethnographically inspired narrative approach in which the researchers 'lived' the context and conducted in-depth interviews to grasp the narratives of two climbing communities consisting of a total of 25 climbers. Throughout the empirical process, we focused on both the mutual and the conflicting stories and their sociocultural and historical origin. Our aim was to investigate both the 'small stories' and the 'big stories', which enabled us to account for consumers' pre-reflective and reflective reactions (Carù & Cova, 2008). To avoid focus on individual mental imagery, we tried to direct attention towards the community and cultural conditions and the dynamics of marketplace activities (Moisander et al., 2009).

The narrative environment in which the stories are produced is related to two of the most popular climbing destinations in Scandinavia. These are the Lofoten Islands in Norway and Bohuslän in Sweden, that are valued by international climbers as being very beautiful climbing areas (climbandmore.com). The destinations are attractive to climbing tourists because the mountains are at the seashore with solid granite walls suited for climbing. Furthermore, during the summer months, the climbers can practice climbing for many hours due to sunny evenings. Many of the 25 informants have been climbing at both destinations.

Whereas narratives are often considered ontologically as the very essence of human behaviour (Pace, 2008), the 'wilderness world' of traditional climbing is chosen because the narrative acts of the consumers are expected to be highly emotional. Thus, we believed that in these contexts the research endeavour of making sense of stories would be easier, enhancing our own interpretations on both a social and a cultural level. In a consumption community, such as a climbing community, it is assumed that storytelling is a key feature as it provides meaning to its members and sustains the culture and boundaries of the group (Schau & Muniz, 2006).

All of the climbers we observed and interviewed stayed at climbing sites for at least one week. They organised the trips themselves without a commercial organiser or a guide and relied on digital resources and the guidebook of the climbing destination (e.g. the

'Lofoten Rock'). The climbing tourists bring their own tents or vans, or depend on local lodging, and we selected participants by approaching them on-site asking them to participate in the project.

In a semi-structured manner, the informants were asked about how they started to climb, their dedication, the climbing culture, and their experiences relating to the current climbing vacation. We asked them how they planned their vacations, why they visited this destination, with whom they travelled, about experiences from the camp and in the community more generally, how they blend in and experience the wall, and about their connections to the socio-history of climbing. The researcher used an active listening technique with follow-up questions (e.g. when, what, how, why). Later in the interviews the climbers were asked more directly about stories of the climbing culture and the community, e.g. if they were telling or listening to stories related to the focal activities. To detect different story worlds and tensions between them, we applied the key elements in what Ewick and Silbey (1995) described as the social organisation of narrative.

Climbers from nine countries were interviewed, including eight Norwegians, six Swedes and eleven from other countries (see Table 1). The youngest was 18 years old and the oldest 36. Two of the climbers were female. The categorisation of traditional and sport climbers is based on the participants' primary commitments (Ebert & Robertson, 2007; Kiewa, 2001). In traditional climbing, all gear is removed when a climbing pitch is complete, while in sport climbing the protection and anchor points are permanently installed in the wall. The average length of interviews was 51 minutes, and they were recorded and transcribed.

The traditional climbing skills of the participants ranged in level from low (7 participants) to medium (5 participants) to high (13 participants). In line with previous research (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016), most of the climbing tourists were male and the majority were either students or highly educated. Four travelled alone, four were accompanied by one co-climber and 17 belonged to climbing groups. We emphasised demographics, group size and skills because of the potential relevance for narrative transportation.

The authors are outdoors persons with experience of diving, trekking, kayaking, sailing, etc., but had no previous climbing experience. Developing a pre-understanding for being able to interpret and understand stories is important in a social science project (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Consequently, we spent five days at a climbing site in Spain (El Chorro) together with a highly skilled climbing guide who gave us a crash course in climbing and the jargon, values, myths, and ideology related to rock climbing. Although we tried to develop cultural and contextual knowledge, we hoped that being non-climbers would be advantageous since we were able to approach the context with the kind of interpretive distance which is necessary in such a study (Thompson, 1997).

We analysed our combined empirical material through a hermeneutic sense-making process (Thompson, 1997). This means that we applied an iterative interpretive process (the hermeneutic spiral) in a part-to-whole fashion across macro (climbing culture and history), meso (the social community), and micro (individual) stories to achieve the best understanding possible. We were attentive to the skills of the climbers, their practices and motivations as climbers (see sport vs. traditional climbing style in Table 1) and stories about 'heroes' in the community and wider climbing culture. Together we were able to interpret the 'thick' stories over the course of the research project. We sought the aid of

Table 1. Description of the participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Interview site	Education/work	Skill (years climbing), sport/trad style	Country
1. Espen	26	Lofoten	Engineer	Low (3) Sport	Norway
2. Asgeir	28	Lofoten	Aviation engineer	High (10) Trad	Norway
3. Lars	26	Lofoten	Univ. student	High (10) Sport	Denmark
4. Harry	34	Lofoten	Outdoor coach	High (13) Trad	Norway
5. Robin	25	Lofoten	Engineer	Mid (4) Sport	Norway
6. Danny	26	Lofoten	Public health worker	Mid (7) Trad	USA
7. Erik	18	Lofoten	Student/Military (draftee)	Low (3) Sport	Norway
8. Jennifer	24	Lofoten	B. of Art/no steady job	Mid (4) Trad	Australia
9. Johan	28	Lofoten	Univ. student	Low (1) Trad	Finland
10. Mikkel	34	Lofoten	Univ. student	High (10) Trad	Finland
11. Calvin	23	Lofoten	Univ. student	Low (2) Trad	Australia
12. Leander	27	Lofoten	Univ. student	Mid (5) Trad	France
13. Jacob	23	Lofoten	Part-time work	High (11) Trad	Canada
14. Birger	36	Lofoten	Mountain-climbing guide, no steady job	High (19) Trad	Norway
15. Thor	18	Lofoten	Student/Military (draftee)	Low (2) Sport	Norway
16. Andreas	[na]	Lofoten	Engineer	High (13) Sport	Sweden
17. Roger	27	Lofoten	Teacher, sport climbing & kayak	Low (4) Sport	Denmark
18. Martin	29	Lofoten	Architect	High (20) Trad	France
19. Daniel	22	Lofoten	Univ. student	High (12) Sport	Germany
20. Albert	30	Lofoten	College teacher	High (10) Trad	Sweden
21. Bryan	27	Bohuslän	Univ. student	Mid (5–6) Trad	Sweden
22. James	26	Bohuslän	Geographer	High (10) Trad	Sweden
23. Juliana	29	Bohuslän	Univ. student	Low (3) Trad	Sweden
24. Lucas	28	Bohuslän	Construction worker	High (8–9) Trad	Spain
25. Ethan	26	Bohuslän	Univ. student	High (10) Trad	Sweden

our climbing expert when we needed to clarify logics or meaning that appeared in the data. We have illuminated the evidence for our claims through meaning condensations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Findings

Narrative practices

Traditional or alpine climbing is today part of a contemporary consumer culture (Schöffl et al., 2010), and our participants state that they spend money on climbing vacations to international venues, and on clothing and equipment. At a climbing venue, they join communities of dedicated people where they not only share their immersive experiences of climbing but also enjoy the camaraderie, e.g. in camp around the bonfire. Consequently, story events happen during interactions when they travel to the destination, meeting others in camp, preparing and moving towards the pitch, during the climb with co-climbers, reaching the peak, returning to the camp, and in local cafés, pubs or other venues. The potential of becoming narratively immersed into the story world of traditional climbing through practices that integrate attention, imagery and feelings (Green, 2004) is thus multifaceted.

The climbers are all well aware of the difficulties involved for the most popular routes at the site, and they share information on other climbing conditions within the community. They also *help* and *instruct* other climbers (Martin, Int. 18). All the climbers like to *develop* their *skills* because they want to learn new ways to solve challenges in the wall.

Trust is an important issue in the climbing culture. Warnings are given to those who do not behave according to the ethos and conventions of the community, e.g. when people practice climbing that is above their competence level (Bryan, Int. 21). Furthermore, clothes and equipment act as symbolic story markers and they 'never trust a guy with shiny equipment' (Asgeir, Int. 2), and they can 'spot a cowboy from a mile away' (Jennifer, Int. 8).

Various interpretative positions reveal different collective narratives (Tsaur et al., 2013). We have followed the participants' journeys focussing on what stories are told, how they are told, and why they tell the stories (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). Although narrative practices at the Lofoten and Bohuslän camps seemingly are homogeneously (re)created, our findings reveal that climbers are captivated by different story worlds. With inspiration from the sport adventure literature (Sailors, 2010), we metaphorically refer to the story worlds of 'summiteers' and 'mountaineers'.

Summiteers' collective narrative: entering the world of competitive fun

Story context

The summiteers are mostly young people who live for climbing but have other (adventurous) interests as well such as surfing, diving and skiing (Juliana, Int. 23). The climbers practice mostly indoor sport climbing, and they are used to the climbing hall context for storytelling (Andreas, Int. 16). They are thus preoccupied with stories of mastering challenging routes and about techniques that are necessary for conquering rocks with high climbing grades (Thor, Int. 15).

While they are in the tourist destinations, the participants spend much time planning their next climb and share stories from previous experiences, such as how they have reached a peak most effectively (Raymond, p. 13).

> [In camp] we share how climbing is about the feeling of mastery [. . .] It's about climbing harder and harder routes. Reaching high levels does not happen in a day, so I might use a couple of weeks. I climb the same route maybe twice a week, and then I learn how to do it and then it's a fantastic feeling when you master it. (Raymond, p. 9)

Content rules

The summiteer content rules cover stories of having 'fun', hard routes and how they master routes and discover new techniques that are effective in the wall (Tor, Int. 15).

> Yes, we ran upwards [. . .] and climbed pretty fast and [. . .] I was mentally crazy enough to lead. So someone had to traverse over there then, go sideways over there. I was pretty much psyched out [. . .] is this physically possible? But then when I was done with it, it was like – ooh! - it was much easier than I thought it should be. (Tor, Int. 15)

The summiteers' stories are mostly about how they reach a summit, through efficient, fast, and rhythmic climbing. Erik (Int. 7) tells a story about reaching the top superfast and how it is the highlight of the vacation, and Lucas (Int. 24) is preoccupied with how they 'make it simpler and focus on climbing as hard as possible'. Thus, waiting in line, slow climbing, and failing to do bold moves create stories of failure.

> And then on the last pitch there was [. . .] two solutions: we could either choose [the challenge of] going straight up – or go around [the crack]. My friend wanted to, since he was leading, he wanted to try going straight up. So he was standing there – trying for quite a while, but in the end he kind of gave up and went around. And then I followed, but it was, it was – EASY, kind of 'nice' experience [. . .] but too much waiting, just standing there, looking around. (Andreas, Int. 16)

Why and how stories are told

The summiteer stories resemble a spirit within which the purpose is to idealise a sport climbing achievement of some sort, i.e. telling stories of practices of competitive climbing or thrill-seeking behaviour towards the top. The climbing is thus sport oriented, and the focus is on performance and technical circumstances for achieving their goal of reaching the top (Ethan, Int. 26, Juliana, Int. 23).

> It's an insane sense of achievement when we climb an insanely difficult route and are struggling quite a bit, and then we get up there [. . .] then we do high five at the top and run down again. (Thor, Int 15)

> It is a lot of competition. It drives me to climb harder and to climb better. [. . .] Yesterday we tried one pitch and there was competition, who could climb with the least number of attempts [. . .] it's just a matter of getting up but it's also about making fewer attempts than your friend. (Lars, Int. 3)

Robin (Int. 5) tells stories of how they try to conquer the same route again and again until they succeed. Failure stories are those that do not result in competitive achievements. For example, when they lose their grip when climbing, which is not regarded as proper, and which leads to stories of how they have to do the route again (Daniel, Int. 19). Conquering pitches and bragging about it permeates the narrative focus of the summiteers.

Mountaineers' collective narrative: entering the world of counter-culture lifestyle

Story context. The context determines when stories are expected and ok to tell. The mountaineers often stay for a month or two before moving to another climbing site. They live primitively, sometimes in a camper or they might camp in tents or stay at a friend's home (Jennifer, Int. 8). They might be employed as a professional climber in construction or other climbing-related jobs, or simply take random part-time jobs when they need money. They are often highly experienced, with traditional climbing as their main interest, and it occupies much of their lives.

The mountaineers narrate differently than the summiteers because the sociocultural background provides a collective identity with historical linkage to traditional climbing norms and conventions. Consequently, some tell stories of living in a van without spending much money (Juliana, Int. 23), and to these people climbing is a lifestyle (Jennifer, Int. 8). 'Climbing is always there' (Jacob, Int. 13) and 'It is part of life and not separate from it' (Jennifer, Int. 8). The story context and their life context seem to coincide since climbing and being part of the community is regarded as an activity that they practice several months a year.

Content rules. They tell stories about climbing as a 'whole' experience and not only a race towards the top (Ethan, Int. 25). There are nice pitches that they enjoy from the start to the end and the aesthetic value of movement (Lucas, Int. 24). The experiences involve 'a greater sense of freedom' (Bryan, Int. 21) and closeness to nature (Juliana, Int. 23). For example, Calvin (Int. 11) tells stories of climbing when the pitch in the middle was so nice that they could have climbed it the whole day. James (Int. 22) tells stories of how he works out in order to be able to move gracefully, to 'dance the wall', and the goal of becoming at one with nature. Others argue that they do not even care if they reach the top or not (Jacob, Int. 13; Lucas, Int. 24).

> If we don't reach the summit, we don't care [. . .] it is all about the experience [. . .] the aim is really not performance but searching for something beautiful, you know. Sometimes when facing a [beautiful] rock to check out, to climb. [. . .] What we enjoy is to feel the rock, to feel the nature around us, to walk in the nature, to get to the cliff. I think it is all the surroundings, all the noise from nature, the noise of the rock [. . .] you know the rock by the sound. (Martin, Int. 18)

In camp, the climbers try to talk about other things than climbing (Jacob, Int. 13; Bryan, Int. 21). Leander describes his fellow mountaineers as very open people, respectful, brilliant, with amazing skills and true friendship (Leander, Int. 12). He also points out that many are musicians and that they have jam sessions together. In one way or another, many of the mountaineers' stories draw on the conventions and values that reflect their dedicated lifestyle.

> Yea, yea, money, house, job, etc. are the strict society norms today which means go to school, get a job, meet somebody, have some kids, buy a house. And, it is kind of centred around supporting that sort of economic social structure rather than a sort of human focus on human interconnection and connection with nature and those kinds of things. I think that climbing is a sport that creates a lifestyle where those aspects are valued. And for me, I feel much more strongly bonded to those values than to the other social values that are common for a city life. (Danny, Int 6)

Why stories are told. While summiteers are preoccupied with their sport climbing achievements, the mountaineers are preoccupied with advancing their anti-materialist, eco values and a primitive lifestyle that they share with friends within the community (Jacob, Int. 13; Jennifer, Int. 8).

The mountaineers explain how they 'put up "walls" against those who try to show other people how strong they are' (Danny, Int. 6). The consequence is that 'the community has a lot more respect for those people who are humble rather than those who try to express how much better they are than other people'. (Danny, Int. 6). Some stories even indicate that mountaineers hate climbers that 'show off'.

> You have got those young guys, they climb grade 8+ and they are super strong, and they are cool and hang with their iPhones. I mean, they are very proud all the time, and they are hanging out of the cliff [showing off]. Come on guys, give us a break! (Leander, Int. 12)

With climbers that brag about their demanding and dangerous performances in the camp, they react by telling them: 'Go and brag about yourself somewhere else!' (Lars, Int. 10). Consequently, 'they don't last very long in the climbing community, because people don't like that kind of person' (Jennifer, Int. 8).

How stories are told. They do not really talk about their demanding and dangerous performances but describe instead what happens during the climb and the difficulties they face (James, Int. 22). A rather humble attitude appears when community 'heroes' do not document the discovery of new climbing pitch, which the local climbing club urge them to do: 'They do not seem interested in having their names there' (Bryan, Int. 21). However, stories can be told about others' achievements, in a communitarian way, such as when they praise and celebrate a friend's good performance.

> Susan and I had been climbing, and then we heard that [friend] had climbed his first grade 8 route. Then we decided to turn the car around and fetch a bottle of champagne so we could celebrate him. (Juliana, Int. 23)

Bryan points out sharing experiences with someone who has also been at the same site. He tells the story in the manner of sharing the climbing experience in a humble fashion:

> It is always exciting to hear someone else who has done exactly the same thing. We talked about 'do you remember when you got up there?' Oh, how did you do that, because there I thought it was scary. And oh, did you do that? We tell each other like different parts . . . the map of how you did it. Its really great to talk about. It will be kind of a problem solving. Then you take the other person 'back' to where it happened. (Bryan, Int. 21)

The mountaineers tell stories differently in the climbing community at large and with fellow mountaineers. While the stories are humble in a broader community setting, Bryan argues 'It's ok to tell stories with a great number of details to others [mountaineers]. Then you can use technical language to turn stories more vivid, and it's easier to reproduce the context' (Bryan, Int. 21). The other words, the humble communion and lifestyle characteristics are a precondition for how stories unfold among mountaineers.

Sub-world tension in community

The sociology of narrative approach allows us to study how social organisation and group dynamics influence collective narrating during communal consumption. Earlier in the paper we provided evidence for how opposing story worlds produce differences in how and why stories are produced due to heterogeneous sociocultural content rules co-present in a consumption community. The consequences are different types of consumption experiences in the various story contexts within which meanings are negotiated, and conflicts occur. Based on the elements that operate simultaneously to (re)structure and (re)produce distinct story outcomes for actors in a social context (Andersen, 2015; Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Polletta et al., 2011), Table 2 offers an overview of the social organisation of narratives in the two sub-words, and their underlying differences.

While it could be expected that a consumption community would rely on similar narratives of relevance, our findings show that what are regarded as intelligible and relevant plots are not the same among the mountaineers and the summiteers. We argue that the content rules of story contexts, with their origin in either sport or traditional climbing (e.g. Kiewa, 2001; Wheaton, 2004), to a large degree distinguish the two sub-worlds. Our findings clearly show that the climbing ethos and conventions are different. The *summiteer* story world is based on the sport climbing ethos, which colours the stories with goal orientation and competitive spirit. Consequently, they are preoccupied with physical fitness, being efficient and fast, and having technical perfection for reaching their goal of a fast ascent.

The accepted content rules of summiteers' stories are related to the competitive spirit of individual hard-core achievements and a shared sense of conquering nature and having fun. The *mountaineer* story world originates from a traditional climbing ethos which calls attention in-camp to lifestyle dedication and a relational-oriented convention of harmony between humans and nature. Whereas competitive spirit shapes the credibility of the summiteers' stories, the mountaineers face a story world which is humble and egalitarian. The man-nature communion, and anti-materialist and counter-culture values are a precondition for which stories are relevant within the group and how they are told. Detailed stories among friends are communicated within their respective story world.

Our findings show that two different ideologies, conventions and values are expressed through stories. This creates sub-world tension when the climbers belong to the same community while visiting Lofoten and Bohuslän. The stories are often not compatible and create contestation and competition with regard to the relevant narrative convention throughout the experience. Whereas some meta-narratives are common within the community, such as those related to the value of the guidebook, and preparing and getting the gear on, the positional struggles in between the goal-oriented and relationship-oriented conventions become evident when we look closer at the different story styles. Many of the goal-oriented summiteers' stories are regarded as ambiguous by the mountaineers because conquering nature, competition to the summit, and listening to performance-related stories are in contrast to their own institutionalised ethos. They are 'living the dream' of mountaineering, where their lifestyle stories resemble human – nature communion, recreation, self-renewal, and familiarity based on anti-materialist and counter-culture values. Their stories resemble coordination of movement, control, and the good feeling that they experience when mastering the 'dance of the wall'.

There are ongoing debates concerning the different conventions among sport climbers and traditional climbers (Kiewa, 2001). For example, some mountaineers (traditional climbing ethos) 'hate' bolting as it destroys nature, and also the bragging behaviour among the summiteers (sport climbing ethos). The conflict is manifested across the

Table 2. Sub-world tensions in a consumption community.

	Summiteers	Mountaineers
Story context	*Sport climbing ethos.* Consumers commit to sport climbing logic (Thor). Climbing makes them fit, it is a good activity for holidays (Andreas), but it is not a lifestyle.	*Traditional climbing ethos.* Consumers commit to traditional climbing. Climbing is a lifestyle and a big part of life. It is more than a leisure-time activity (Jennifer, Jacob).
Content rules	*Goal-oriented convention* Consumers are concerned about efficient, fast, and rhythmic climbing and are eager to reach the top (Emil, Torgeir).	*Relational-oriented convention* Consumers are concerned about relationship with people and nature when climbing (Danny, Jennifer).
Why stories are told	*Competitive spirit* Consumers tell about their performances and the hierarchy in the group (Thor, Erik).	*Humble spirit* Consumers are discrete about their skills and achievements. Egalitarian and lifestyle oriented (Jacob, Leander).
How stories are told	*Conquering nature and fun* Consumers like to share stories about techniques for better performances, to get amused by stories from the past and to plan for new holiday adventures (Robin, Daniel).	*Man-nature communion and friendship* Consumers like to share stories with their friends who have the same anti-materialist and counter-culture lifestyle (Danny, Juliana).

various destinations and is debated in social media. Some mountaineers even state that they cannot talk about it as they get so upset. They try instead to silence summiteers' storytelling when they e.g. sit together around the camp fire, by rejecting 'show-off personalities' and 'bragging behaviour' (Jennifer, Int. 8), both of which are regarded as taboo in the camp which is dominated by mountaineers.

Thus, stories are also strategic in that they may advance some interest, power or viewpoints in a consumption community. The socially competent and experienced climber would know about the controversy of the community (Albert, Int. 20) and that the summiteers draw on their indoor sport climbing ethos to be narratively transported into the community. The story world tension is therefore not a tension of *what* and *how* stories are told, but between the underlying, and to some degree tacit ethos and conventions of the climbing culture. While the summiteers 'refute' the unitary values of the traditionalist ethos by challenging the egalitarian convention and centrally held solidarity rules in the camps that we have studied, the mountaineers try to resume symbolic power through stories that resemble the myth of the counter-culture lifestyle.

Discussion

This article establishes a novel framework for understanding the collective origin of narratives and how tensions play out in communal consumption. From the perspective of the sociology of narrative, our research contributes to knowledge on how collective narrative influences social worlds of consumption, and the manner in which consumers face story world tensions in a consumption community. By studying climbing experiences, we discuss how these two main contributions impact on marketing and consumer research.

Collective narrative in social world of consumption

Prior research shows that stories are important for the rules and behaviours of consumers when they navigate within consumption communities (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). The social context shapes the storytelling, the meanings, and determines when a story is expected and demanded (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). The rules thus govern content and participation (Andersen, 2015), and both the storyteller and the story receiver should receive attention because narrative processes are activated during interactions (Craig, 1999; Deetz, 1994; Mura & Pahlevan, 2017). Recent narrative research, however, argues for an extended transportation-imagery lens which assumes that stories occur in isolation and are cognitive (Van Laer et al., 2014). Our findings, based on the sociology of narrative lens, extends this research stream because cultural and contextualised knowledge allows us to grasp the communal and social nature of narrative experiences.

Our findings show that it is possible to uncover at least some of the underlying cultural rules and conventions that distinguish the stories of a consumption community. For example, the socio-historical roots of consumer culture, such as the anti-materialist and counter-culture climbing conventions, illustrate the role of the collective narrative of consumption story worlds (Yannopoulou & Elliott, 2008). Consumers are seeking social bonds and a connected way of life in communities or neo-tribes, and such transformations involve major changes of story contents and processes in communal experiences (Ourahmoune, 2016). Our findings call attention to how collective narratives influence the

'feeling of being in another world' (Pomfret, 2012, p. 152), such as when the climbing ethos influences the content rules (e.g. relational-oriented convention), how stories are told (e.g. conquering nature, fun) and why (e.g. competitive spirit). Whereas much research focuses on how attitudes and intentions are changed when consumers are entangled in a story world (Green, 2008; Mazzocco et al., 2010), our findings reject a romanticised, mono-cultural or static view of community and argue instead for plural narrative structures that dynamically influence social practices of community.

Consequently, the theorisation of narrative consumption in interaction and meta-contexts contrasts prior research because the attention turns towards narrative practices in social acts that organise meanings. Whereas prior research has been preoccupied with identifying sequential features of narrative transportation (Van Laer et al., 2014), i.e. individual receiving/interpreting, mental transportation, loss of reality and consequences (Green, 2008; Mazzocco et al., 2010), we argue that a collective narrative view makes it possible to identify communal dimensions that are more complex and multifaceted, with consequences not only for cognitions (attitudes and intentions) and behaviour (Van Laer et al., 2014), but also for variations of cultural meaning constructions. Our results contribute to knowledge on how collective narratives shape social worlds and why consumers face tensions when contrasting stories are embedded in consumption community.

Van Laer et al. (2014) question whether social uses of stories matter for narrative transportation. Although the purpose here was not to investigate how consumers were 'transported', our analysis indicates that sociocultural stories are essential for transformation and loss of reality during communal consumption. The mountaineer story world involves stories that tend to reproduce existing ideologies and hegemonic relations (Ewick & Silbey, 1995) whereas the story world of summiteers innovatively contests the very conventions of the mountaineers, which lead to competition and positional struggles throughout consumption (Canniford & Shankar, 2013). While Van Laer et al. (2014) wonder if consumers are 'less or more likely to become transported if they also collectively interpret the story' (p. 811), we wonder if it is possible to become transported outside the scope of the collective narrative. We argue that it is a question of perspective, and that the sociology of narrative approach enables findings within which content rules would constitute what are regarded as accepted narratives, including the mechanisms that are governing social norms of becoming narratively transported into a certain experience.

Finally, our study might contribute to knowledge on how we understand communal experiences. Tumbat and Belk (2011) suggest viewing such experiences as 'competitive and individualised discourses around performative expressions and tensions' (p. 45). Rather than creating a climbing fraternity, the Everest climbers belonged to multiple communities that were composed of multiple teams. However, Tumbat and Belk do not investigate the intersections between the various sub-worlds. In contrast to their dominant logic of 'individual performance ideology' explanation, a reinterpretation of the Everest climbers might have shown that multiple collective narratives were co-present in base camp, e.g. between 'true mountaineers' and 'cheaters' (p. 51), that might have helped explain the variations in goals, communitas and sacredness among the climbers.

Story world tensions in communal consumption

In some ways climbing experiences transpire within liminal social spaces that offer magic, dedicated communion, collective identity, and spiritual enrichment (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). Our findings show, however, that consumption stories can be competitive even if they are shared in a community, that story ethos and conventions can be limiting just as they are communal, that differences between participants are anticipated even if they cause tension, and that narratives, even in a theorised homogeneous community, originate from heterogeneous story worlds of consumption. Along with a few articles from similar nature-based contexts (Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015; Tumbat & Belk, 2011), our analyses show that consumption heterogeneity is the rule rather than the exception, and that social tensions have a cultural origin in communal consumption.

Whereas heterogeneity within narrative research often is theorised as a challenge on an individual level, e.g. that storytellers lose control or that story receivers do not accept the motive behind a story (Green & Brock, 2002), little research has investigated tensions and conflicts due to variations of collective narratives (Van Laer et al., 2014). The co-presence of the summiteer and mountaineer story worlds thus provide new understanding about how consumption heterogeneity unfolds, i.e. as a power struggle between competing collective narratives. In line with critical conversations of consumer research, the hybrid and complex reality of community (Moufahim et al., 2018) turns our focus towards which story worlds are regarded as intelligible and relevant as the foundation for ongoing tensions.

Figure 1 shows a sociocultural model of story world tension in communal consumption, where heterogeneity is a result of competing sub-worlds, i.e. the model theorises how tensions emerge. The circle symbolises the community which is inspired by multiple story worlds' story contexts (e.g. sport climbing vs. traditional climbing ethos) and content rules (e.g. goal-oriented vs. relational-oriented conventions). The model calls attention to how storytelling, like other discursive forms, is embedded in hierarchies of cultural authority (Polletta et al., 2011) that shape the credibility of why (e.g. competitive vs. humble spirit) and how (e.g. conquering nature vs. man-nature practices) stories are told.

Consequently, the story world tensions in communal consumption originate from intersections between collective narratives rather than story contents. Stories are differently invoked due to the varying story context/ethos and content rules/conventions that govern each story world (see Figure 1). Consequently, the feelings evoked by narratives, which is assumed to provide empathy for the story characters (Green, 2004), might instead provide aversion and rejection of the story plot. Similar to ideology-advocating tension (Luedicke et al., 2010) and authenticity-protecting conflicts (Bellezza & Keinan, 2014), story world tension involves consumers who disagree on consumption principles. For example, Lars narrates how he hates climbers who 'show off' when interacting with summiteers and those who tell stories 'about their demanding and dangerous performances'. Not only is this about consumption incompatibility, which originates in disagreements about consumption morality, but it can be argued as a power play between a core story world (mountaineers) and an innovative non-core story world (summiteers), the latter which claims to oppose consumption ownership based on different culturally-

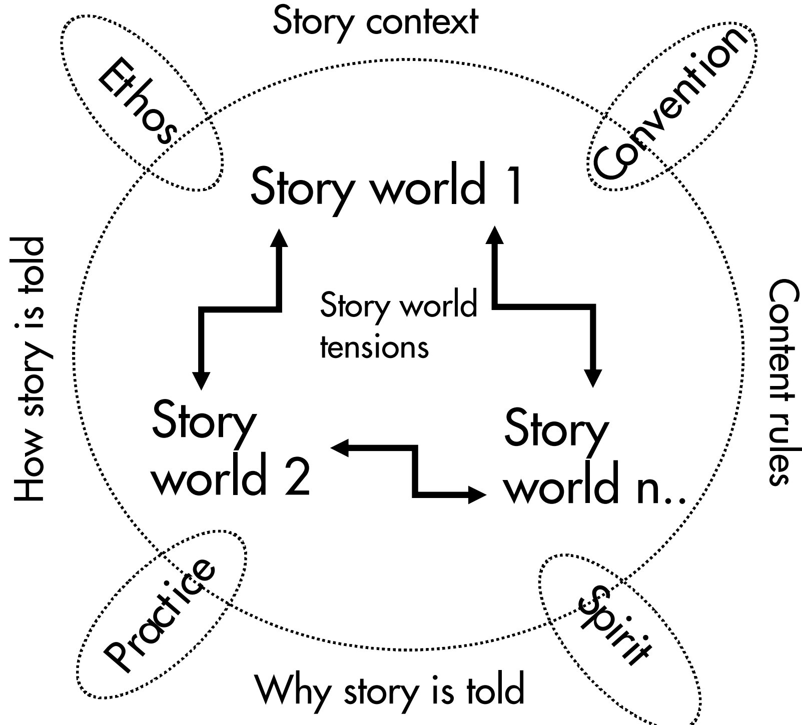

Figure 1. A sociocultural model of story world tension in communal consumption.

shaped stories. Inspired by Arsel and Thompson (2011), the mountaineers aim at 'insulating' a story field of consumption for the protection of social and cultural capital from being devalued.

Polletta et al. (2011) argue that social groups, such as activists, might dislike stories and thus fail to become part of a collective story world. However, the mountaineers do not fail to become part of the communal collective. Instead, the rejection of the summiteers' plots leads to meaningful movement away from the summiteers' competitive spirit while, at the same time, retaining the humble spirit of the relational-oriented story convention. A consequence of this is that not only do certain stories matter for entering story worlds, but alternative collective narratives are also emerging and co-created during consumption as a consequence of tension and ambiguity between story worlds, such as when someone is bragging.

Our data shows that stories are not randomly told when climbers meet. Members of each sub-world can be seen as forming an 'inner world' where a certain social contract and means of expression are reciprocally constituted. The much-argued verisimilitude effect (Green, 2004), i.e. that a story needs to be realistically told, does not hold as an explanation here. It is not the verisimilitude of the community that matters, but rather the verisimilitude of the story world. The creation of conceptual borders around a community is therefore not feasible if social flows via shared emotions, stories and embodied experiences are different between sub-words (Moufahim et al., 2018). Rather, our findings call attention to hierarchy as the norm within a communal community. In our case, the

core heroes are the highly skilled mountaineers with their relationship-orientation convention rules. Whereas it seems relevant for the summiteers to resolve tensions through adjusting their story practices, e.g. trying to mimic a hero´s climbing gear for self-differentiation (White & Argo, 2011), stories like 'never trust a guy with shiny equipment' (Asgeir) indicate that symbolic story markers might be inappropriate for resolving tensions. Rather, it seems more likely that the community might face separation, i.e. that the sport climbing ethos and conventions become popular in rock climbing contexts.

Conclusion and implications for innovation

In this paper, we have used a sociology of narrative approach that focuses on how collective narratives operate in a community within which consumers engage in cultural formation with a shared social and historical context. This approach allows us to understand the communal and social nature of collective narratives and that 'narratives are not just stories told *within* social contexts; rather, *narratives are social practices* [. . .]' (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 211), that can help to explain sub-world belonging and tension in a consumption community.

Collective narratives are stories that are commonly known in a group, they circulate for a long period and are often socially important (Chronis et al., 2012). The chosen context, adventure tourists visiting Norway and Sweden, enables us to present knowledge which extends the rather one-dimensional understanding of prior research by focusing on the sociality of narratives beyond the imagery model and the written text (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007).

While we set out with the intention of studying the story world of a consumption community, we discovered instead two distinct story worlds, which we have labelled 'summiteers' and 'mountaineers', with different collective narratives (i.e. story context/ethos and content rules/conventions) that structure how and why stories are told. Consequently, we extend existing knowledge with a multifaceted understanding of collective narrative that focuses on 'the institutional shaping of stories' (Polletta et al., 2011, p. 114). We think that the discovery of story world tensions extends what it might mean to understand consumption in adventure tourism and experiential markets (e.g. Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016).

Collective narrative does not structure consumption experiences in a rigid, static and essentialized manner. Rather, our perspective views story worlds as intertwined and always in the process of being negotiated among structures of society. This enables an understanding of the dynamic shaping of narratives and how and why stories are enacted. In addition to explaining why social conflicts and tensions might appear in consumption, a managerial implication is that co-existing story worlds would influence meaning and value creation. Consequently, managers should be careful of treating such phenomena as preconceived and unified in communal consumption.

Further research should look into the role of disputes between story worlds in other contexts, including the capturing mechanisms of collective narratives for immersion, which for a long time has been treated as an individual and psychological phenomenon. Furthermore, future research should try to extend the conventionalised manner in which consumption communities are understood (Moufahim et al., 2018). Our findings indicate that consumers are not primarily socially linked

through a consumption activity (Carù & Cova, 2007; Cova, 1997) but, rather, through story worlds. This calls attention to the need for further research related to the multi-faceted role of stories in communities.

With insights into how collective narratives can play a role in the two worlds that we discovered, choosing mountaineers as a target group is probably not a useful idea for hotels. For these adventure tourists climbing is a lifestyle, and they prefer wild camping in either tents or vans, staying with friends or in 'simple' lodging run primarily by a non-profit organisation like a local climbing club. Summiteers, on the other hand, would consider staying in a hotel or hostel and regard climbing as a good holiday activity. They might search for destinations where they can practice different adventurous activities as well. The mountaineers would be independent travellers who prefer managing the risk and challenge themselves, and value the counter-culture lifestyle with their friends at climbing spots around the world.

This paper focuses on narrative consumption, which allows us to reflect about experience-based innovation as a value-creating process, which is open and in which various actors might participate through dialogues. Knowledge is an important resource for driving innovation in businesses, and absorbing knowledge is vital in innovation processes (Hoarau-Heemstra & Eide, 2019). Adventure consumers often have a great deal of influence on how experiences are created and can make suggestions on how they want the experience to develop. It is not just about learning from the consumers but also together with the consumers. From a strategic reflexive perspective (Sundbo & Fuglsang, 2002), systematic work with innovations depends on what is important for the company, its environment and the consumers.

We think that interpretations of collective narratives and relevant story worlds in communal contexts can lead to increased uniqueness, differentiation and competitiveness. Once managers and other innovators become aware of their values mixed with those of story worlds, interesting concerns can be explored and translated into innovations that matter. For example, what ethos and conventions of the two story worlds depicted here are relevant: the goal-oriented sport sub-world or the environment- and relational-oriented traditionalists? We recommend identifying key sub-worlds including stakeholders such as 'heroes' and influencers, and monitoring and engaging with key narrative structures during the systematic work with innovations.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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