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Influential factors of experiential outdoor consumption

**A qualitative study investigating the experiences
and perceptions of experiential outdoor consumers**

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Abstract

Researchers agree on the harm materialistic values and consumption have on consumers' well-being in society today (Black, 2010; Goldsmith & Clark, 2012; Isenhour & Black, 2010; Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Pieters, 2013; Richins, 2017; Shrum et al., 2013; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Therefore the interest in investigating experiential consumption has grown as an opposite, offering healthier and more self-fulfilling alternatives than the materialistic counterpart. Especially consuming experiences in nature has proven to have significant positive effects on individuals' well-being (Hartig & Staats, 2006; Kaplan, 1995; Maas et al., 2006; Maller et al., 2006; Van Den Berg et al., 2007). Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate influential factors fostering experiential outdoor consumption. By conducting semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews with female, experiential outdoor consumers, an understanding of their perceptions on the subject was obtained. The criteria for the respondents' participation were their self-perceived identification as experiential outdoor consumers and that they regularly engage in an outdoor activity such as hiking, skiing, cycling or mountaineering. The empirical data collected were analysed using a theoretical framework consisting of previous research within experiential consumption and general consumer behaviour, inspired by an extended version of *The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)* by Ajzen, (1991). The findings delivered four major concepts describing what the respondents perceive to have influenced them into adapting experiential outdoor consumer lifestyles: *Appreciation of nature as sprung from social input*, *Nature experiences as a contributor to well-being*, *Implications of social input related to self-development* and *The mediating role of nature experiences for self-development, self-identity and well-being*. This study showed that the motivation behind experiential outdoor consumption can be perceived to originate from social input such as family, friends and through cultural- and generational belonging. One strong incentive to consume experiential outdoor activities was the increased well-being it was perceived to bring. This by offering a social belonging, challenging adventures and a setting for mental recuperation.

Keywords: "Experiential consumption", "Experiential outdoor consumption", "Well-being", "Theory of planned behaviour (TPB)", "Consumer behaviour", "Materialism".

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Introduction

This study contributes with expanding the understanding of the factors that motivate and influence outdoor experiential consumption. With vast amount of previous research stating and agreeing on the harm materialistic values and consumption have on consumers' well-being (Black, 2010; Goldsmith & Clark, 2012; Isenhour & Black, 2010; Muñoz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Pieters, 2013; Richins, 2017; Shrum et al., 2013; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), the research field of experiential consumption has thrived as an opposite, instead offering healthier and more self-fulfilling alternatives to the materialistic and affluent consumption of today.

Materialism is often defined as the perceived importance of acquiring and owning material possessions as means to reach desired states and goals in life (Goldsmith & Clark, 2012; Jiang et al., 2021; Richins, 2017; Shrum et al., 2013). This value-orientation has taken a firm grip of contemporary consumers, which has made materialistic consumption a compulsive tool used to express identity and social belonging (Pieters, 2013). The need to build a desired identity to fit in to a certain social group or context originates from the human instinct of not wanting to be alone or left out, seeing that we need each other to survive (Baumeister et al., 1995). Due to globalization and improved welfare, especially setting of after WWII, the consumption of discretionary products increased rapidly (Majima, 2008), which initiated and bolstered the materialistic values and affluence of today.

Pieters (2013) point to one adverse consequence of this being the connection between loneliness and materialism and how these foster each other. Instead of nourishing and deepening interpersonal relationships by enjoying each other's company and by exchanging real intimacy and connectedness, people tend to take the shortcut of buying things with symbolic meaning to communicate who they are in relation to others (Pieters, 2013). In the long run, this will instead create confusion about self-identities and push people further away from the relationships they want to cherish, and thus make them feel lonelier (Pieters, 2013; Richins, 2017). Isenhour and Black (2010) confirms this problematization by explaining that what humans genuinely desire in life are family, friends and leisure-time, but instead of prioritizing this we attempt to race towards happiness by addictive materialistic consumption. For the EU population, social interaction is valued as one of the most important factors influencing overall life satisfaction (EUROSTAT, 2019). Materialism is further a source of detrimental social comparison, since the nature of this value orientation revolves around continuously wanting more and better than what oneself and others already have, to again communicate identity and hierarchical status (Howell et al., 2012; Muñoz-Velázquez et al., 2017).

Mental illnesses account for 30% of diseases globally with non-fatal outcome and 10% in total when including fatal outcomes (Mnookin, WBG & WHO, 2016). In 2010, mental ailments cost society about US\$2.5 trillion, a number that is expected to go up by 240% by 2030 (ibid). As previously stated, the realization of the harmful effects materialism has on consumers' well-being has evoked the interest in investigating consumption that instead contributes with increased happiness and even self-fulfilment. This has resulted in extensive research agreeing on that to reach higher levels of well-being in life, consumers should allocate their discretionary time and income on experiences rather than on material possessions (Dunn & Weidman, 2015; Howell et al., 2012; Muñoz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Richins, 2017; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

Even though it is difficult to define and separate materialistic- and experiential consumption entirely, Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) has formulated an intention-based distinction of the experiential category:

[...] experiential purchases are those made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience: an event or series of events that one lives through. Material purchases are those made with the primary intention of acquiring a material good: a tangible object that is kept in one's possession (p. 1194).

They further stress that this definition can be applied differently on various consumers and that one should be aware of areas of consumption that are challenging to define. Cars for example, are they sources of experiences or simply material possessions?

Among the strongest determinants for why experiential consumption is beneficial for our well-being is its often social nature (Howell et al., 2012; Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) that offers a feeling of belonging to a group, which is a foundation for human happiness (Baumeister et al., 1995). Another important determinant is experiential consumption usually being outdoor activities set in nature, a relationship that has demonstrated positive effects on psychological health (Maas et al., 2006; Marrero & Carballeira, 2010; Van Den Berg et al., 2007). This includes for example activities such as hiking, sporting or simply spending time in enjoyable nature settings (Marrero & Carballeira, 2010). Researchers have found that by spending time in nature, positive consequences on well-being have been measured in terms of lowered levels of stress, greater recuperation, improved attention capacity and increased perceived feelings of relaxation, beauty and joy (Hartig & Staats, 2006; Maas et al., 2006; Marrero & Carballeira, 2010; Van Den Berg et al., 2007). Thus, experiential outdoor consumption that offers social belonging, is arguably beneficial for human well-being and therefore interesting to investigate further to expand the understanding of how contemporary consumer culture can become healthier.

Previous research on how society can shift to a healthier, more experiential-oriented consumer culture has come a long way, even though the field being quite novel. Howell et al. (2012) have acknowledged the importance of understanding the tendency and preference for experiential consumption, focusing on *what* type of personality traits that are most common with experiential consumers. There still is a shortcoming in research regarding *how* and *why* experiential consumers have been influenced to prefer this type of consumption, or more profoundly what the causes for this behaviour are. The purpose of this study is therefore to examine this research gap by conducting qualitative interviews with individuals who identify themselves as experiential outdoor consumers and investigate how and why they perceive to have been influenced to develop this specific consumption behaviour. Expanding this understanding can aid and guide future research which in turn can develop practical implication strategies for companies, organisations and policy makers wanting to foster experiential outdoor consumption.

Following this purpose, this study aims to answer the following research question:

How do experiential outdoor consumers perceive themselves to have been influenced to adopt an experiential outdoor lifestyle?

To answer this research question, the study will after this introduction and review of previous research, continue with a theoretical framework that will work as a foundation for the empirical study and analysis. Thereafter the qualitative method will be explained, followed by the findings and analysis section. Finally, a conclusion is presented accompanied by a summary of the theoretical contribution, recommendations for future research and managerial implications.

Theoretical framework

In this chapter the theoretical framework based on previous research relevant to the purpose of this study is presented. Since this framework is partially based on an acknowledged theory within behavioural research, the chapter will begin with an introduction of this theory, addressing how and why it is used in this study. Thereafter the theoretical framework will continue with relevant previous research on experiential consumption and well-being, which further will assist in analysing the empirical result.

Theory of planned behaviour (TPB)

Understanding the antecedents influencing and affecting consumer behaviour has been of interest for marketers, companies and social science researchers for a long time. The valuable insights and knowledge within this area gives are crucial for companies wanting to understand how to best target their consumers and how to successfully develop value-creating activities. A well-established theory within the consumer behaviour research is the *Theory of planned behaviour (TPB)* (Ajzen, 1991). This theory states that the central factor directly preceding consumer behaviour is an individual's intention to engage in a specific behaviour. Variables influencing behaviour are most often mediated by intention, thus affecting behaviour indirectly. Therefore, the likeliness of an intention to influence a behaviour depends on the strength of the intention per se (Ajzen, 1991). This strength is further predicted by the underlying variables building up the TPB, namely *perceived behavioural control (PBC)*, *attitudes* and *subjective norms* (Ajzen, 1991). If an individual has a positive attitude towards a specific behaviour, as well as perceiving it being easy (*PBC*) to execute and the normative (*subjective norms*) thing to do, his or her intention to conduct the behaviour is consequently strong, according to the TPB (Ajzen, 1991). Although, there are researchers questioning the sufficiency of the original conception of the TPB (Conner & Armitage, 1998; Fielding et al., 2008; Thorbjørnsen et al., 2007). Thorbjørnsen et al. (2007) argues that to increase the capability of the TPB-framework in capturing the multifaceted and complex influential antecedents of behaviour, it needs to expand to include self-identity as a variable of influence.

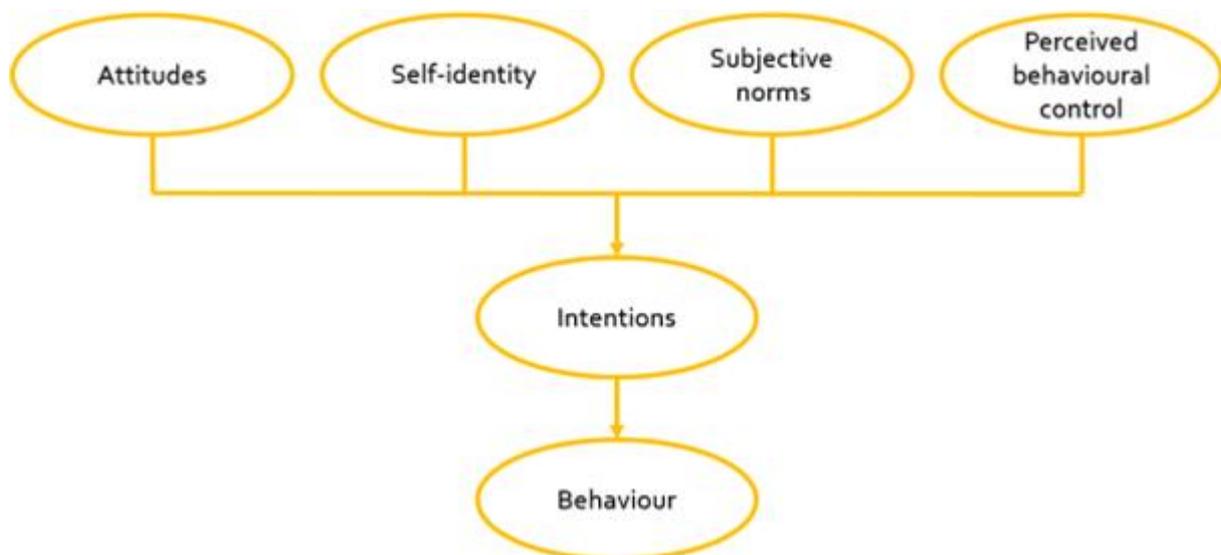


Figure 1. This conceptual model shows the relations between the variables in the extended Theory of planned behaviour, inspired by Thorbjørnsen et al., (2007).

The TPB is most often used in quantitative research to find statistical correlations between the variables. Although, in this study, these established correlations between the variables influencing intentional- and actual behaviour, as displayed in **figure 1**, are used as an inspiration to construct a theoretical framework relevant and supportive of the purpose and research question of this study. This is done together with previous research within experiential consumption and well-being. The variables included in the TPB and this theoretical framework is developed on a more profound level with extensive previous research, not necessarily connected to the TPB, but to the variables in question. Thus a fruitful and multifaceted analysis could be conducted, resulting in a relevant conclusion.

Perceived behavioural control (PBC)

The *perceived behavioural control*, henceforth *PBC*, stands for, as the name suggests, the degree of voluntary control the individual perceives to have over the behaviour in question (Ajzen, 1991). For an individual to convert an intention into a behaviour, she needs to perceive that she has volitional control over the choice of conducting the behaviour or not. This perceived control can be interrupted and influenced by external circumstances such as availability of money, competence or time (Ajzen, 1991). It can also regard factors such as demographic conditions, public policy and the behaviour of others; everything that is not under the direct volitional control of the individual in question (Ajzen, 1991). If the relevant external factors are working in favour for the individual's intention to conduct a certain behaviour, the behaviour should be successfully performed according to (Ajzen, 1991).

Ertz et al. (2016) further highlights the importance of considering the external circumstances, or the contextual factors, when predicting consumer behaviour. They present the ABC-theory as another approach to investigate behaviour antecedents. ABC being the acronym for *Attitude-Behaviour-Context*, where behaviour is influenced by attitudinal variables and contextual factors (Ertz et al., 2016). In addition to the intrapsychic aspects that drives an individual's behaviour, objective and subjective situational circumstances should be considered (ibid). Objective factors can regard public policy, regulations, costs, infrastructure and norms, in accordance with the description by Ajzen (1991), while subjective circumstances are the individual's *perception* of resources available to conduct a certain behaviour, such as time, money and power (Ertz et al., 2016). This theory is based on the reasoning stating that an individual subjectively perceives objective contexts or situations in relation to the individual's own connection and involvement in the context or situation in question (ibid). As soon as an external context or situation is subjectively perceived by an individual, it discontinues to be objective and instead becomes a unique so-called 'life space environment' for that specific individual. This 'life space environment' represents the psychological reality the individual is perceiving and is shown to influence consumer behaviour (Ertz et al., 2016). Ertz et al. (2016) argues that by including contextual factors when investigating consumer behaviour, the result and insight can more fruitfully explain the antecedents of consumer behaviour.

Attitudes

The next variable of the TPB is *attitudes*. An attitude towards a behaviour or object is based on the individual's assessment of the positive- contra negative outcomes accompanying the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) or object (Bohner & Dickel, 2011) in question. Besides behaviour, Bohner and Dickel (2011) explains that one can have an attitude towards for example things, people or ideas, which can be of both abstract and concrete nature.

How attitudes are formed and changed are dividing researchers. The theories are ranging between those arguing that attitudes are derived from memory recollection of previous already evaluated experiences and hence are fixed and stable, to those asserting that attitudes are constituted on the go (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018; Bohner & Dickel, 2011). There are also researchers indicating that

attitude-formation rather is a product of both these processes (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018; Bohner & Dickel, 2011). The latter construction implicating the possibility of an individual both possessing persistent attitudes, as well as attitudes more susceptible to change.

Albarracin and Shavitt (2018) present the most prominent factors influencing attitude-formation, starting with values, which they define as being "... attitudes toward abstract entities" (p. 304). Values influence behaviour not only mediated by attitudes but through norms as well, where they guide social behaviour by clarifying what is deemed as normal and righteous according to society (Lin & Niu, 2018). Petty et al. (1997) continue with explaining that the more important an individual find a value to be, the more supportive attitudes will be formed towards behaviours reflecting these values.

Developmental processes in an individual's life-span are important influential factors forming attitudes, especially throughout the childhood and adolescence (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018). By these periods in life further being crucial in terms of forming identities and belonging to a group, it is often during these life-phases, the basis for materialistic attitudes later in life are formed and are starting to show (Twenge & Kasser, 2013).

This naturally leads to what Albarracin and Shavitt (2018) further has found to have an eminent role in influencing attitudes, namely social inputs. We are constantly exposed to social input from family, friends, social networks and various media channels to name a few. These inputs and how they are received and subjectively interpreted by an individual are further shaped by how, who, why, where and when the information and messages are communicated. People are also more prone to share attitudes with other people they are socially connected to (de Klepper et al., 2010). De Klepper et al. (2010) found that the reason for why friends often share attitudes is not because the selection of friends is based on shared attitudes, the attitudes are rather formed during friendships by friends influencing each other.

Adding to the factors forming attitudes besides from personal and social contexts, are historical contexts (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018). These include for example historical, generational and cultural factors; all constituting the backdrop for our objective and subjective reality and our attitudes towards these. Different generations have contrasting backgrounds and therefore relate differently to sociocultural events that has taken place, either in their own lifetime or before (Donnelly et al., 2016; Twenge & Kasser, 2013).

Culture is highly important when investigating the antecedents of attitude formation according to Albarracin and Shavitt (2018). The value systems within different cultures can diverge considerably, which further explain why attitudes differ between cultures (ibid). For example, many eastern countries are characterized by value systems cultivating collectivism and therefore social expectations, norms and obligations to the bigger group (Miller et al., 2011). Western countries are instead often guided by individualistic values such as independence and self-fulfilment, prioritizing personal goals over the group goals (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018). The attitudes aligning with the cultural value system an individual belongs to are therefore much easier formed and fostered (Boer & Fischer, 2013).

Subjective Norms

It is not only people living in collectivistic societies that are affected by and conform to social norms. Norms are generally recognised by researchers as having a strong influence on behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Coleman et al., 2011; Lin & Niu, 2018) and *subjective norms* further constitutes the third and last variable in the TPB-framework by Ajzen (1991).

Subjective norms are the behavioural and attitudinal expectations the individual perceives being determined by other people of importance to the individual (Ajzen, 1991). Norms are motivational forces influencing not only behaviour, but attitudes and opinions as well (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). These norms can be derived from larger societal scales, or smaller group-related contexts (ibid), and are important, natural tools enabling humans to coexist in a relatively peaceful way (Lin & Niu, 2018). Furthermore, individuals often assess the behaviour of close reference groups to be normal, and therefore the normal and right thing to do oneself (Rettie et al., 2012). Close reference groups can for example be determined by age, gender or culture.

By norms being subjectively interpreted, as well as derived from various contexts, norms vary in both strength and significance for different people. For example, Coleman et al. (2011) and Thorbjørnsen et al. (2007), found that norms can have considerably stronger impact over the behaviour of young people, compared to older individuals. Younger individuals are still developing their identities and are trying to find their roles in relation to others and are therefore more inclined to comply with social norms, due to insecurity. Materialism has been found to be connected to insecurity and anxiety and that individuals with materialistic tendencies, to a greater extent, avoids risks and rather act on negative emotions (Howell et al., 2012). This could translate in using material consumption to compensate for self-doubt originating from social comparison, and to suppress feelings of anxiety (ibid). Older people, having longer life experience, are instead more often comfortable with acting on their own attitudes and will (Coleman et al., 2011). But even if social norms- and comparison can affect individuals' well-being negatively, humans are social creatures that wants to be a part of a social context consisting of healthy and fruitful relationships (Dunn & Weidman, 2015; Howell et al., 2012; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

Yet, what most people have in common is the motivation to comply with norms deemed as important to oneself (Ajzen, 1991). This is not solemnly driven by a desire to belong to a group of importance, but also the possibility of being exposed to either social rewarding- or maltreatment, depending on if one acts in compliance with the norm in question or not (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). Naturally yearning for social recognition and wanting to avoid negative consequences, humans are influenced by norms, both deliberately and subconsciously (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Smith & Louis, 2008).

Extending the TPB with self-identity

Conner and Armitage (1998) states that self-identity has proven to be an important variable affecting intentional behaviour, and according to Thorbjørnsen et al. (2007), actual behaviour as well. Self-identity circulates around the image an individual has and want to enhance about oneself (Fielding et al., 2008; Gatersleben, 2014) and the related behaviour individuals engage in to fulfil and nurture this desired identity (Thorbjørnsen et al., 2007). This can be shown in personal values, preferences, personality traits, behaviour, physical appearance and goals in life (Gatersleben, 2014). Values are even being of prominent significance in the construction of self-identity, by being the broader source of influence for the other determinants (Gatersleben, 2014). Gatersleben (2014) continues to explain that individuals are prone to align their behaviour with their self-perception, a fact fostering the importance the role self-identity has in predicting behaviour. According to Thorbjørnsen et al. (2007), an individual will assess if the outcome of a potential behaviour, that is supposed to aid the creation and expression of a self-identity that is important to the individual in question, is beneficial for this desired identity. If the outcome is deemed positive to the individual, the individual is motivated to engage in similar identity-beneficial behaviour in the quest of wanting to validate the self-identity (Fielding et al., 2008; Thorbjørnsen et al., 2007). If this is hindered in some way, the individual might instead experience an internal conflict, because of the identity-behavioural gap (Fielding et al., 2008).

Experiential consumption

The *Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)* applies to behaviour in general and are therefore often used when studying consumer behaviour. Furthermore, to comprehend and possibly predict experiential consumer behaviour, Howell et al. (2012) have in their research acknowledged the importance of understanding the tendencies and preferences behind experiential consumption. Their research found experiential consumers in general to possess extrovert, empathetic, open-minded and reward-seeking personality traits. Since experiential activities often hold a social character, this could support why extroversion is a common personality trait amongst experiential consumers (Howell et al., 2012). A person who is emotionally attracted to and open towards seeking excitement and at the same time possess an extroverted type of personality, could be more inclined to favour experiential consumption over acquiring materialistic possessions (Howell et al., 2012). This because extroversion can be connected to an adventure- and sensation seeking character (Aluja, Garcia, & Garcia, 2003) and thus experiential consumption can be well suited in satisfying the psychological needs with this type of personality (Howell et al., 2012). Mehmetoglu (2012) agrees with Howell et al. (2012) by also explaining that personalities in general are crucial to consider when examining preferences for experiential consumption and mentions openness as a strong predicting personality trait for experiential consumption as well.

Materialism has further been found to be connected to insecurity and that consumers with materialistic tendencies avoids risks and rather act on negative emotions (Howell et al., 2012), for example by using material possessions to compensate for financial or social insecurities (Pyszczynski et al., 1997; Rindfleisch et al., 2009). In contrast, experiential consumers might hold an increased sense of security and a reward-system benefited by seeking out life-experiences rather than material acquisitions (Howell et al., 2012). This can lead to a positive upward spiral for perceived security and well-being; security fostering experiential consumption values, which in turn fosters higher levels of psychological need satisfaction and lower levels of anxiety (Howell et al., 2012). This is supported by Fredrickson's (2001) research stating that positive emotions have a reproducing effect, meaning positive emotions tend to generate even more similar emotions. Moreover, when feelings of security are imminent, people are more inclined towards broadening the experience-bank, which often involve requiring new skills, knowledge and relationships (Howell et al., 2012). These types of experiences will in turn foster experimental values and a basic set of chronic, positive emotions that gets more and more difficult to alter with, even when temporary feelings of anxiety appear (ibid).

Well-being and nature

The reasons for why experiential consumption is beneficial for our mental health and happiness are multifaceted. Among the strongest determinants is the social nature of experiences. Humans are social creatures driven by the need to belong, feel relatedness and connectedness (Baumeister et al., 1995); needs which experiential consumption can satisfy (Howell et al., 2012; Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). People travel together, eat together, go to concerts together, live together, and so on and so forth. By this we nurture and develop our social relationships and create long-lasting shared memories. The reminiscing of these memories, in combination with the excitement and anticipation experienced before the activity itself, expands the positive effects experiences have on consumers' well-being to a longer time-span, outperforming what material possessions can achieve (Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

Often discussed in human psychology and happiness is if motivations originate from external or internal sources (Carver & Baird, 1998; Pieters, 2013; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). To succumb to a motivation that emerges as a product of intrinsic interest, whether it be an interest in an activity or relationship, leads to higher levels of self-actualization (Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Carver & Baird,

1998) and well-being (Easterbrook et al., 2014). The opposite would be motivations controlled by external pressures of conducting behaviour with the purpose of satisfying other people, which often is the case with materialistic consumption (Carver & Baird, 1998; Pieters, 2013). This results in decreased well-being (Easterbrook et al., 2014). Being controlled by other sources than the self and thus hindering the inner free will, brings us unhappiness, dissatisfaction and loneliness (Carver & Baird, 1998; Pieters, 2013; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

Experiential consumption is more likely to satisfy intrinsic needs and motivations, as opposed to the materialistic counterpart (Carver & Baird, 1998). Muñiz-Velázquez et al. (2017) explain that experiences empower individuals to self-develop by increasing individuals' understanding of themselves and their goals and values in life and thus their associated self-identity and intrinsic motivations. Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) continues on the same course by stating that experiences, by being more prone than material belongings to align with intrinsic ambitions of personal growth, assists more positively to an individual's identity.

Previous research has shown multiple positive effects on human health when being in contact with and experiencing nature (Hartig & Staats, 2006; Kaplan, 1995; Maas et al., 2006; Maller et al., 2006; Van Den Berg et al., 2007). Everything from having a plant in the workplace to being in the middle of a forest has proven to lower levels of stress and mental fatigue (Maller et al., 2006) and at the same time increase feelings of calm, enjoyment, bliss and life-satisfaction in general (Hartig & Staats, 2006; Maas et al., 2006; Maller et al., 2006; Van Den Berg et al., 2007). Kaplan (1995; 2001) has identified general variables important for human recuperation environments and thus well-being, for example "*being away*" - meaning that normal routines or environmental settings are interrupted, "*fascination*" - being consumed by experiencing meaning in a situation and "*extent*" - engaging in an environmental context offering ample individual exploration Kaplan (1995; 2001).

In connection to this, Marrero and Carballeira (2010) similarly discuss six elements of psychological well-being, which are the result of conjoint humanist and existential psychology research. These elements being "*self-acceptance*" - accepting the self and one's previous and present life, "*positive relationships*" - the importance of connecting with and feeling empathy towards others, "*autonomy*" - being independent and comfortably adapting behaviour after believed morals and values, "*environmental control*" - the ability to elect and design beneficial preconditions for self-development, "*purpose in life*" - goals and belief systems guiding the behaviour and decisions in life with the purpose of creating meaning, and lastly "*personal growth*" - continuously exposing oneself to challenges to develop and to reach greater potential as an individual.

Connecting with nature and consuming experiences in a nature environment can be beneficial in creating the settings and preconditions needed to recover from mental fatigue as explained by Kaplan (1995; 2001) and to support the six elements of psychological well-being Marrero and Carballeira (2010) are referring to. Although, Marrero and Carballeira (2010) found that extroversion and openness could be the more accurate and direct explanatory variables of well-being, rather than connection and exposure to nature. These personality traits are more often found to be directly connected to well-being than contact with nature Marrero and Carballeira (2010). Extroversion and openness have however shown to have connections with contact with nature. This could be explained by nature often being the innate setting for exerting these traits, both by enabling the pursuit of new experiences per se (openness) and further by these experiences often including attractive social contexts (extroversion) (Marrero & Carballeira, 2010).

Even though researchers are debating the direct and indirect influential variables explaining well-being, a vast amount still agrees on the positive, de-stressing and convalescing effects consuming

and experiencing nature environments have on psychological health and life-satisfaction (Hartig & Staats, 2006; Kaplan, 1995; Maas et al., 2006; Maller et al., 2006; Marrero & Carballeira, 2010; Van Den Berg et al., 2007).

Method

In this chapter the chosen qualitative method is presented, explained and motivated based on previous scientific sources.

Study Design

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were applied based on the exploratory nature of the research design, where the purpose was to deepen the understanding of *how* experiential consumers subjectively perceive to have been influenced and shaped to possess associated consumer behaviours (Brinkman, 2013). This being a relatively novel research territory, a qualitative method, as explained by Gerring (2017), is suitable both when investigating new areas of research and when hoping to discover new perspectives on a topic. Using individual interviews as the data collection instrument made it possible to collect descriptions of how the respondents perceive and experience the world (Brinkman, 2013), within the context of experiential consumption. A quantitative approach would instead have explained the reality as it is, but not *how*, which was the purpose in this specific study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Gerring, 2017).

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used when recruiting respondents for the study, to ensure the respondents having first-hand experience of the subject studied (Goulding, 2005). The criteria were the respondents' preferences for experiential outdoor consumption over materialistic consumption and thus identifying as experiential outdoor consumers. Due to experiential consumption being a vast and complex area of research, a niche group of experiential consumers specifically consuming outdoor activities on a regularly basis, was recruited for this study. Furthermore, the selection was also to some extent delimited by demographic characteristics derived from previous research. According to the research of Ryan and Dziurawiec (2001), men are more prone to adapt to materialistic values than women. At the same time Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) reports that women were more inclined to derive feelings of happiness from experiential consumption than men were. This could give cause to women being influenced in certain ways differing from men, making them favour and appreciate experiences more. Thus, the selection for this study will only include women. These delimitations increase the study's transferability and can be useful for future research comparing male and female consumers or different categories of experiential consumers.

The respondents were found and recruited using the social media platform *Instagram*. The nature of the platform being users sharing stories and pictures from their lives and lifestyles, users were selected based on their profiles displaying tendencies towards experiential consumption. The selected profiles were thereafter contacted and asked if they were interested in participating in the study and if they fulfilled the criteria presented above.

Respondents

Five respondents were recruited. They are presented below using pseudonyms for anonymity, along with how the interviews were conducted. This is further explained under 'Data Collection'.

"Matilda" (video interview):

Female, 24 years old.

Occupation: Student, personal assistant and self-employed within copywriting.

Place of residence: Borås (Sweden).

Education: Social Pedagogy (ongoing).

"Alice" (face-to-face interview):

Female, 28 years old.

Occupation: Student and instore sales assistant.

Place of residence: Gothenburg (Sweden).

Education: Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Marketing.

"Maria" (telephone interview):

Female, 24 years old.

Occupation: Warehouse worker.

Place of residence: Söderköping (Sweden).

Education: Nature Guide (vocational education).

"Ester" (telephone interview):

Female, 33 years old.

Occupation: Integration of refugees.

Place of residence: Gothenburg, (Sweden) but are currently living in a camping van, moving around in northern Sweden.

Education: Bachelor's degree within Human Resources and Organizational Theory.

"Lisa" (video interview):

Female, 34 years old.

Occupation: Professional skier and founder of a social media platform for female experiential- and extreme sport consumers and practitioners.

Place of residence: Östersund (Sweden).

Education: Currently enrolled in a bachelor's program in Business Administration and International Marketing.

Data collection

To gain a deep and nuanced understanding necessary to answer the research question of this study, individual qualitative in-depth interviews were used as instrument. Group interviews could also have been suitable as it is a useful format when exploring new areas of research, considering group discussions can open for spontaneous detours evoked by the various interpersonal interactions (Brinkmann, 2013). Seeing that the purpose of the study was investigating and interpreting individual experiences, and that group interviews could increase the risk of result bias by respondents possibly modifying their responses to suit the group dynamic and context, individual interviews were still considered to be the best format for the study (Brinkmann, 2013; Roulston, 2010). This format is also favourable when wanting to keep the interviews and conversations relevant and rich in content (Brinkmann, 2013) within the limited time-frame that prevailed.

Five in-depth interviews were conducted during 2021, either face-to-face or via video call or telephone. Due to the prevailing pandemic of Covid-19 and the respondents residing all over Sweden, regarding the interviews held via video call or telephone, this was deemed as the most suitable way of conducting these qualitative interviews, considering the circumstances.

The interviews were conducted mainly using the *emotionalist*- and *constructionist*- approach to interview research, explained by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008). The '*Emotionalist*'-approach focus the questions on obtaining knowledge regarding the respondents' subjective perceptions, viewpoints and understanding of their own realities and experiences, instead of focusing solemnly on consistent hard facts which would be the *positivist* – approach (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Since the purpose of this study was to understand individuals that consume experiences and how they perceive to have been influenced to do so, this approach was arguably suitable. This approach is often guided by 'what' - questions, which is the reason for combining the *emotionalist* – approach with the

constructionist – approach. The latter approach instead contributes with open questions of ‘how’- or ‘why’- character, which help to initiate an active conversation between the interviewer and the respondents (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) and to gain an understanding of how the respondents’ realities are constructed (Brinkmann, 2013). The *constructionist* – approach can further help exploring new discourses in the research field (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) which, as previously stated, still is reasonably new and uncharted.

Combining these two approaches resulted in the formation of an interview framework, found in *Appendix 1*. The interview framework consisted of three themes inspired by the four variables included in the extended version of the *Theory of planned behaviour* with an integrated focus on experiential outdoor consumption and well-being, which are presented and also used in the theoretical framework of this study. These themes were *perceived behaviour control, attitudes, subjective norms* and *self-identity*. This was to make sure that the result derived from the interviews were relevant for the purpose of the study of investigating influential antecedents of experiential outdoor consumption. The interview framework also included three other themes comprising questions confirming that the respondents met the criteria of the study and further to gain an understanding of the respondents’ personalities and perceptions of their general consumption. These themes contributed with making the interviews relevant, logical and more easily navigated for both the respondents and the researcher (Brinkmann, 2013).

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, using the interview guide as a flexible framework, enabling and encouraging space for spontaneous, follow-up probing questions. The conversational nature of this medium further fostered the opportunity to take exploratory detours that could be of value for the study, although continuously guided by the interview framework to stay on a relevant path (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The respondents were introduced to the purpose of the study in the beginning of the interviews, as well as being presented the definition of experiential- and materialistic consumption by Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) which also is presented in the introduction of this study. This was done to decrease the risk of misinterpretations later affecting the answers. Furthermore, the respondents confirmed their voluntary consent of participating in the study, as well as approving of the interviews being recorded. The respondents were further informed of their anonymity in the study to ensure their confidentiality (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Instead pseudonyms were used in the findings and analysis section. These can be found under *Sampling* in this chapter, along with some basic demographic information about the respondents, with the purpose of aiding the interpretation of the empirical data. Questions clarifying the sampling criteria initiated the interviews to determine the conformity of the respondents, along with basic demographical questions to increase the understanding of the thereafter generated result. The interviews were conducted in Swedish, as this being the mother tongue of the researcher and respondents.

Data analysis

After completion, the interviews were transcribed to make all data available by text for the analysis. The generated data was analysed with an inductive, thematic approach, one of the most common methods for analysing qualitative data (Guest et al., 2013). Following this approach, the text-based data were thereafter read and interpreted multiple times to find similarities and differences, within and between each case, regarding the respondents’ experiences and perceptions, by using data-driven coding. Data-driven coding being patterns emerging during the interviews and especially afterwards while processing the material generated through these interviews. The purpose of coding being to explain and understand greater concepts of the result and thus helped guide towards answering the research question (Brinkmann, 2013).

Developed concepts

Four major concepts were identified and developed through the data-driven coding when interpreting and analysing reappearing perceptions and experiences with the respondents. These concepts were:

- ***Appreciation of nature as sprung from social input***
- ***Nature experiences as a contributor to well-being***
- ***Implications of social input related to self-development***
- ***The mediating role of nature experiences for self-development, self-identity and well-being***

The purpose of using developed concepts like these is to reflect the findings in a summarized manner but still contain rich and profound descriptions of the native data (Seers, 2012). Quotations derived from the interviews were used to increase the trustworthiness of the analysis (Seers, 2012) and to bring out the respondents' personalities.

During the analysis, a continuous reflection of the purpose and the research question was done to ensure the interpretation of the data was implemented with these in mind (Seers, 2012). The process of analysing the data was further conducted by comparing and discussing the findings in relation to previous research found in the theoretical framework. Thus, an understanding of the empirical data evolved, which both confirmed and somewhat challenged connections to prior theories.

Trustworthiness

To assess the trustworthiness of a qualitative study one needs to consider its credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Connelly, 2016). The credibility criterion concerns if the study and its result displays what it was aimed to do in a believable way (Connelly, 2016). This was ensured by the study following the standard procedures of an interview study, concerning the phases of preparation, interviewing, analysing and reporting, as explained by Brinkmann (2013). Credibility was further conserved by continuously and critically assessing if the material produced contributed to understanding the influential antecedents of experiential consumption through the respondents' own experiences and perceptions. A further challenge was the respondents' subjective interpretation of the interview-questions. If the respondents misinterpret the questions, the result could lack relevance or can even be misleading in reflection to the purpose of what the questions were meant to investigate (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). To avoid this, a clarification or follow-up question was used in those cases when misinterpretations were suspected. Aiding credibility is also the researcher's knowledge and familiarity with the subject (Connelly, 2016), which were considered to be relatively high since the researcher conducted an extensive review of previous research during the study as well as having a strong interest in the subject in general. A disadvantage to the credibility is the study being conducted by one researcher only, increasing the risk of subjective bias (Connelly, 2016). Although, this deficiency was somewhat diminished through a discussion of the study with a peer and a supervisor.

For the study to show dependability, the processes within the study need to be clear and consistent to prove stability in the generated data and reported result (Connelly, 2016). By presenting an informative methodology, a description of the empirical findings and logical connections between findings and theory during analysis, the dependability is considered to be strong.

The criterion of confirmability was fostered through distinctly supporting interpretations and decisions throughout the study with qualified references from previous research (Connelly, 2016). The report further aims to be logical and accessible and thus enabling the reader herself to assess the

trustworthiness and quality of the study. Furthermore, the question of subjectivity is important to discuss (Brinkmann, 2013). It is difficult, if not impossible, for anyone to be fully objective no matter the subject since information is always somewhat filtrated through each person's unique experiences, attitudes and personality. In the case of qualitative interviewing, the goal often is to gain access to the respondent's subjective perceptions, viewpoints and experiences. What is important is for the researcher to not generalise what cannot be generalised and to consider the own subjectiveness when interpreting the research area itself and when analysing the result (Brinkmann, 2013).

Lastly, the level of transferability, namely the potential the study and its findings have in being transferred and applied to similar, but other contexts, is decided by the reader aiming to do so. But to responsibly aid the reader in this decision, this study is constituted upon relevant previous research and aims to transparently present the empirical process and findings through rich detail (Connelly, 2016).

Empirical findings and analysis

In this section the findings are presented and analysed under four concepts that emerged during the process of interpreting and analysing the empirical data in relation to previous research. These thematical concepts have been assessed as collectively being influential in promoting experiential outdoor consumption in the context of this study, based on the experiences and perceptions expressed by the respondents.

Appreciation of nature as sprung from social input

Two of the most prominent common denominators between all the respondents were their perception of nature being a source of subjective well-being and possibilities. Lisa recurringly mentions that being outdoors experiencing nature is important for her happiness and is further the setting for her greatest interests such as skiing, running and biking. What she especially appreciates is the complexity and multifaceted attributes nature experiences offer:

Researcher: *"It sounds like you are drawn to nature when you describe what motivates your experiential consumption?"*

Lisa: *"Well, I like to be on the move, both physically and mentally. And the curiosity of being on my way somewhere, to see something, to feel something, a scent.. If it had only been about me wanting to move my body, well then I might have gone to the gym and used an exercise bike. There is an element of excitement and unpredictability, that you do not know what is going to happen, even if you go out to run the same route as always.. I find that very pleasing."*

Why nature has become an important component in Lisa's experiential consumption could be from her growing up close to nature and that her parents, from an early age, took her skiing and mountain hiking. Alice also highlights the influence her upbringing and environment probably had on her appreciation for nature:

Researcher: *“From where you think this appreciation for nature originates?”*

Alice: *“We moved from the city to the countryside when I was about 7 years old, so I basically grew up around nature and animals. It feels like home and ‘normal’ to me, and I need to have nature close to feel happy. Also my mother prefers the calm of the countryside over living in the city. So I guess in a way that has transferred to me. “*

That Lisa and Alice highly value the possibility of being close to and experiencing nature can thus be derived from the aligning values, attitudes and norms possessed and expressed by their parents, since values influences both attitude- and norm creation, as described by Lin and Niu (2018). Further strengthening the probability of the parents impact is Albarracin and Shavitt (2018) stressing that attitude formation especially takes place during the developmental childhood and that social inputs are eminent in guiding and influencing these formations. Seeing that parents are among the first and most authoritative and extensive sources of social input for a child, it is arguably no surprise that the values, opinions and lifestyles of the parents are, at least to some extent, reflected onto the child. Further interesting is that what is deemed as normal and normative behaviour to an individual is put in context to close reference groups (Rettie et al., 2012), especially for younger individuals being insecure about their identities and roles in different groups and social contexts (Coleman et al., 2011; Thorbjørnsen et al., 2007). This further supports the suggestion that the centrality of nature-appreciation distinguished in the behaviour, values and attitudes of Lisa’s and Alice’s parents and the childhood environment this created, fostered Lisa’s and Alice’s continued appreciation and perceived need for nature as a necessary element in their lives.

Maria believes that her strong interest for exploring and experiential consumption comes from her having many friends later in life with travelling as a great interest. By Maria being subject to influence from her friends’ interests and behaviours, seeing that friends shape each other’s attitudes (De Klepper et al. (2010), this created a normative setting for what she subjectively perceived to be a normal, important and thus attractive focus to have in life (Ajzen, 1991). In combination with her extroverted and curious personality, inherited from her parents according to herself, this made her develop a positive attitude towards experiential consumption. This conclusion is supported by norms strongly affecting behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Coleman et al., 2011; Lin & Niu, 2018) and the fact that an extroverted person is more prone to adapt an experiential lifestyle since this personality trait more easily derive the psychological benefits of experiential consumption, according to Howell et al. (2012). Her positive attitude towards experiential consumption furthermore played an important part in developing her strong interest in nature experiences, especially hiking:

Researcher: *“How did you get involved with nature experiences?”*

Maria: *“It was after high school and me and my best friend didn’t have that much money but still wanted to do something. So I googled around and found out that hiking was a good and cost-free activity. My friend was a bit sceptical at first, but she joined me on*

a hiking trail I had found close to where we lived. We got lost haha, but still greatly enjoyed the beautiful autumn nature and hiking as an activity, and since then we were hooked and still continuously go on hikes and adventures together.”

Besides possessing a positive attitude towards experiential consumption, she further perceives to have a strong volitional behavioural control over consuming nature experiences. She believes that it is easy for her to go on experiential hikes, since it does not need to demand monetary resources or expert skills, factors that often can be hindrances in the way of self-desirable behaviours (Ajzen, 1991; Ertz et al., 2016). Further supporting Maria's behavioural control in this context is the fact that her values, attitudes and interests are vastly products of influences from like-minded, and therefore she is complying with the subjective norms she deems being important (ibid). Thus, she does not have to combat an internal conflict of incompatible normative behaviour, which naturally would obstruct her consumption of nature experiences (Ajzen, 1991; Ertz et al., 2016).

Matilda also acknowledges the influence her friends have on her interest in outdoor, experiential consumption. She explains that the people she is most comfortable around and connects with are people like herself; loving adventures and nature, and therefore these are important and common traits with her friends. This probably fosters her own appreciation for nature by attitudes towards a behaviour or an object, in this case nature, being continuously nurtured and formed amongst friends (de Klepper et al., 2010).

Researcher: *“Do you feel a strong connection with other individuals consuming similar experiences?”*

Matilda: *“All my friends are adventurous, so therefore I feel that I normatively belong and that I am in the middle of a group of people that like to do the same things.”*

Her friends are an important reference group affecting what Matilda assesses as being normal and therefore something she is more inclined to believe in and act in accordance with, as stated by Rettie et al. (2012). Consequently, her selection of friends and their social input nurtures her appreciation of nature and her motivation to spend time outdoors.

Besides being influenced by friends, both Maria's and Matilda's appreciation for nature and hiking is constantly reinforced and strengthened by them being part of social media communities sharing the same interest. They express that these communities within nature experiences means very much to them. Maria experiences a strong connection to the individuals within these online communities and both Maria and Matilda often find inspiration and collect knowledge for future outdoor endeavours within these groups and contexts. Matilda even expresses that without being part of these online communities, she would feel left out. The social input they receive from social media communities does not only inspire and influence their preferable attitude and value orientations toward nature experiences (Albarracín and Shavitt, 2018), but it further increases their *PBC* by enabling them to collect valuable knowledge making the threshold even lower for consuming new nature experiences (Ajzen, 1991). In addition, these communities probably contribute to increase Maria's and Matilda's

well-being, since it gives them a sense of belonging and inclusion (Baumeister et al., 1995), as expressed explicitly by Matilda herself.

Another source of social input that has formed and shaped Maria's interest and liking for nature and nature experiences, she received during her education to become a nature guide. The education involved the students, everyone naturally interested in nature experiences, conducting various and many times more extreme nature experiences such as long-distance ice-skating and camping in low degrees during winter. Being around individuals with the same values and positive attitudes towards nature probably strengthened and reinforced Maria's own positive relationship with nature experiences, in accordance with the research by Albarracin and Shavitt (2018) and de Klepper et al. (2010).

All five respondents in this study expressed a concern for the environmental challenges the world is facing today and how nature is being degraded by our standards of living. Alice, Maria and Ester explain that their concern exists partially because of it being a general, normative and topical subject in society today, which then naturally influence their own value orientations and attitudes (Ajzen, 1991; Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). Alice further believes it to be generational. She perceives it to be her generation's future on stake and therefore their responsibility to solve the environmental- and climatic challenges ahead. Thus, being concerned for the environment and climate is not simply a general, societal norm imposed upon her, since she feels pressured and obligated to comply to the expectations put upon her generation in this context as well (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018; Donnelly et al., 2016; Twenge & Kasser, 2013). These generational norms are possibly perceived as more important since they originate from a closer reference group than general societal norms (Rettie et al., 2012). Seeing that all respondents in this study belong to the same, young generation, they are more prone to align their attitudes and behaviour with the accompanied normative value orientation (Lin & Niu, 2018; Petty et al., 1997), which today concern environmental sustainability in many ways. Alice explains that she genuinely cares about nature and the challenges to preserve it that lies ahead. But she further highlights the pressure she feels to comply with these norms and that it often is difficult and somewhat exhausting:

Alice: "I feel more and more pressured to adapt to a more environmentally friendly lifestyle because I am young and belong to one of the generations that is supposed to 'solve everything'. It doesn't feel comfortable anymore to post about a trip abroad on Instagram or go shopping for a new garment at H&M, it feels like I would be judged if I would, it feels wrong. At the same time I still see people from my own generation doing these specific things, maybe because they're not as concerned or educated on the subject as I.. but then I struggle with a 'fear of missing out' instead; I also want to go on trips and buy new clothes haha... But well, I know it's for the best and that hopefully society will transform to not accept this behaviour with anyone in the future.."

This pressure and feeling of not wanting one's behaviour to be negatively judged is further an example of how norms affect individuals (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). Since humans do not want to be excluded from a group of importance, in Alice's case the group from her generation that acts against environmental degradation, we comply with the expectations imposed upon us (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Smith & Louis, 2008). But Alice is also conflicted since she still feels pressured to use materialism as a way of expressing identity, which according to Coleman et al. (2011) and Thorbjørnsen et al. (2007), is of special importance to young people who are in the developing phase of forming an identity. Howell et al. (2012) further point out that social comparison insecurities can translate to materialism specifically, which seem to be something Alice still is bothered with, even if she is aware of it and actively opposes it.

Nature experiences as a contributor to well-being

All five respondents describe nature as an important factor contributing to their well-being, aligning with the research by Hartig and Staats (2006), Kaplan (1995), Maas et al. (2006), Maller et al. (2006), Marrero and Carballeira (2010) and Van Den Berg et al. (2007). Lisa recurrently highlights how important it is for her well-being to be able to be outdoors, enjoying nature. Ester says that for her, nature is a very important source of happiness and balance and for Maria, being outdoors surrounded by the beauty and challenges of nature is her greatest passion in life.

For Matilda, nature and hiking has become one of her greatest interests and the hub for her mental recovery and well-being. She has a history of depression, toxic relationships with both physical and psychological abuse combined with the struggle of trying to fit into the role as a stereotypical, extroverted young woman. She says that nature became her rescue and a zone of freedom when her mental well-being was limping. In accordance with Kaplan's (1995; 2001) theory of recuperation environments, Matilda disclose that nature has become her way of "being away" from everyday routines and expectations, as well as allowing her "extent" to reflect over her own well-being and genuine goals in life.

Researcher: "What is your relationship with nature?"

Matilda: "I can be myself outdoors in nature. If I want to walk around and cry, nature allows me to do so without me risking any judgement. It's only me and nature, and that notion creates a calm within me and makes me more present. "

Alice describes a similar connection with nature:

Researcher: "What is your relationship with nature?"

Alice: "There is no other time or place I can experience such deep calm as when I'm out in nature. It doesn't matter if I'm on a hike, bike ride or if I'm cross country skiing, the nature is amazing and beautiful, I feel so present and other worries just fade away for the moment."

For Alice, nature seems to be a well-suited recuperation environment as it, according to her own descriptions, include several of Kaplan's (1995; 2001) variables important for recovering from mental

fatigue. Besides “being away” and “extent” as Matilda connected to nature experiences as well, Alice further experience “fascination” through the meaning and appreciation she feels while being outdoor in nature.

Both Matilda and Alice describe themselves as introverts and that they rather have few, deeper relationships than several ones of superficial character. They further need dedicated time to be alone to mentally recover after social situations, time which they also enjoy.

What they find to be the toughest part of having an introverted personality is that it often is normatively counteracted in society. They feel pressured to have many social connections and a personality that revels in being around people, which is constantly forced upon them, especially through social media where the content often involves social contexts of happy people. This pressure can originate from generational norms of how to act and behave to be accepted amongst peers (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018). The internal conflict Matilda and Alice perceive here, can emerge when an individual is hindered in expressing and acting accordingly to the own self-identity, as described by Fielding et al. (2008). The hinder in this case being the prevailing norms they perceive themselves to be expected to comply with (Ajzen, 1991), which in turn are not aligning with what fosters their individual well-being. For Alice, being out in nature relieves her from the stress of confirming to these norms and helps her re-connect with herself.

Alice: “I’ve really struggled with my self-image and still am to this day, since I feel that I don’t fit in to the normative, extroverted persona that seems to be the ideal in society. But it’s like, when I’m outdoors in nature, it feels like I regain control and feel like this is my element, here I am myself, I feel confident and at peace.”

One conclusion can be that the societal norms of extroversion both Matilda and Alice experience, diminish their *PBC* of how they wish to live their lives in many situations, as explained by Ajzen (1991) and Ertz et al. (2016). This “life space environment”, meaning the psychological reality of not fitting in Matilda and Alice subjectively perceive themselves to be in (Ertz et al., 2016), has arguably driven them to find an alternative way to escape this reality and regain control of their well-being. They find nature and experiential consumption to be solutions to distance themselves from these norms and expectations, enabling them to increase their *PBC* and well-being. That nature is a source that lowers levels of stress and increases feelings of calm and life-satisfaction is, as already stated, recurrently supported by previous research (Hartig & Staats, 2006; Maas et al., 2006; Maller et al., 2006; Van Den Berg et al., 2007). This in combination with the research by Muñiz-Velázquez et al. (2017) explaining that experiential consumption empowers self-development and the understanding of the self, strengthens the argument that nature experiences increase well-being and the chances of self-fulfillment.

Both Matilda and Alice provide evidence of how vast and complex experiential consumption is and how difficult it is to describe an experiential consumer. Aluja, Garcia and Garcia (2003) as well as Howell et al. (2012) found experiential consumers to generally possess extroverted personalities since these often come with openness to adventure, thrill-seeking and being around people. But in the case of Matilda and Alice, this is only partially true. Alice and Matilda explain that they gladly share their experiential adventures with others, but that they probably are more selective with their company, compared to a stereotypical extrovert. Furthermore, if an extrovert enjoys nature because

of the environment per se enables experiential consumption and adventures, Matilda and Alice add a dimension of enjoyment by, in addition to this, appreciating nature for offering possibilities of mental recuperation, in accordance with Kaplan's (1995; 2001) research. Marrero and Carballeira (2010) highlight that being an extrovert can possibly more accurately be connected with increased well-being, rather than exposure to nature. Furthermore they explain that extroversion has shown connections with contact with nature, just because it enables experiential consumption as mentioned above. This can explain why Lisa, Ester and Maria, as self-appointed extroverts, focus on the adventures and challenges when explaining their appreciation for nature, whilst Alice and Matilda instead focus on the possibilities of mental recuperation nature offers them.

Why and how Matilda managed to turn to nature and experiences on her quest to recover from mental illness, when the common response for many individuals in the same position is to turn to materialistic consumption to seek comfort and happiness (Pyszczynski et al., 1997; Rindfleisch et al., 2009), is interesting. She explains that before she met her partner a few years ago, she was more inclined to turn to materialism to fit in and get approval from peers and society. But she believes that this new relationship and the fact that they share the same values and interest in nature, influenced her to search inwards after what she needed to focus on in life to find meaning and well-being. Her new relationship might have given her an increased sense of security, which fosters experiential consumption over its materialistic counterpart, according to Howell et al. (2012). She managed to prioritize and nurture her intrinsic desires and needs over the external pressures dictating how she should live. That Matilda today acts accordingly to what she genuinely wants, that being consuming nature experiences and additionally has left her materialistic value orientation behind, supports the research by Fredrickson (2001) and Howell et al. (2012) of how positive emotions, in this case from perceived security and experiential consumption, work in an upward spiral of positive symbiosis. Feelings of security fosters experiential consumption and the lust for developing new relationships and competences. This in turn has possibly resulted in Matilda experiencing more positive emotions, lower levels of anxiety and an increased life-satisfaction which gets even more difficult with time to alter with, according to Howell et al. (2012).

Besides the social input from her relationship and the security this arguably has given her, the reason for why she has embraced nature experiences over materialism could further be derived from Matilda being more prone to act on her own attitudes and will, due to her increasing life experience fostering independence and self-honesty, as explained by Coleman et al. (2011). Instead of using new gadgets to gain external acceptance and adapting her behaviour and opinions to fit into the social roles and contexts she finds herself in, all these being products of external demands which are detrimental to her well-being (Carver & Baird, 1998; Easterbrook et al., 2014; Pieters, 2013; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), she has possibly found a way to follow her intrinsic motivations and goals through nature experiences (Carver & Baird, 1998; Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017). By doing so, she is more inclined to self-actualize (Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Carver & Baird, 1998) and to increase her subjective well-being as explained by Easterbrook et al. (2014).

This connection between well-being and nature is described by all five respondents and can be a clear example of them being intrinsically motivated to have nature in their lives. To follow an intrinsic motivation can lead to increased well-being in itself, as already stated (Easterbrook et al., 2014). Although what has led this to be an intrinsic motivation is harder to pinpoint. It could have been transferred from the environment and social input from a young age as mentioned earlier, in the case of Lisa and Alice. All five clearly possess a positive attitude towards nature experiences since they assess the positive outcomes of experiencing nature to outweigh the negative (Ajzen, 1991; Bohner & Dickel, 2011), otherwise they arguably would not deem nature as a crucial element

affecting their well-being. Matilda explained that she was interested in nature and outdoor activities even before she met her current partner and decided to change her life in order to increase her well-being and then discovered the real importance of nature in that equation. This supports previous research indicating that attitudes are continuously created, depending on the prevailing circumstances for the individual in combination with previous memory recollection (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018; Bohner & Dickel, 2011). Prominent in the case of Matilda is that her positive attitude towards nature and nature experiences have increased since her lifestyle change, but since it was not non-existent before, the semi-fixed theory of attitude-formation supported by Albarracin and Shavitt (2018) and Bohner and Dickel (2011) is arguably valid in this case. Further aligning with the idea of attitudes being able to change is how attitudes are influenced through different developmental phases in an individual's life, further explained by Albarracin and Shavitt (2018). If Matilda partially dealt with her mental illness through materialism when she was younger, which is common according to Twenge and Kasser (2013), she later managed to change and diminish this materialistic attitude through her later developmental phase of changing her values and priorities in life. This can also be applied to Ester re-evaluating her priorities in life. When she was younger her main focus was to build a successful and lucrative career. But her change of attitude has today led her to instead value a balanced life with time spent in nature together with her family.

Implications of social input related to self-development

Lisa expresses that the constant search for opportunities of self-development is a key driving force rooted in her personality:

Researcher: *"How would you describe your strongest personality traits?"*

Lisa: *"Incredibly curious with a desire to constantly develop, to always try to see if one can develop as a person, and I like to perform and win."*

Lisa perceives her upbringing being the most prominent factor that has fostered these personality traits. She explains that as a little sister to an older brother she often needed to fight to gain her space and get her voice heard. Lisa also mentions that when she was a child, her parents wanted to create an environment that nurtured pedagogical and inquisitive personality traits by enabling the possibility of exploring and trying new things. With her mother being a teacher and her father an entrepreneur, she has naturally since childhood been raised and present around values promoting self-improvement and the curiosity of pushing the limits. The importance of social input, especially during developmental phases such as childhood, in the formation of an individual's attitudes, values and identities (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018) and therefore arguably also personality, cannot be stressed enough, as previously mentioned. For Lisa, the subjective norms, values and attitudes she perceives, possesses and are guided through in life are arguably to a great extent focused on self-development and her challenging herself. One explanatory reason for this can be that behaviour aligning with self-development was socially rewarded and encouraged in her childhood environment (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Smith & Louis, 2008). Furthermore, this social influence she experienced as a child that strongly valued self-development, was plausibly transferred in strength as well, since according to Petty et al. (1997), the more important a value is perceived to be to a person, the more supportive the attitude towards behaviour beneficial to those values will be as well. And this is further supported the other way around by individuals being inclined to share attitudes with people of importance to them (de Klepper et al., 2010), in this case, Lisa's family. Explaining Lisa's preference

for and interest in more extreme experiential consumption can thus be her channelling her curiosity and need for self-development through these experiences.

Alice's relationship with self-development can instead be perceived as having a different focus compared to Lisa. Interpreting Lisa's perception of her goals related to self-development, a pattern of athletic performances seems to be in focus. Interpreting Alice's perception of her self-development, it instead appears to be an intra-psychic journey towards well-being and increased self-reliance and self-confidence. When she reflects over her strong motivation to challenge herself and to strive towards self-fulfilment, Alice finds it difficult to pinpoint why she has this drive, and why it has translated into experiential consumption:

Alice: "It might have come from me not really fitting in as a child, and being subject to bullying, even if it might not have been that severe. Maybe that gave me a mentality of 'I will show them' and in a way feel good about myself when I succeed and for example see on Facebook that my old bullies are stuck in our old, small hometown with a boring job. It's like I'm looking for redemption. But at the same time I know that this mindset is not healthy, and I am constantly trying to remind myself that I am doing this for Me, not to show others. But it is hard."

She further mentions that her parents do not have a university degree but that she is strongly motivated to attain one herself. Interesting is that Alice's mother has been the source of social input that has shaped Alice's attitudes and values in several ways. By her mother appreciating nature it is likely that she transferred this preference and admiration to Alice, but regarding educational level, the mother instead acted as a somewhat deterrent example, since Alice wanted to achieve more.

One explanation can be that the positive attitude towards nature grew strong since Alice lived close to nature and directly experienced the positive effects nature had on her well-being (Hartig & Staats, 2006; Kaplan, 1995; Maas et al., 2006; Maller et al., 2006; Van Den Berg et al., 2007). This direct experience of well-being in combination with important social input from the mother sharing the same attitudes and values connected to nature (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018; de Klepper et al., 2010), developed appreciation for nature to be an intrinsically important attitude and value orientation with Alice (Petty et al., 1997). The external social pressure of higher education Alice experiences are important in other contexts, to increase her well-being by being included and accepted in society and other social groups (Dunn & Weidman, 2015; Howell et al., 2012; Pyszczynski et al., 1997; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Her quest to attain a higher education degree has resulted in her making friends with similar ambitions, and thus her positive attitude towards higher education and similar achievements are constantly reinforced (de Klepper et al., 2010). Although according to herself, she doesn't know if this motivation of higher education and success in life in the end will make her happy as she knows nature does, which can be explained by these pressures originating from external expectations (Carver & Baird, 1998; Pieters, 2013; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Alice further explains that exploring nature experiences and thus often challenging herself through these, is her way of trying to find well-being and self-actualization outside the societal external pressures of, for example, obtaining an educational degree. Thus, nature experiences become a way for her to connect to her

self-identity and to find her genuine intrinsic motivational way to happiness (Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Carver & Baird, 1998; Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017).

Ester tells a similar story. She grew up in a small town in a family that do not share the same interests as her. She felt that she couldn't reach her full potential if she were to stay in that environment and thus moved away as soon as she turned eighteen to embark on her own journey and the experiential lifestyle she has developed since then. The reason for why both Ester and Alice desired a different life compared to their parents, can be explained by different generations possessing different attitudes, as expressed by Albarracin and Shavitt (2018), Donnelly et al. (2016) and Twenge and Kasser (2013). Even if attitudes vary on individual level, it also varies on a generational and cultural level (ibid). The generation raising Ester's and Alice's parents had other values, attitudes and norms to live by, more focused on stereotypical family constellations and putting bread on the table. The self-centrality and focus on self-fulfilment weren't that prominent for earlier generations. Ester and Alice instead grew up in a generation with a more liberal and equal historical setting, offering more possibilities for self-actualization. Another explanation to why Alice and Ester feel a strong motivation to fulfil themselves, can be them perceiving a normative pressure of having to fulfil themselves as young individuals in a western society. As discussed earlier, it is natural to conform to norms that are found within a close reference group (Rettie et al., 2012). In the case of Alice and Ester, these normative groups of guidance can be of both generational and cultural character. We often want to comply with a close reference group since these norms are important to us to feel belonging and relatedness (Baumeister et al., 1995). Furthermore, another motivation to comply with the norms, attitudes and value systems of these reference group or groups is the social rewarding or maltreatment Alice and Ester can be subject to (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). These reference groups elucidate the importance of devoting your life to self-fulfilment. If you do so, you are rewarded and accepted, but if you don't you get the opposite treatment. Alice and Ester might be aware of these expectations guiding them through life, but it can also affect them subconsciously (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Smith & Louis, 2008). Either way, this social input can be a source of influence which has motivated them to indulge in experiential consumption.

The mediating role of nature experiences for self-development, self-identity and well-being

Marrero and Carballeira (2010) highlight the importance of "*personal growth*" and self-development as elements fostering psychological well-being. For Ester, personal growth has revolved around changing her priorities to instead foster a balanced life, due to several reasons. Ester describes herself as an ambitious person that continuously sets new goals for herself to achieve and to continuously self-develop, something she has done as long as she can remember. But after her six week old son became sick and almost passed away, she re-evaluated her prioritizations in life. Instead of focusing on building a successful, well-paid career, spending time with her family and experiencing the world together with them became her new focus.

Ester: "... it changed my perspective on life quite drastically when my son had been ill. I felt that all the pressure around work and my own career disappeared, that instead what's important is to live and be present in life, to cherish it and each other, because we don't know how long we've got."

It is clear that Ester's perception of what self-development is and how it brings happiness to her shifted after her son's illness. Before, Ester was motivated by financial success and career titles; external, normative pressures which she at the time deemed as important and therefore complied with (Ajzen, 1991; Coleman et al., 2011; Lin & Niu, 2018; Petty et al., 1997) and adapted her behaviour to fulfil that desired self-identity (Fielding et al., 2008; Gatersleben, 2014; Thorbjørnsen et al., 2007). She believed that by aligning her goals and behaviour to fit in to this mould of an individual measuring success in titles and money, she would become happy. After the incident with her son, as well as seeing friends following this normative path of building impressive careers, which lead them to burnout and stressful lives, Ester says that she was influenced to not fall into the same destructive patterns. Her attitude towards that sort of lifestyle changed and became adverse since she perceived the negative outcomes of conforming to it outweighing the positive (Ajzen, 1991; Bohner & Dickel, 2011) and thus made it unlikely for her to engage in behaviour fostering a life valued after stereotypical, western success.

After this change of value orientation and attitude, she is today more motivated by intrinsic motivations, seeing she is focused on her balance and well-being in life (Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Carver & Baird, 1998). Ester explains that she still wants to challenge herself and always have something to look forward to, because it is part of her intrinsic self-identity. Self-identity is, as explained by Fielding et al. (2008) and Gatersleben (2014), the personality traits and image an individual want to connect to the self, often through identity-related behaviour (Thorbjørnsen et al., 2007). She does this by channelizing her intrinsic needs of personal growth and thus well-being, in accordance with the research by Marrero and Carballeira (2010), through experiential consumption, for example by building her own camping van, going on great hikes and bike rides and taking her children mountain hiking. This causality is no surprise if you refer to the research by Carter and Gilovich (2012) and Carver and Baird (1998) which disclose the fact that experiential consumption more often is derived from intrinsic motivations and therefore also contributes to increased well-being, possibility of self-actualization and understanding of the self-identity (Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003). For Ester, experiential consumption is an important part of her journey towards a more balanced life and healthy self-development.

All five respondents perceive their own identities to be connected to experiential consumption. As Conner and Armitage (1998) and Thorbjørnsen et al. (2007) describe self-identity to be an important determinant for intentional and actual behaviour, their self-perceptions are reasonably not surprising. In Lisa's case, she explains her greatest personality traits to be curiosity and the willingness to constantly develop and grow as a person, which arguably would benefit her well-being (Marrero and Carballeira (2010)). When asked about her self-perceived identity connected to experiential consumption, Lisa answered:

Lisa: "Well yes, it is a great part of who I am. It's like I said earlier where my focus lies and that what's important to me is being happy, and what makes me happy is to be in nature a lot, to do things I find fun, to meet these people I do these things with. So I would say.. that it is two thirds of who I am".

Gatersleben (2014) explains that self-identity can be shown in for example personality traits, preferences, personal values, goals and behaviour. Confirming that Lisa holds a self-identity that easily translates into experiential consumption is her self-perceived curious, openminded, adventure-

seeking and extroverted personality, her preference for being outdoor enjoying nature, her goal of reaching the world elite within free skiing and a value-orientation motivating her to constantly improve herself (Aluja, Garcia, & Garcia, 2003; Howell et al., 2012; Mehmetoglu, 2012; Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

Alice explicitly says that she very much perceives that experiential outdoor consumption has become a part of her identity. This identity and the behaviour aligning with it has become important for her well-being and how she views herself. Thorbjørnsen et al. (2007) explain that when a person is fond of the self-identity, all activities related to creating and performing this identity will be evaluated in terms of goodness of fit and alignment between behaviour and identity. For Alice, this has in a way worked the other way around. She instead values distinct behaviours because of the well-being and affirmation this give to her intrinsic needs, which naturally has translated in experiential outdoor consumption becoming a part of her identity. Supporting this reasoning are Muñiz-Velázquez et al. (2017) stating that experiential consumption can help increase the understanding of the own identity and thus foster a self-development favouring that specific identity. Alice has realised that experiential outdoor consumption is of topmost importance for her personal-growth and well-being, which aligns with Marrero's and Carballeira's (2010) research.

Matilda's journey towards well-being has been through a self-development that has enabled her to embrace, accept and comply with her self-identity as an experiential outdoor consumer at the same time as leaving destructive and abusive relationships behind and realising her own self-worth. Matilda finding her solution to be a search inward to allow her intrinsic motivations to flourish and thus in many instances defying societal norms and expectations as discussed earlier, can be a result of her being raised in an individualistic culture and society (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018). As Albarracin and Shavitt (2018) discern, western cultures today are greatly embossed and driven by individualistic values, meaning that the cultural norm encourage the individual to focus on the self. These values and societal norms projected on the respondents have further shaped their opinions and attitudes as explained by (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998), on how they should act and fit in to their generational- and cultural role, but still in a way that suits them personally, which in combination arguably have translated into their unique experiential self-identities. Matilda's positive attitude towards her individualistic needs and the experiential self-identity this attitude has contributed with creating, can further be due to the fact of it being easier to foster attitudes conforming with the value system one comes from and belongs to, as acknowledged by Boer and Fischer (2013).

A prominent pattern in Maria's description about what motivates and influences her to consume experiences, is her strong dedication to her self-development. Especially how important it appears to be for her to challenge herself by consuming experiences.

Researcher: *"How would you say that experiential consumption is important to you?"*

Maria: *"I would say it's the challenges. When I had done my first hike I just wanted to continue. Two years later we climbed Kebnekaise, and before that we trained a lot to not risk us giving up because of it being too difficult. And once we've done that and reached the top I felt that well, this was definitely not the last time."*

Just as the other respondents, Maria identifies as an experiential outdoor consumer and greatly desires to have a challenging and adventurous lifestyle, which is reflected in her experiential outdoor consumption habits. This further aligns with Fielding's et al. (2008) notion of individuals' tendency to engage in behaviour that benefit and validate their self-identity. Although, she further expresses that she just as much values a challenging hike as an unpretentious one; both conditions are important for her well-being and enjoyment of nature experiences. One concern she has is that hiking and nature experiences will become an overly prestigious lifestyle where people begin to compare one's own achievements and efforts with others' and thus put self-value into this. Maria believes that everyone should be allowed to create their own perception of, and level of ambition within experiential consumption, without feeling pressured to compare themselves to other practitioners. This again relates to the fact that external pressures and comparisons with others often impair well-being (Carver & Baird, 1998; Easterbrook et al., 2014).

Personal growth and self-development, as expressed by Marrero and Carballeira (2010) to be decisive elements for psychological well-being, seem to be important for all respondents in this study, albeit it being expressed differently with everyone. Athletic ambition motivates Lisa, a balanced life between challenges and unpretentiousness is important for Ester and Maria, whilst for Alice and Matilda it is about finding themselves and what makes them genuinely happy and in connection with their intrinsic self.

Another important element for psychological well-being Marrero and Carballeira (2010) discuss is "*positive relationships*". This element is also acknowledged to be an important determinant for why experiential consumption is a source of well-being (Howell et al., 2012; Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Although Lisa is strongly dedicated to herself, her own self-developments and achievements, she also emphasises that she very much enjoys sharing and spreading her love for experiential consumption to others by creating and inviting others to participate in various experiential activities as well. Lisa being a founder of a social media community network for women, with the purpose of distributing inspiration and enabling individuals to find like-minded people within the area of experiential consumption, is an example of a somewhat collectivistic mindset (Miller et al., 2011). This arguably shows that one value orientation does not have to exclude the other, since Lisa seems to be guided by both individualistic and collectivistic values in her life. Ester also describes how important social encounters and relationships are to her well-being:

Researcher: *"Is social interaction important to you in your everyday life?"*

Ester: *"Very. But since we have a mobile lifestyle right now, travelling around in our camping van, we don't have that normal continuity of meeting friends you always hang out with. But we meet people all the time through our way of living, but never the same people. It is very important to me to have social interaction with other people, but it doesn't necessarily have to be with the same person. Instead, what's important to me is that we share the same values and interests."*

For Ester, positive relationships do not need to involve profound and long-term friendships to be meaningful. On the contrary, she collects energy and inspiration from the people she briefly meets with on, for example, her hikes or when mountaineering. Maria explains that even if she is trying to pursue more hiking trips on her own to challenge herself and to be independent, one of the things she loves the most with hiking is sharing the experience with others. Alice points out that friends and social connections are important to her, but she has high demands on the people she surrounds herself with, as previously discussed. Just like Matilda, Alice chooses her relationships on the premise of them having to positively contribute to her well-being. They both want to share their experiences and memories with other people, but with people they know well, enjoy being around and are comfortable with. Interesting here is the common thread within previous research that connects the reason for why experiential consumption in general increases well-being with individuals, with the often social aspect of an experience (Howell et al., 2012; Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Since all respondents underline the importance of the social interaction experiential consumption enables, albeit the demands on these interactions diverging, this could further explain why the respondents perceive experiences to increase their well-being and why they identify with the image of being an experiential outdoor consumer; not only because of the adventurous and developmental part, but also the social- and community aspect.

Marrero and Carballeira (2010) further found that “self-acceptance”, the accepting of the self and one’s previous and present life, being key to an individual’s well-being. Alice’s ability to accept herself and the person she is varies from day to day. She believes this being the result of her previous self-destructive mindset of not being good enough, that sometimes recur and brings her down. Although she perceives that her self-acceptance increases the older she gets (Coleman et al., 2011) and that her fairly newfound interest in experiential outdoor consumption, and all positive aspects that comes with it, helps her on her way towards self-acceptance:

Alice: “I think it’s about when I’ve have completed a challenging hike for example, it becomes like a sort of concrete receipt proving that I actually am capable of achieving something. These nature experiences also in a way manifest what it feels to be alive, the purpose of being human. Like reconnecting with how we are supposed to live. All these positive emotions from this type of experience are then in a way packaged into a meaningful memory that I thereon after can access whenever I want, especially when I’m doubting myself and what I am capable of.”

Reminiscing over experiential memories is an additional determinant for why experiential consumption contributes positively to our psychological well-being (Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). The memory becomes a time-capsule that prolongs the positive effect of the experience, whenever the memory is accessed.

Matilda has struggled with self-acceptance as well, during a long time. Not only because she has felt lost in complying with societal-, and gender specific norms and roles, but also because of traumatic happenings in the past involving abuse and neglect as mentioned earlier. Today, she has accepted who she is and that what makes her happy are nature experiences; either consumed on her own or

with people she perceives to care about her. For Matilda, self-acceptance and personal growth have been crucial elements for her now increased and more stabilized well-being, aligning with the research by Marrero and Carballeira (2010).

Both Alice and Matilda have thus in a way gained greater control over the last three elements of well-being by Marrero and Carballeira (2010); “autonomy”, “environmental control” and “purpose in life”. These elements comprise an individual to be independent and in control over adapting the behaviour after one’s own values and beliefs, as well as designing the right environment for self-development, well-being and meaning in life (ibid). This is arguably the case for Lisa, Ester and Maria as well. Lisa has built a life around her passion and what makes her feel good, Ester has re-evaluated her priorities and created a balanced life she genuinely enjoys and Maria has found hiking to be an activity she can consume and perform on a daily basis, as well as hiking giving Maria both the challenges and unpretentiousness she needs for her well-being and intrinsic meaning in life.

Conclusion

This study has investigated how experiential outdoor consumers themselves perceive to have been influenced to develop this specific preference for outdoor activities. This aligns with the purpose of the study to add knowledge to the research area of what incentives are behind experiential outdoor consumption. Guided by the research question “*How do experiential outdoor consumers perceive themselves to have been influenced to adopt a preference for an experiential outdoor lifestyle?*”, five in-depth interviews were conducted, from which four concepts emerged when the data were analysed and related to previous research. These concepts show that the perceived factors fostering a preference for experiential outdoor consumption both differ and correspond between the respondents in this study.

The first concept, *Appreciation of nature as sprung from social input*, shows the pervading perception of nature holding a key role behind the motivation to consume experiences. One influential factor identified was the strong impact growing up close to nature with social input from family and friends that created a normative setting that nurtured attitudes and behaviours connected to appreciation for nature, in accordance with the research by Albarracin and Shavitt (2018), Coleman et al. (2011), Lin and Niu (2018) and Rettie et al. (2012). Although, as demonstrated in this study, appreciation for nature does not necessarily need to be inherited directly from the family and environment during the childhood. Instead, the personality traits developed through social input in the course of growing up, can indirectly foster appreciation for nature by an individual later in life engaging in contexts where this personality can flourish, which in this study was shown to be contexts involving experiential consumption in nature. The fact that attitudes are developed, shaped and changed throughout life as argued by Albarracin and Shavitt (2018) and Bohner and Dickel (2011), especially amongst friends and close reference groups (De Klepper et al., 2010), is also recurrently displayed in this study. This is not only shown through individuals having developed an interest in experiential outdoor consumption as a consequence of social input amongst friends later in life, but also through perceived intensifying generational- and societal norms demanding more engagement in sustainability issues (Ajzen, 1991; Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). The latter, as well, circles back to normative social input that affects individuals’ behaviours and attitudes. Even if the concern for environmental sustainability is not one of the strongest determinants for appreciation of nature in this study, it is still acknowledged.

The second concept, *Nature experiences as a contributor to well-being*, is a strong and prominent theme throughout this study. Being out in nature is perceived to be a crucial element in the intrinsic journey to find the self and to increase the subjective well-being (Easterbrook et al., 2014; Hartig &

Staats, 2006; Kaplan, 1995; Maas et al., 2006; Maller et al., 2006; Marrero & Carballeira, 2010; Van Den Berg et al., 2007). This by nature enabling experiential consumption that fosters self-development but also by complex and dynamic elements that stimulates and inspires the mind. Aligning with Kaplan's (1995; 2001) description of recuperation environments, nature is furthermore perceived to act as an important setting offering mental recovery and a zone of freedom from mental illness and demanding societal norms not conforming with the self-identity. Interesting are the different angles between self-proclaimed extroverts and introverts to why nature is perceived to increase the subjective well-being. For the extroverts, there is a greater focus on the possibilities nature creates in the context of physical challenges leading to self-development. For introverts, the focus instead lies on the opportunities nature offers in terms of mental recuperation and in embracing the self-identity. Although, an important note is that both personalities perceive to appreciate and experience both these angles to why experiential outdoor consumption benefits their well-being, even if one is more prominent than the other. Despite the fact that this study partially supports the research by Howell et al. (2012), describing experiential consumers to generally possess an extrovert personality since they are prone to reap the psychological benefits of it more easily, it is important to apply a broader perspective and reflect over what type of experiential consumer one is referring to and how complex the subject of defining what experiential consumption is. In this study, both extroverts and introverts identify as experiential consumers and perceive experiential outdoor activities to increase their well-being, albeit with somewhat differing underlying reasons.

The third concept, *Implications of social input related to self-development*, interestingly exhibit that perceived subjective meaning of self-development connected to experiential outdoor consumption can deviate between individuals, which partially can be traced back to social input. According to this study, the need for self-development can originate from personality traits and attitudes of curiosity, ambition and competitiveness, which in turn has been translated into life-goals connected to athletic and adventurous achievements within experiential consumption. The need for this type of self-development has been and still are nurtured and rewarded by family, friends and other close reference groups of importance (Albarracín & Shavitt, 2018; Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Rettie et al., 2012). But the perceived need for self-development can also arise from the desire to leave a detrimental and externally controlled lifestyle behind, such as generational and societal norms and expectations, that do not align with the self-perceived identity, to instead embrace the intrinsic motivation of self-development and well-being, expressed through experiential outdoor consumption (Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017; Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003). Hence, this study indicates that experiential outdoor consumption can be appreciated for its contribution to self-development broadly in two ways. Either by experiential outdoor consumption naturally being developing for individuals because of its often challenging nature, or by it being a mediating tool helping to increase an individual's self-reliance and confidence and thus be part of a journey towards a new, desired and healthy self-identity. Both approaches being important factors in the quest towards well-being and self-actualization (Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Carver & Baird, 1998; Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2017).

The fourth and last concept, *The mediating role of nature experiences for self-development, self-identity and well-being*, indicate how this type of consumption can be a direct and indirect source of well-being and self-fulfilment. As Conner and Armitage (1998), Gatersleben (2014) and Thorbjørnsen et al. (2007) state, self-identity is a strong determinant for individuals intentional and actual behaviour. In this study, individuals self-identifying as experiential outdoor consumers are central, as well as their perceived need for self-development and subjective well-being. How and why these various individuals are meeting these needs and with what incentives differs, but the unifying and mediating denominator is experiential outdoor consumption. Thus, one conclusion can be that it is

difficult to pinpoint if an individual is a potential experiential outdoor consumer, even if facts such as personality, upbringing, social influences, generational- and cultural belonging are transparent and available. However on a positive note, knowing if an individual identifies as an experiential outdoor consumer makes it easier, as according to Thorbjørnsen et al. (2007), an individual fond of a certain identity will try to align the behaviour to fulfil and foster this specific identity. Although it is once again important to stress the subjectivity of self-identity; two different individuals identifying themselves as experiential outdoor consumers can in fact mean that one is a freestyle skier on elite level, whilst the other engages in shorter hikes now and then; as proven in this study. To summarize, experiential consumption in general is a complex and still rather novel research territory to investigate. The purpose of this study was to contribute to expanding this area of research by answering the earlier presented research question. This was done and the findings show that social input and the environment during childhood, but also later in life through other close reference groups such as friends, generation and culture, is perceived to imprint and shape values and attitudes fostering experiential identity and behaviour. Furthermore, the result displays that experiential outdoor consumption is important and multifaceted in guiding and aiding various individuals towards fulfilling themselves and their self-identities, to self-develop and to increase the subjective well-being, which supports the research by Muñiz-Velázquez et al. (2017) and Marrero's and Carballeira's (2010). These factors are further perceived, by the experiential outdoor consumers participating in this study, to be strong motivational forces explaining why they engage in this specific type of consumption.

Theoretical contribution and future research

This study has focused on investigating influential factors that foster experiential outdoor consumption. The theoretical contribution lies in the extracted knowledge and understanding of how and why younger women in Sweden perceive to have come to develop a strong interest in, and actual consumption of, outdoor experiences such as skiing, cycling, hiking and mountaineering – athletic activities where nature is a great part of the experience. To broaden the understanding of experiential consumption, future research should target other categories within the subject, for example connected to other ages, genders, cultures, tourism and travelling, to name a few. Furthermore, future research should continue to approach the subject using new and different angles and methods. Thus, a more holistic picture of experiential consumption can be developed, aiding those interested in encouraging this type of consumption and wanting to raise awareness regarding the increased well-being that often comes with it. Interesting would be research investigating consumers that have turned from a materialistic- to an experiential value orientation, and thus identifying tools to enhance the preference for experiential consumption with materialistic consumers, with the purpose of fostering well-being, self-fulfilment and maybe even sustainability. But as shown in this study, the concept of experiential consumption is vast and sometimes hard to grasp. First, because it is difficult to define what an experience is as shown with the car example given in the introduction. Second, because various individuals identifying as experiential consumers have their own subjective idea of what that identity means. Therefore, for future research, it is of utmost importance to thoroughly determine what is being investigated.

Managerial implications

The findings provided in this study can indirectly, by its theoretical addition, contribute to building a healthier consumer culture that favours healthy experiential consumption. This by inspiring further research on the subject as explained above, that in turn can develop practical strategies and tools for this type of change that hopefully can aid companies, organisations and public policy makers wishing to nurture and grow the interest for experiential consumption in society. By understanding how different individuals are influenced, companies and organisations can adapt their business models and value-creation processes to possibly attract both already established- and novice experiential

consumers. Public policy makers interested in fostering a prosperous society and population can use this knowledge to support experiential consumption by for example using subsidies for companies within experiential consumption, by further enabling and increasing the availability of experiential consumption and by using marketing to increase the public awareness of both the experiential consumption locally available and its general benefits for well-being.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide (Swedish)

Intervjuguide – Upplevelsekonsumtion

Presentation av studie

Det är vetenskapligt bevisat att vi människor i allmänhet mår bättre av att konsumera upplevelser, gärna i naturen, framför materiella saker och att vi då även i större utsträckning får möjlighet till självförverkligande. Syftet med denna uppsats är att generera bredare och djupare kunskap kring drivkrafter och motivationer bakom upplevelsekonsumtion. Genom detta kan uppsatsens resultat förhoppningsvis bidra med insikt och kunskap som kan vara användbart för framtida forskning, företag, organisationer och offentliga verksamheter som är intresserade utav att gynna upplevelsekonsumtion. Respondenterna i denna uppsats är därför utvalda efter kriteriet att upplevelsekonsumtion som tar plats i naturen är en stor och viktig del i deras livsstil.

Det kan vara svårt att särskilja upplevelse- och materiel konsumtion, både separat och i kontrast till varandra. Men denna uppsats kommer utgå från följande, intentions-baserade definition:

“...experiential purchases are those made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience: an event or series of events that one lives through. Material purchases are those made with the primary intention of acquiring a material good: a tangible object that is kept in one’s possession.”

Så det är denna definition man ska ta med sig när man svarar på frågorna om respektive upplevelse- och materiel konsumtion. Dock så hänvisar definitionen till faktiska köp av upplevelser eller saker, men det kan du bortse ifrån. Man kan ju planera och genomföra en upplevelse utan att behöva genomföra köp; dessa upplevelser är inkluderade i denna studie. Hänvisar jag till endast ”konsumtion” så syftar det på konsumtion i allmänhet och inkluderar därför båda kategorierna.

Tema 1 - Inledning (Uppfyllande av kriterier, demografi)

- Kan du beskriva dina konsumtionsmönster?
- Skulle du säga att du subjektivt identifierar dig själv som en upplevelsekonsument där upplevelserna ofta tar plats i naturen?
- Föredrar du ett generellt sätt konsumera upplevelser framför materiella saker? Varför?
- Upplever du att du lägger merparten av den tid och de pengar du har över till nöjen varje månad, på upplevelser framför materiella saker? Varför?
- Ålder/yrke/utbildning/bostadsort?

Tema 2 - (Personlighet/preferenser)

- Beskriv dina starkaste personlighetsdrag som gör dig till den du är och hur dessa påverkar dina val i livet?
- Hur tror du att du har utvecklat dessa personlighetsdrag?
- Vad är viktigt för dig i livet?
- När mår du som bäst/sämst?
- Beskriv din drömvardag och varför den skulle se ut så:
- Har du några större mål i livet du vill uppnå?

Tema 3 - (Konsumtion)

- Har du reflekterat mycket över dina konsumtionsmönster? Hur?
- I vilka sammanhang kan materiella saker vara viktiga för dig?
- Varför känner du ett behov av att köpa detta? Vad motiverar dig?
- Beskriv varför du känner ett behov av att konsumera upplevelser, vad motiverar dig?
- Berätta om en stor, mer extraordinär upplevelse du valt att delta i:
- Vad var det för upplevelse?
- Varför ville du göra detta?
- Hur kom du på att du ville göra detta? Vilken tankeverksamhet pågick i planeringen, vad ville du uppnå med upplevelsen? Vad motiverade dig och varför?
- Var det en bra upplevelse? Varför?
- Finns det någon typ av upplevelse-konsumtion som är återkommande/sker regelbundet (1 till flera gånger per år)?
- Hur kom du i kontakt med denna aktivitet och varför började du?
- Vad motiverar dig att göra detta?
- Vad vill du uppnå och varför gör du det regelbundet?
- Hur påverkar detta ditt vardagliga liv och dig som person tycker du?
- När du konsumerar upplevelser, gör du det oftast tillsammans med andra? Vad föredrar du?
- Hur känner du dig före/under och efter en upplevelse?

Tema 4 - (PBC)

- Är du nöjd med hur och varför du konsumerar som du gör idag?
- Hur nöjd är du med din frihet att kunna konsumera som du vill? Är det något du känner att du skulle vilja kunna göra/konsumera mer utav som du inte har möjlighet till idag?
- Om du känner dig hindrad, vilka faktorer skulle du i så fall säga hindrar dig och hur? (Ex. speciella situationer/sammanhang, att det inte finns tillgängligt, du har ingen att göra det med, ingen kunskap, tid, pengar etc.)

Tema 5 - (Attityder)

- Beskriv vad du uppskattar- kontra ogillar med materiel konsumtion?
- Beskriv vad du uppskattar- kontra ogillar med upplevelsekonsumtion?
- Skulle du säga att det finns några större händelser/milstolpar i ditt liv som förändrat/påverkat din konsumtion? (Ex. en flytt, utbildning eller relationer som påverkat ditt sätt att se på konsumtion, dina värderingar, dina prioriteringar osv.) Hur och varför?

Tema 6 - (Subjektiva normer och självidentitet)

- Vilka personer i din närmsta krets (vänner, familj) skulle du säga har influerat dig som person mest? Hur och varför?
- Vilka personer utanför din närmsta krets (bekanta, kollegor, offentliga personer) skulle du säga har influerat dig mest? Hur och varför?
- Hur uppfattar du att upplevelsekonsumtion är kopplat till dig själv och vem du är som person?
- Känner du en stark samhörighet till andra som konsumerar samma/liknande upplevelser? Hämtar du inspiration från dessa? Hur gör du det i så fall?
- Hur förhåller du dig till att få bevisa för dig själv vem du är samt att få tillhöra en grupp som betyder mycket för dig? Varför?