Digital technocultures in Nature-based tourism

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To Antonella & Katrin

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the influences of digital technologies on nature-based tourism (NBT) experiences. I acknowledge that the holistic digitalization of human lives increasingly impacts nature-based tourism. Particularly, I argue that it impacts tourists' experiential valuation of nature, as well as tourists themselves as experiencers of nature in NBT in ways that need to be further understood.

Following contemporary consumer-dominant perspectives on tourism experiences, I argue that tourists' multi-dimensional valuation of experiences depends greatly on ex-situ factors that exist outside service encounters in NBT and within digitally networked lifeworld experienced by tourists, which informs how they value themselves and what they experience. However, such lifeworlds are poorly acknowledged in research on NBT experiences. Building on consumer culture theory, I argue that NBT tourists are cultural agents, and their NBT experiences are highly affected by how their lifeworlds are ingrained in marketplace cultures that discipline what is valuable and experienced in NBT. Such marketplace cultures, which are becoming increasingly digital and technological, can be conceptualized as digital technocultures. More than simply enhancing experiences, as extant literature suggests, digital technology provides lifestyle scripts, ideologies, identity myths, symbolic universes, and stories associated with the everyday, tourism, and consumption of nature. The latter are powerful actors in shaping consumers' meaning making, sensescapes, emotions, behaviors, and ultimately experience valuations of nature in NBT.

Across the four papers and the additional discussion that compose it, this thesis investigates how digital technocultures shape the identity of tourist experiencers in NBT and how they impact the valuation of nature in NBT. The thesis adopts a mix of novel, in-depth, thick, and interpretive methodologies to gain such knowledge. Findings offer thick consumer knowledge and a high-level consumer insight into NBT tourists. In digital technocultures, NBT tourists and their experiences of nature are contested among different digital and disconnected selves. Tourists appropriate digital technocultures and NBT according to identity projects that aim to assemble valued digital "experiencers" and at taking part in valued in e-tribes reflecting them in one's lifeworld. At the same time, tourists negotiate digital technocultures disciplining their lifeworlds in order to build a valued escapist, liberated and disconnected Self in nature. Moreover, digital technocultures discipline, abstract, and extremify specific aspects of nature. These are sought, desired, imagined, and experienced as digital hyperrealities in NBT. This thesis explores the implications of digital technocultures of experience for NBT, which have so far been insufficiently acknowledged.

Summary in Swedish

Den här avhandlingen undersöker hur digitala teknologier inverkar på naturbaserad turism (NBT). Jag tar i beaktande att den genomgripande digitaliseringen av människors liv allt mer påverkar naturbaserad turism och argumenterar för behovet att studera denna påverkan när det gäller turisters värdeskapande i relation till naturen, liksom hur digitaliseringen påverkar turisterna själva och deras upplevelser. Utgångspunkterna är samtida teoretiska perspektiv inom konsumtionsforskning som betonar upplevelsen som skapad av konsumenten. Jag menar att turisters flerdimensionella värdeskapande i upplevelser är nära kopplat till faktorer utanför själva produktionen och konsumtionen av service inom naturbaserad turism samt att detta värdeskapande i hög grad hänger samman med hur turister förstår och värderar sig själva och sin upplevelse genom digitala nätverk.Inom forskning om naturbaserade turismupplevelser har hittills inte de upplevande subjektens livsvärldar getts särskild uppmärksamhet. Genom att bygga vidare på teorier om konsumtionskultur och genom att se naturturister som kulturellt formade aktörer, så kan deras upplevelser av naturen förstås som nära kopplade till hur deras livsvärldar vävs samman med marknadskulturens logik, som i sin tur sätter ramarna för vad som ses som värdefullt och möjligt att uppleva inom NBT. Dessa marknadsorienterade kulturella kontexter, som blir alltmer digitala och teknologiska, kan förstås som digitala tekno-kulturer. Förutom att förhöja upplevelser, som tidigare litteratur ger vid handen, så visar denna avhandling att digitala teknologier skapar 'livsstils-skript', ideologier, identitetsmyter, symboliska universum samt berättelser om vardagslivet, som påverkar turismen och

konsumtionen av och i naturen. Dessa symboliska världar har kraftfull påverkan på konsumenters meningsskapande, känslor, beteende och i förlängningen också upplevelsevärden inom NBT.I de fyra artiklarna och den diskussion som knyter dem samman, undersöks i den här avhandlingen hur digitala tekno-kulturer skapar turisternas identitet inom NBT och hur de själva påverkar värdet av naturen i sina upplevelser. Avhandlingen använder en mix av kvalitativa och tolkande metoder som ger ny kunskap. Resultaten ger fördjupad förståelse om konsumtion, konsumenter samt naturturisters menings- och värdeskapande. I digitala tekno-kulturer ifrågasätts och utmanas naturturistens upplevelser genom de multipla och isärkopplade identiteter och självbilder som skapas. Turister tillägnar sig digitala tekno-kulturer och NBT inom ett ramverk av olika digitala gemenskaper till vilka individuella identitets-projekt knyts. Samtidigt ifrågasätts och utmanas de digitala tekno-kulturerna där turistens livsvärld också utvecklas utanför och i motsats till den digitala sfären i ett slags eskapism som inkluderar bortkoppling och nedkoppling i naturen. Dessutom så sätter den digitala tekno-kulturen ramar för hur naturen kan förstås och förhöjer och gör vissa aspekter mer extrema. Dessa extrema föreställningar om naturen upplevs som åtråvärda hyperverkligheter inom NBT. I den här avhandlingen utforskar jag och visar på följderna och konsekvenserna av relationerna mellan digitala teknokulturer och upplevelser inom naturbaserad turism.

List of papers

Paper I: Conti, E., & Lexhagen, M. (2020). Instagramming nature-based tourism experiences: A netnographic study of online photography and value creation. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, *34*, 100650.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100650

Paper II: Conti, E., & Heldt Cassel, S. (2020). Liminality in nature-based tourism experiences as mediated through social media. *Tourism Geographies*, *22*(2), 413-432.
https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2019.1648544

Paper III: Conti, E., & Farsari, I. (2022). Disconnection in nature-based tourism experiences: an actor-network theory approach. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 1-18.
https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2022.2150665

Paper IV: Conti, E. (N/A). Eudemonia and VR tourism in nature-based Virtual Environments. Manuscript.

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1 Introduction

Before the disruptions caused to tourism flows by the COVID-19 pandemic, nature-based tourism (NBT) was one of the most rapidly expanding typologies of tourism worldwide (Elmahdy, Haukeland & Fredman. 2017; Buckley & Coghlan, 2012; Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010). After the pandemic, NBT maintained a strong international outlook and positioned itself as a primary typology of tourism in several countries (Sthapit, Björk & Coudounaris, 2022). Nevertheless, NBT is faced with tourists' mutating lifestyles, which affect experiential demands and valuations of experience of nature (Mandic & McCool, 2022; Margaryan & Fredman, 2020). Paraphrasing Vespestad and Lindberg (2011), NBT experience providers, researchers, and marketers are increasingly unsure about NBT tourists' lives, and what, how and why, depending on them, tourists value NBT experiences. There is a need for research that helps develop an up-to-date market understanding of NBT experiences (Cooper & Buckley, 2021; Mandic & McCool, 2022; Margaryan & Fredman, 2020).

In this thesis, I argue that a crucial part of such understanding relates to the growing relationship between NBT experiences and the pervasiveness of digitalization in tourists' lives. Over the last two decades digitalization has been one of the most important phenomena driving how humans experience, interpret, demand and value nature (Silk et al., 2021; Fennell, 2021; Phan & Schott, 2019). As argued by Kozinets (2022), the very notion of "natural" changes for humans living increasingly indoor and digital lives. Nature "is not farms, trees, animals and the great outdoors, but rather digital information, telecommunication, mass popular culture and the sets of simulated worlds within them" (2022, p.18). Evolving digital technologies critically shape and mediate tourism experiences, desires, and values attributed to nature and being in nature as tourists (Mykletun, Oma & Aas, 2021). However, digital technologies have received relatively little attention in NBT research, despite recent acknowledgement that they influence in-situ behavior, expectations, perceptions, and service encounters in NBT destinations (Sthapit et al., 2022; Mandic & McCool, 2022; Clark & Nyaupane, 2022; Fennell, 2021; Phan & Schott, 2019; Elmahdy et al., 2017). Overall, we are far from having a holistic understanding of how digital technologies impact NBT experiences and tourists.

There have been many research enquiries about tourism experiences due to the broad definition of "experience". An experience can be defined broadly as a flow of thoughts and feelings occurring in consciousness (Harris, 2014; Carlson, 1997). It may link to outcomes for one's identity (such as becoming "experienced"), to processes of "experiencing" activities, as well as to the cognitive, affective, and hermeneutic experience of an entity (Helkkula, Kelleher & Pihlström, 2012; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). As such, "experience" encompasses both an experienced and an experiencer. In tourism, it involves phenomenological aspects of what is experienced – for example, a destination, service, or activity – but also of the experiencer; that is, the tourist, his/her identity, and agency as experiencer (Yang & Kirillova, 2023; Karagöz & Usayl, 2022; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Nevertheless, the experiencer has received far less attention than the experienced in contemporary tourism research (Yang & Kirillova, 2023) and NBT (Buckley & Cooper, 2022). Tourism and NBT draw from advancements in several disciplines to conceptualize and manage experiences (Fredman, 2021; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). From a market-based perspective, experiences are entities that play a pivotal role in an economic exchange or are the very valued object of exchange (Smit & Melissen, 2018). In market-based perspectives, tourists are understood as consumers of experiences, suppliers as experience providers, and the market significance of a tourist experience lies in the tourists' consumption and valuation of it (Smit & Melissen, 2018; Mossberg, 2007). Thus, tourism needs to know about experiences chiefly because there is a demand for, a consumer value of, and a market for tourism experiences that need to be assessed (Zeithaml et al., 2020; Mossberg, 2007). In market-based perspectives of NBT, such understanding influences the commercialization of nature for tourism (Fredman, 2021; Margaryan, 2017; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Gómez-Baggethun et al. 2010; Fredman et al., 2009).

A market-based approach grounds the understanding of NBT experiences in this thesis. Nevertheless, I argue that NBT has not yet fully implemented advances in the understanding of consumer experiences, how and why experiences are valued by tourists in relation to their increasingly digital life and identities, and how tourists' digital life impacts the very identity of tourists as experiencers. Such advances are brought by evolutions within broader consumer research. Understanding of NBT experiences draws mostly from the "experience economy", where a consumer experience is defined as a staged memorable event (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), and early frameworks of Service-Dominant (SD) logic, where providers co-create service experiences with consumers based on the provision of experience value propositions (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Accordingly, tourists' valuation of experiences depends on "how an individual, in a specific mood and state of mind, reacts to the interaction with the staged event"

(Mossberg, 2007, p.60). Thus, a tourism provider needs to know how to predict, design and stage the circumstances providing value propositions (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015; Mossberg, 2007). However, while emphasizing co-creation of experience value based on such propositions, it is assumed that the provider is the main creator of experiences, and the tourist a perceiver (Rihova et al., 2018; Helkkula et al., 2012; Heinonen et al., 2010). Tourism experiences and their valuation are situated in dyadic B2C and C2B relationships, and the C2C networked relationships between tourists and other entities are overlooked (Heinonen, 2022).

Such paradigmatic views still orient research questions on experiences in several tourism contexts, including NBT (Fredman, 2021; Zeithaml et al., 2020; Gallarza & Saura, 2020; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011). Site attributes, activities, personnel, perceptions, and other in-situ dimensions of the NBT “product” are still dominant phenomena of interest in research (Mandic & McCool, 2022; Heinonen, 2022; Buckley & Cooper, 2022). This has implications in terms of how experiences are studied. Tourism experiences are highly multidimensional constructs, and tourists associate different values to them (Prebensen, Chen & Uysal, 2018). Nevertheless, according to Lengieza, Hunt and Swim (2019), tourism research considers mostly hedonic dimensions linked to the in-situ valuation of pleasure and, despite acknowledging them, overlooks other dimensions that are more related to what the tourist finds meaningful in his/her life. Following Heinonen (2022), in-situ dimensions of what is experienced by tourists are privileged due to the abovementioned paradigmatic views.

Recent perspectives on the logic of creation and valuation of experiences have moved from such paradigmatic views in a way that expands NBT research agendas. In my thesis, I refer particularly to the perspectives of consumer-dominant (CD) logic, value-in-experience (VALEX), and Consumer culture theory (CCT). CD logic and VALEX build on recent revisions of SD logic advanced by Vargo and Lusch (2016). Their main argument is that consumers value experiences through interpretations other than perception and depending on how experiences are intertwined with a lifeworld of peers and contexts existing outside B2C and C2B relationships (Rihova et al., 2018; Helkkula et al., 2012; Voima, Heinonen & Strandvik, 2010). In fact, consumers may even refuse or resist B2C and C2B relationships, relying instead on their own ex-situ networks to interpret and value experiences (Heinonen, 2022; Moisander, Närvänen & Valtonen, 2020). Thus, CD logic and VALEX are particularly interested in experiential dimensions and phenomena that are not segregated to C2B and B2C interactions and are instead connected to the tourist's lifeworld (Heinonen, 2022; Helkkula et al., 2012). According to CD logic and VALEX, research on consumer experiences and their valuation should be directed towards understanding what consumers do with providers and products to accomplish their own values rather than what firms do with consumers to create value (Heinonen, Strandvik & Voima; 2013; Helkkula et al., 2012). According to Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), what consumers do is greatly impacted by how their lifeworlds are embedded in pervasive consumer cultures (Arnould, Crockett & Eckhardt, 2021; Jakkola, Helkkula & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2015; Heinonen & Strandvik, 2015). These represent forces that discipline how to live, experience, value, and consume marketplace offerings, and as such represent critical entities to consider when investigating experiences from the consumer's point of view (Arnould et al., 2021; Caldwell & Henry, 2020). Moreover, according to CCT, consumption of experiences does not reflect a supposedly fixed consumer’s self-identity that “freely” chooses what and how to experience. Instead, consumption contributes to constructing a consumer’s sense of Self according to identity myths and scripts shaped by marketplace cultures (Arnould et al., 2021; Belk, 2016; Holt, 2002). Accordingly, consumers appropriate, rework, and transform offerings, such as tourism experiences, to construct and manifest their personal and social circumstances, identity, and lifestyles (Arnould et al., 2021; Kozinets, 2001).

Contemporary frameworks of the tourism experience agree that it is necessary to consider how tourists value experiences based both on in-situ and ex-situ factors (Heinonen, 2022; Yachin, 2018; Neuhofer et al., 2012; Ek et al., 2008). This is true for NBT too, as NBT experiences are increasingly valued based on tourists’ individual identities ex-situ, and life histories (Buckley & Cooper, 2022; Cooper & Buckley, 2021). The latter are progressively shaped by digital technologies such as social media, mobile information and communications technology (ICT), and the metaverse (Kozinets, 2022; Fast, Ljungberg & Braunerhielm, 2019). Such digital technologies empower and shape tourists, their networked dreams, feelings, imagination, lifestyles, and life histories in shaping experiences in ways that could not be imagined before (Kozinets, 2022; Heinonen, 2022), and that need to be further investigated in NBT (Yang & Kirillova, 2023; Buckley & Cooper, 2022; Machnik, 2022). There is a growing recognition that researchers need to move from reductionist and rationalized views on technology, and venture to socio-cultural perspectives when investigating how digitalization relates to tourists’ lives and experiences (Pourfakhimi, Duncan & Coetzee, 2019; Munar, Gyimóthy & Cai, 2013). According to Kozinets (2022; 2019), Kozinets, Gambetti and Biraghi (2021), and Kozinets and Gambetti (2020), technology introduces pervasive consumer cultures disciplining human experiences, which in relation to digital technologies are defined in this thesis as "digital technocultures". Digital technocultures link to widespread ideologies influencing the tourists' lifeworlds and identities (Jansson, 2020; Xiang, 2018; Rosa, 2013). Following Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman (2017) and Pace (2013), digital technocultures drive to a great extent consumers' experiential needs, valuation, desires, and interpretations of what is consumed. They drive NBT experiences similarly (Canniford and Shankar, 2013) and define the experiencer's identity and agency according to dynamics that need to be further researched (Yang & Kirillova, 2023).

Advances in digital technologies and their pervasiveness in shaping cultures of consumption make it necessary to venture further "ex-situ" and into tourists' digitally networked lifeworlds in order to understand NBT experiences (Heinonen, 2022; Moisander et al., 2020; Helkkula et al., 2012). CD logic, VALEX and CCT are highly concerned with that venture, and well-equipped to tackle the gaps investing NBT and its increasing digitalization presented here. However, they have been either neglected or scarcely implemented in tourism, which remains dominated by in-situ and provider-led research (Heinonen, 2022; Fan, Hsu & Lin, 2020). The same is true in NBT where, to quote Buckley and Cooper, the approach is still "simply to offer products of different types, and leave purchasers to choose" (2022, p. 9) without thoroughly investigating consumers outside service experiences shared with them. Other than an up-to-date market understanding of NBT experiences in an increasingly digitalized world, NBT also needs up-to-date approaches to such understanding.

1.1. Aims, research questions, and structure of the thesis

My overall aim in this thesis is to contribute to an up-to-date market understanding of NBT experiences by investigating the growing relationship between NBT experiences and the pervasive digitalization of NBT tourists' lives. I do this according to an approach rooted in CD logic, VALEX, and CCT that frames digital technologies as technocultures, and particularly by focusing on two dimensions of NBT experiences. On one hand, I investigate how digital technocultures influence the experience and valuation of nature in NBT, which I link particularly to the concept of *naturalness*. Moving from Fredman, Wall-Reinius and Grundén (2012), naturalness denotes "nature" as experiential commodity in NBT. According to a consumer-dominant perspective, naturalness links to in-situ hermeneutics and ex-situ lifeworlds in ways that need to be further understood (Fälton 2021; Hellkula et al., 2012; Heinonen et al., 2010). Following a market research agenda recently drafted in CCT (Arnould et al., 2021; Rokka, 2021), my thesis considers how naturalness in NBT links to tourists' identity projects and myths about nature and subjective negotiations with marketplace ideologies around nature and experiencing nature. On the other hand, addressing a gap identified by Yang and Kirillova (2023), I maintain that investigations on NBT experiences in digital technocultures should address both the experience of nature and the experiencers themselves as subjects and agents of the experience. Following those authors, as well as Karagöz and Usayl, (2022), and Kozinets (2022), I claim that digital technocultures transform the very identity of NBT experiencers, their agency, subjectivity, and how they value themselves in the world, again according to dynamics that need to be further researched.

Based on the above, I identify two qualitative research questions:

- How do digital technocultures influence the NBT tourist as experiencer?
- How do digital technocultures influence naturalness in NBT?

In agreement with Moisander et al. (2020) and Hellkula et al. (2012), I argue that shifting to a consumer-dominant point of view in NBT implies the need to adopt interpretive, hermeneutic, and phenomenological approaches oriented towards gaining "thick" understanding about the consumer and his/her networked lifeworld. Departing from research questions qualitative in nature, I aim to do this throughout this thesis. In particular, I adopt an interpretive viewpoint that drives a careful selection of interpretive methodologies tailored to the phenomenon under study. In implementing such approach, I aim to produce what Kozinets (2011) called a "high level consumer insight" about NBT tourists and their experience and valuation of NBT, particularly encompassing how consumers' lifeworlds and experiences are influenced by digitalization.

This thesis comprises four independent papers and a cover essay (in Swedish and hereafter, *Kappa*). The four papers follow the aim of my thesis by offering interpretive contributions on how tourists value NBT experiences while recognizing the critical importance of their lifeworld in determining what is experienced and the increasingly pervasive role of digital technocultures in defining who, what, and how is experienced in NBT. The first paper investigates which tourism experience values are conveyed through online photography and the role of online photography in creating experience value in NBT. The second paper, informed partly by the findings of the first paper, explores further the intersections between online photography, liminality, and NBT experiences and how online photography relates to tourist identity building and the experience of nature. The third paper assesses how disconnection and connectivity to mobile ICTs are negotiated and valued within NBT experiences. That paper also investigates how such negotiations link to other meaningful entities in enabling tourists' experiences of places, proximity, and distance in nature. Finally, the fourth paper turns to VR and studies the connections between VR tourism, eudemonia, and nature-based virtual environments (VEs). The central aim of that paper is to explore how do virtual NBT experiences relate to tourists' flourishing and eudemonic well-being in their lifeworld.

The kappa brings together the papers according to a joint introduction, several shared theoretical underpinnings, a common philosophy of science driving the choice of each paper's research methods, and overall research questions (RQs). Chapter 2 illustrates my work's overall theoretical framework, which I matured and refined throughout my PhD work. In their respective conceptual frameworks, each paper displays a selective use of concepts from the comprehensive theoretical framework of the Kappa, depending on the paper's focus. Even when not explicated in the text, due to journals' word limits, most theoretical underpinnings detailed in the Kappa implicitly influenced the design of the papers to various extents. Chapter 2 also provides the grounding upon which I detected the research gaps illustrated in the Introduction. Chapter 3 illustrates the methodological framework of the four papers, all of which depart from a common philosophy of science in relation to the phenomenon under study. In Chapter 4, I further discuss the papers' findings and draw several conclusions and implications according to the two research questions stated above.

My entire kappa is the result of a continuous hermeneutic effort leading to knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation, conclusions, and implications. Hermeneutics describes interpretation as a relationship between "pre-understanding" and "understanding" (Willig, 2014; Willig & Billin, 2011; Gummesson, 2003). Pre-understanding is the interpreter's interpretation of the phenomenon in relation to the research question, whereas understanding is an improved understanding of the phenomenon as the interpreter proceeds throughout the research activity, interpreting and re-interpreting data while also interpreting and re-interpreting theory. During the research, it is common for the researcher to oscillate from pre-understanding to understanding; that is, understanding from the first phase of the research supplies the pre-understanding for the next phase and then again. Throughout my hermeneutic effort, there is a constant movement between what I knew before and the new things I learned, which leads me to refine my pre-understanding of the subsequent research phase (Willig, 2017; Nåden, 2009). Across the hermeneutic path that led to this thesis, pre-understandings and understandings have both been informed iteratively and diachronically by data collected across papers, my other publications, newly discovered theories, and how I relate them to old theories (Willig, 2017; Nåden, 2009; Helkkula et al., 2012). This is normal in research, where the hermeneutic movement is represented as a "hermeneutic spiral" to underline that the researcher is provided with new interpretations at every step of the oscillating movement instead of going back and forth (Willig, 2014; Gummesson, 2003). Thus, the overall discussion of the findings, answers to RQs and implications in Chapter 4 represent the culminating hermeneutic effort of the spiral that is my PhD work. Following Willig (2017) and Bondas and Hall (2007), Chapter 4 represents an interpretive meta-synthesis of the four papers in relation to the thesis' research questions; that is, a new, integrated, and holistic interpretation of findings offering a wider understanding in depth and breadth than the findings from individual papers. Thus, a meta-synthesis does not represent a mere aggregation of the single papers, but a new step of the hermeneutic spiral, developed over time in comparison to earlier interpretations belonging to single studies.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Tourism experiences

Holbrook and Hirschman's pioneering work has inspired theory on tourism experiences and the broader consumption studies field. In this thesis, it is essential to note that Holbrook defined consumer value itself as "an interactive relativistic preference experience" (Holbrook 1994, p. 27), making experiences concomitant with value and a fundamental unit of analysis in marketing and consumer studies. Pine and Gilmore's framework of the "experience economy" (1999) has arguably been the most influential work in defining consumer experiences in the tourism and service industry. According to Pine and Gilmore, an experience occurs "when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event" (1999, p. 98). In the experience economy, objective, functional, and tangible features of goods and services are insufficient to define value, as experiences include dimensions such as fantasy, aesthetics, entertainment, learning, and dreaming. The experience economy contributed critically to moving the notion of consumer value further away from utilitarian judgements and tradeoffs and towards the holistic experience of an offering (Gallarza & Saura, 2020; Gallarza & Gil, 2008). The experience economy was translated within tourism into the notion that destinations cannot compete by appealing to the customer as framed in the "*homo economicus*" philosophy. In such a philosophy, utilitarian, rational and functional aspects dominate the valuation, consumption, and production of tourism products and destinations (Frochot & Batat, 2013).

Staging experiences help destinations reach important management goals of tourism, such as customer loyalty, memorability, and other long-lasting emotional bonds (Park & Vargo, 2012; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007). Hayes and McLeod (2007), Williams (2006), and Lagiewski and Zekan (2006) applied Pine and Gilmore's principles (1999) to the marketing and management of specific destination experiences. However, despite the popularity of the experience economy, attempts to operationalize its frameworks for practical uses within tourism management and marketing have been challenging (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Volo, 2009; Quan & Wang, 2004). One of the main reasons for this is that implementing a staged and coordinated experience in private service businesses is a more straightforward process than a complex reality such as a destination (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011; Pike, 2005). Mossberg (2007) and Andersson (2007) noted that a tourist's holistic experiential landscape of a destination, conceptualized by Mossberg as "experiencescape", cannot be designed and managed in a controlled fashion similarly to other service offerings.

The experience economy made the notion of "experience" dominant in tourism marketing and management by identifying tourism offerings and consumer values with consumption experiences

(Zeithaml et al., 2020; Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2017; Mossberg, 2007). Such an understanding persists today, and I implement it in my work; however, the understanding of who and what creates experiences and how experiences link to value evolved further with the paradigms of service-dominant logic of production (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), value-in-experience (Helkkula et al., 2012) and customer-dominant logic of production (Heinonen et al., 2010; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). My assessment of experiences is grounded on the latter two perspectives, which build on the service-dominant logic while modifying some of its premises. They will be detailed below.

Service-dominant (SD) logic is centered on the *experience of services* as the unit of exchange in the markets (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). SD logic has been shown to have excellent compatibility with tourism, being the latter particularly concerned with service experiences (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015; Blazquez-Resino, Molina & Esteban-Talaya, 2015; Horbel, 2013; Park & Vargo, 2012). SD logic is highly attentive towards the intangible aspects of service experiences, given that a service is "any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another which is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything" (Kotler, 1996, p. 588). Moreover, SD logic defines service marketing and management as disciplines concerned with consumption *processes* rather than *outcomes*. Specifically, the value of an experience in SD logic is shaped by various actors throughout a consumption process, rather than being a product attribute that is pre-determined by providers and then exchanged with consumers (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008). Consequently, SD logic reconsiders who, in the interaction between the provider and the consumer of the experience economy, determines the value of the experience and how the relationship between consumers and providers changes accordingly (Prebensen et al., 2018; Prebensen, Vittersø & Dahl, 2013; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). In SD logic, experiences represent the phenomenological nature of service encounters. However, whereas experiences are *staged* and *designed* in the experience economy to deliver value, in SD logic experiences and their valuation are always *co-created* between consumers and providers throughout consumption (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Chathoth et al., 2014; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). A tourist is conceptualized as an experience value co-creator in several tourism studies grounded on SD logic (Campos et al. 2015; Prebensen et al., 2013; Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2012).

SD logic encourages providers to engage in the co-production of value, delivering value *propositions* to customers while staging experiences, abandoning strictly supply-based perspectives and acknowledging consumers' subjective value creation processes (Kowalkowski, 2011; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009; Payne et al., 2008). Nevertheless, most SD logic frameworks assume that providers maintain the lead in the co-creation of value by arbitrarily choosing how to integrate consumers' resources during a service encounter (Heinonen, 2022; Rihova et al., 2018; Prebensen et al., 2013; Heinonen et al., 2010). Consequently, co-creating consumers are reduced to integrators of resources that are useful for delivering value propositions planned by suppliers. Even in SD logic, the value of an experience "is viewed as the final step of a process that begins with and is always facilitated by the provider" (Rihova et al., 2018, p. 363). Although the concept of co-creation in SD logic had a strong influence on my investigation of experiences, I agree with such criticism. While there are now a large number of studies that have applied SD logic to tourism experiences and value, SD logic's provider-centrism is problematic in tourism contexts that are increasingly dominated by tourists' own valuations and phenomenologies of experiences (Heinonen, 2022; Moisander et al., 2020; Rihova et al., 2018).

Vargo and Lusch's (2016) revisions of SD Logic clarified that it should be intended as a consumer-dominant paradigm regarding how experiences are created, valued, and consumed. However, Heinonen (2022) noted that most studies grounded on SD logic do not venture into tourist sensemaking to ask "how through a sense-making process customers construct their experience of value of a service provider's participation in their activities and tasks" (Heinonen et al. 2010, p. 4). Conversely, the perspectives of customer-dominant logic (CD) and value-in-experience (VALEX) argue that experiences situated in the consumer's phenomenological contexts are more important than the service context in terms of determining the value of an offering (Helkkula et al., 2012; Heinonen & Strandvik, 2015; Heinonen et al., 2013). Such contexts are often referred to in CD logic and VALEX as "lifeworlds"; that is, worlds grounded on individual and collective everyday lived experience, and where things are experienced as meaningful (Helkkula et al., 2012; Heinonen et al., 2010). Both perspectives are based on SD logic, but modify some of their premises to reflect increasingly consumer-dominated marketplaces.

By defining the term "value-in-context", Vargo (2008) already underlined how, in SD logic, value creation goes beyond a single in-situ service encounter. Instead, value co-creation encompasses distinct contexts of pre-experience, experience, and post-experience and is influenced by imagination, memories, expectations, and C2C sharing before and after the experience (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). Within the SD logic, Tynan and McKechnie (2009) emphasized that different emotional, functional, and social values are experienced before and after the actual product experience, from imagining and planning before the experience to nostalgic remembering, reviewing, and recommending the offering to others after the experience. In SD logic, these actions and thoughts all represent potential "touchpoints" with the consumer, defined as "a customer contact point, or a medium through which the firm and the customer interact" (Neslin et al., 2006, p.96) and co-create value. Such processual value co-creation is implemented in popular models of consumer experience, most notably the "customer journey" (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In tourism, SD pre/on-site/post- understandings of the processual nature of tourist experiences and their valuation have been integrated into most models of the tourism experience (e.g., Yachin, 2018; Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2012). However, Heinonen (2022) and Helkkula et al. (2012) contended that such a journey should be intended as a hermeneutic, iterative process of individual and collective customer sense-making, rather than a linear process anchored to sequential touchpoints. Helkkula et al. (2012) defined such a hermeneutic process as "value-in-experience" (hereafter VALEX). In tourism, the consumer creates VALEX hermeneutically, according to his/her unique and dynamic lifeworld of memories, goals, emotions, and other tourists, influencers, and peers that may hold a general and common perception of phenomena (Heinonen, 2022; Helkkula et al., 2012). In other words, value is at any moment "interactional within the context of […] customers' phenomenologically determined social networks" (Helkkula et al., 2012, p.61) and, most importantly, does not necessarily depend on interactions with providers at specific touchpoints (Heinonen, 2022; Moisander et al., 2020). Thus, CD logic and VALEX shift the attention of experience researchers from asking what providers do with tourists to create services that tourists will value to asking *what tourists do with providers* to accomplish their values (Heinonen, 2022; Heinonen et al., 2010). Accordingly, companies and researchers should primarily gather knowledge on "what the customer is doing or trying to do" (Heinonen et al., 2010, pp. 7–8). Consumer knowledge should be cross-contextual, holistic, intersubjective, and focused on C2B and C2C interactions instead of limited to the service context and touchpoints of B2C interactions (Heinonen, 2022). It should also aim to help the provider understand how to support the consumer's autonomous creation of value (Moisander et al., 2020; Helkkula et al., 2012; Vargo, 2008; Grönroos, 2008). Crucially, according to CD and VALEX, while service experiences might be co-created, value creation does not necessarily emerge from them alone. In fact, tourists might want to perform/stage the experience by themselves or even reduce the role of a provider in the overall experience (Heinonen, 2022; Moisander et al., 2020).

Table 1 illustrates the paradigmatic movement between GD logic, experience economy, SD logic, CD logic and VALEX in tourism. The table is loosely based on Heinonen (2022), Gallarza and Saura (2020), Neuhofer and Buhalis (2017), Heinonen et al. (2010), Tynan and McKechnie (2009) and integrates the contributions mentioned so far in this section. Table 1 aims to clarify the characteristics of CD logic and VALEX, used in this thesis, compared to other logics in use in the literature. Thus, it clarifies how I position my idea of experience, experiencing and experience valuation in tourism. However, the reader should not be misguided by the sharp distinction between the types of logic that the table seems to suggest visually. The logic types are built on each other to enrich and expand, rather than entirely reject, previous understandings of experience and value creation. This is reflected in the literature and is particularly true for service-based offerings as they move from SD to CD logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

	Experience economy	Early SD logic	Late SD logic - CD logic - VALEX
Dominance	Provider - dominant	Interactive, provider-led	Consumer(s)-dominant
Dynamics of creation of value	- The provider determines value in the context of an offering's supply chain - The providers add value by staging an offering as a multidimensional experience - Valuation is in the experiential stage	- The tourist creates value during his/her experience of a service encounter - The valuation of an experience comprises linear time frames of before, during, and post-experience Different values are located within each time frame - Each time frame is a touchpoint with the provider	- The tourist creates value according to his/her networked lifeworld - Experience valuation is a hermeneutic process, not a linear timeline - Most of this process is invisible or inaccessible to the provider - The provider may not have a role in value co-creation
Tourism Demand for experiences	- The tourist value unique and dazzling experiences	- The tourist values the co-creation of unique and dazzling experiences	- The tourist values experiences meaningful to a lifeworld
Context(s) of value creation	- The context where the service experience is *staged* is where value is *delivered* to the tourist - "In situ value"	- The context where the service experience is *staged* is where value is *co-created* with the tourist - Co-creation through B2C	- The contexts where value is experienced are many and related to the tourist's identity and sensemaking - Co-creation through C2C and C2B interactions in

		interactions and strategic pooling of mutual resources - "In situ value" is dominant - "Ex situ value" is possible	various tourist-based lifeworld contexts - "Ex situ" value is dominant
Roles of tourists and providers in the experience	- The provider is the stager/manufacturer; the tourist is the guest	- The provider is the facilitator; the tourist and other providers are co-creators - The provider leads the co-creation of value	- The provider is the observer and tries to be a meaningful actor in a lifeworld; the tourist is the ultimate creator - Tourist lifeworlds lead the creation of value
Business imperatives for tourism providers	- The provider needs to learn how to stage a compelling experience to deliver value	- The provider needs to learn how to co-create experience value with the tourist in the context of a consumer journey	- The provider needs to learn from the tourist how their offering is valued according to the tourist's lifeworld - The provider needs to be a meaningful actor within that lifeworld

Table 1: Paradigmatic movement between logics of experience creation and valuation in Tourism

2.1.1. Multidimensionality of experiences and the study of value

In tourism and consumer studies, the evolving logic of value creation and the conceptual proximity between value and experiences brought the definition of value to acquire an increasingly multi-dimensional nature. Understanding the multidimensional nature of experiences is very important, as nature, tourism, and digital technologies are experienced and valued according to several dimensions, depending on the lifeworld of the experiencer and his/her goals. I believe it is important to acknowledge such multidimensionality, as it clarifies what I investigate when researching experiences and how, bearing in mind my CD- and VALEX-based approach.

Based on the development of the experience economy, the definition of value expanded from tangible, utilitarian and functional to incorporate intangible, hedonic, emotional, social, and other experiential dimensions of a product (Tynan, McKechnie & Hartley, 2014; Prebensen et al., 2013; Frochot & Batat, 2013). Concurrently, consumer studies adopted experiential dimensions that were not previously considered parts of consumption experiences. An example is Csikszentmihaly's dimension of "flow". Flow describes the experience of intense focus and engagement linked to a challenging and variously prolonged activity, leading people to lose track of time and basic needs (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Arnould and Price (1993) and Abrahams (1986) investigated dimensions of the extraordinary, novelty, discovery, and reflexivity that occur not during a single leisure activity or event, but on an extended temporal line of experiential events. The expanding dimensionality of experiences is visible in popular frameworks of experience in today's tourism literature, which aim to encompass all experience dimensions that contribute to valuation of an experience. Most studies have departed from Pine and Gilmore (1999), who considered four dimensions – entertainment, aesthetics, education, and escapism – and from Holbrook (1999; 1994). Holbrook's experience value dimensions included efficiency and quality, hedonic fun and aesthetic beauty, social status and esteem, altruistic ethics, spirituality, and magic. Such dimensions are drawn based on how active the role of the consumer is, whether the experience is a means to an end or an end itself, and whether an experience is oriented towards the self or others. Subsequent frameworks either departed from Holbrook and

Pine and Gilmore, expanding their dimensions, or used definitions encompassing similar value dimensions. In tourism, Prebensen et al. (2013) distinguished a functional and utilitarian value from emotional (hedonic), social (social status and self-validation) and *epistemic* value, the latter being dependent on the pursuit of skills, novelty, and knowledge development. Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991) also identified epistemic, emotional, functional, social, and *conditional* value, which depends on the alternatives available in the market and the context of decision-making. Smith and Colgate (2007) and Tynan et al. (2014) added a symbolic/expressive value to the dimensions above, and a vast number of sub-dimensions (approximately 20 for each dimension), making their frameworks some of the most comprehensive but also very broad.

Despite the abundance of multidimensional frameworks, there is some skepticism regarding their concrete capacity to understand and manage experiences and their valuation (Rokka, 2021; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Mohd-Any, Winklhofer & Ennew, 2015; Prebensen et al., 2013). Experience dimensions are explored by various disciplines and are not always transferrable into a single multidimensional framework (Zeithaml et al., 2020; Heinonen et al., 2010). Due to their broadness, their concrete use and management is complicated, if not impossible, particularly in SMEs – tourism is a perfect example (Fiore et al., 2007). Dimensions within each framework also present several gaps. Notably, whereas multidimensional frameworks normally recognize aesthetics as a critical dimension, the underlying idea of aesthetics is often biased towards *sight* as the "main" sense that give value to aesthetics. In tourism, the dominance of sight as the sense to stimulate experientially can be traced back to Urry's earlier conceptualizations of the "tourism gaze" (Urry, 1990) and the roles of tourism photography (Urry, 2003). When a tourist experiences something, he or she does so first and foremost by gazing at it visually. On the other hand, it is important to consider aesthetical stimulation generated from sound-scapes, smell-scapes, and touch-scapes, which build up a complex and unique multi-sensorial valuation (Agapito, Mendes & Valle, 2013; Pan & Ryan, 2009). Moreover, whereas sensorial valuations are taken as given due to the idea of value and experiences in most frameworks as perceptions, the ways in which tourists construct their sensoriality and attributed values to senses are important matters to consider, and very sensitive to tourists' cultural lifeworlds (Howes, 2019). Considering the CD logic and VALEX implemented in this thesis, I also use a multifaceted view of aesthetics, sensoriality, and their role in experience valuations. Finally, extended tourism experience dimensions – such as reflexivity, novelty, and discovery – are usually neglected (Smit & Melissen, 2018). However, these are essential to consider once one acknowledges that the valuation of experiences spread outside single service encounters and into the tourist lifeworld (Heinonen, 2022; Helkkula et al., 2012).

An idea underlying most multidimensional frameworks is that the subjective relations between experience dimensions shape the *perception* of an offering, and thus its valuation. Ideally, due to a strategic composition of different dimensions, the offering is perceived not simply as a satisfying experience but as memorable, extraordinary, and different (Smilansky, 2009; Schmitt, 1999; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The term "perception" is commonly used to refer to value as "perceived value" (Gallarza, 2022; Gallarza & Gil, 2008) or PERVAL (Helkkula et al., 2012). Perception outweighs more consumer-empowering terms such as "performance" and “interpretation”, which imply heightened attention to the subjectivity of experiencers, their actions and identity (Helkkula et al., 2012; Kelleher & Peppard, 2011). The use of perception is typical of positivist studies positioned within the experience economy and SD logic, which assume that experience value has an objective nature, however intangible, that is “perceived” by consumers and produced by suppliers according to specific dimensions (Zeithaml et al., 2020). The investigation of PERVAL is also restricted to a dyadic relationship between consumers and providers, as these are zeroed in as the only meaningful actors within the nexus of value creation in experiences: one creates, the other perceives (Helkkula et al., 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). However, this is problematic for perspectives that are interested in dimensions of experiential valuations existing *outside* the service encounter and within consumers’ own sociocultural contexts and imaginaries (Heinonen, 2022). The latter are the primary concern of interpretive research on consumer experiences and are phenomena where interpretive research is better equipped to offer valuable insights than other paradigms (Moisander et al., 2020).

Interpretive views on experiences start from the axiom that the reality of experiences is always subjectively interpreted. Subjective interpretations of an experience make value “uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary” (Vargo & Lusch, 2008, p. 9). Thus, multiple realities of experience and valuation exist as interpretations and performances instead of perceptions. Interpretivist views agree with Holbrook that value is experiential in nature, meaning that value is experienced, and experiences are valued phenomenologically (Helkkula et al., 2012). Interpretive views also agree that experiences are valued according to several dimensions and commonly refer to multidimensional frameworks (Zeithaml et al., 2020). However, interpretive perspectives give content to dimensionality based on the analysis of first-person empirical data, as “the phenomenon of value in the experience is the starting point of the research as opposed to existing constructs, measures, and scales” (Helkkula et al., 2012, p. 69). In other words, generalization or external validation of multidimensionality is not an aim of interpretive studies. Consequently, vast frameworks aimed at external validity (e.g., Smith and Colgate, 2007; Tynan et al., 2014) are absent (Zeithaml et al., 2020). Nevertheless, some interpretive studies use such frameworks hermeneutically as pre-understandings or departure points (Zeithaml et al., 2020), a practice I implemented in this thesis starting from Paper 1.

According to interpretive views in line with VALEX and CD logic, existing multidimensional frameworks suggest a limited understanding of the dimension of time, and thus the processual nature of experience valuation (Heinonen, 2022; Helkkula et al., 2012). As in SD logic, linear temporal valuations of experience based on generalized touchpoints are privileged in depicting dynamics of experiencing (Smit & Melissen, 2018). For instance, a tourist budgets and plans, then imagines a service offering, has an actual “experience” in situ, and finally remembers it (Yachin, 2018; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). From an interpretive standpoint, by contrast, “service customers’ experiences of value are not linear in time, and may iteratively flow back and forth between current, future, and past experiences within a hermeneutic spiral of sense making” (Helkkula et al., 2012, p. 61). At any point in time, tourists may nostalgically recall an idealized past or a real past encounter with an imaginary about the future and reinterpret it in a new light when they anticipate or plan a consumption, either ex-situ or in-situ (Helkkula et al., 2012; Kelleher & Peppard, 2011). Tourists may also recall a past experience and reinterpret it in the light of a more recent experience, which may be connected to an imagined future. All these hermeneutic processes rely on collective and individual memories and imagination, just to name a few, and are not necessarily touchpoints that single providers can manipulate, envision, or control (Heinonen, 2022; Helkkula et al., 2012). Time is experienced and interpreted dynamically and fluidly among subjective past, present, and future phenomenologies during an experiential journey, in ways that elude provider-led sharp chronologies of valuation (Helkkula et al., 2012; Ek et al., 2008).

Finally, the study of hedonic, economic, functional, and instrumental dimensions of experiences is privileged, in provider-led research, over dimensions reflecting the consumer's lifeworld and meaning-making process outside C2B and B2C interactions, such as identity building, growth, spirituality, ethics, and virtue, as well as personal myths, and flourishment (Helkkula et al., 2012; Kelleher & Peppard, 2011; Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Conversely, the latter are dimensions of interest in interpretive perspectives precisely because they influence consumers' phenomenology and the hermeneutics of reality (Zeithaml et al., 2020). Interpretive research on experiences departing from lifeworld-based logics of their valuation are needed in tourism (Heinonen, 2022). Such research should include dimensions that are not segregated to isolated responses to C2B and B2C interactions and consider dimensions linked to the tourist's lifepath. This thesis puts particular focus on *eudemonia* and *liminality* as dimensions that effectively address the above.

2.1.2. Eudemonic dimensions of experience

Eudemonia, or *eudaimonia,* is an ancient Greek concept of happiness that is commonly translated to the "pursuit of excellence" and "virtue" (Moran, 2018; Miles, 2019), and contrasted to hedonia. Hedonic experiences are those of pleasure oriented towards satisfaction and the specular avoidance of pain (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Conversely, eudemonic experiences are experiences of well-being intended as the pursuit, in time, of one's potential, purposes and virtues, as well as the discovery, nourishment, and flourishment of one's "Self" (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993). Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008) argued that hedonia is concerned with well-being and happiness as a perceived *outcome* (complete pleasure and no pain). In contrast, eudemonia reflects a more holistic *process* of living and pursuing an ideal or meaningful way of being. Thus, eudemonic experiences are valued because of the roles they play in the process of living well, meaningfully, and in pursuing identity goals (Galeone & Sebastiani, 2021; Lengieza et al., 2019; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016).

Hedonia's focus on what provides immediate pleasure in the context of an experiential encounter is historically privileged in research due to how the experience economy and several SD-based frameworks envision consumer experience and value. Conversely, eudemonia is synergic with perspectives, such as VALEX, late SD and CD logic, which focus on how the valuation of experiences reflects the consumer's lifeworlds and identity building more than isolated experiential environments. Indeed, eudemonia plays a key and underappreciated role in understanding the role of tourists' identities in valuing experiences and the role of experiences in the assemblage of identities (Yang, Zhang & So, 2021; Rokka, 2021; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016). The dominance of provider-led logic might explain why, until recently, eudemonia went unnoticed in consumer and tourism behavior research, experience marketing and management (Lengieza et al., 2021; 2019; Knobloch, Robertson & Aitken, 2017). While pleasure-based experiential dimensions have dominated the tourism literature for decades, eudemonic dimensions are overtaking pleasure as the principal drivers of destination decision-making, particularly in nature-based destinations (Cooper & Buckley, 2021).

In tourism, eudemonia is connected to studies on the role of tourism experiences in flourishing, mental health, and self-determination (Filep & Laing, 2019; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016). For instance, eudemonia relates to the emergence and discovery, through tourism, of rich personal meaning, acknowledgement of personal growth and self-reflexivity (Galeone & Sebastiani, 2021; Garcês et al., 2018; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016). Moreover, it relates to awe, wonder, and fulfilment, as well as awareness, harmony, and connectivity with oneself, the re-examination of one's self, one's values and empathy (Filep & Laing, 2019; Lengieza et al., 2019). Such experiential dimensions are linked to tourism, especially in the context of rites of passage, such as special events, marriages, pilgrimages, and gap years (Filep & Laing, 2019). Tourism is also linked to the opportunity to flourish with a degree of autonomy that is not possible in daily life due to constrictions and limitations (Yang et al., 2021; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016). In tourism, eudemonia is also associated with flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), due to an activity's transformative potential and contribution to one's flourishment (Ahn, Back & Boger, 2019; Filep & Laing, 2019; Zátori & Beardsley, 2018), self-improvement and achievements (Galeone & Sebastiani, 2021; Garcês et al., 2018) and environmental mastery (Yang, Zhang, et al., 2021; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016). Importantly, hedonic flow relates to feeling good while engaging in an activity, while eudemonic flow might not seem "pleasant" but may contribute to skills and personal goals that are valued in one's lifeworld (Filep & Laing, 2019; Knobloch, Robertson & Aitken, 2017; Huta & Ryan, 2010). Thus, eudemonia recognizes the positive valuation of experiences of challenge and pain better when it is directed towards flourishing and identity building (Sirgy & Uysal, 2016), which is important in the context of nature-based tourism experiences. Another key and overlooked dimension of eudemonia is the creation, maintenance, and flourishment of positive relationships (Garcês et al., 2018; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016). Several researchers have contended that positive relatedness to others is "at, or very near the top of the list" (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 154) of eudemonic wellbeing. The significance of meaningful relatedness to others in destination and tourism experiences has been noted in tourism literature focused on eudemonic well-being (Yang, Zhang, et al., 2021; Kirillova, Lehto & Cai, 2017). Attachment, understanding, intimacy, and meaningful dialogues constitute important dimensions (Ryan & Deci, 2001), together with binding through sharing stories and experiences, the latter particularly relevant in tourism (Yang, Zhang, et al., 2021; Filep & Laing, 2019). In tourism, meaningful relatedness to local and indigenous actors (Galeone & Sebastiani, 2021), nature, and destination ecosystems (Spangenberger, Geiger & Freytag, 2020; Garcês et al., 2018) are added to relatedness to home-based significant others.

The interpretation of eudemonia as the pursuit of one's "self" through excellence, virtue, goals and morals is arguably built on Western and Aristotelean ideas of Self and well-being (Moran, 2018; Miles, 2019). However, ideas of "self" and its well-being nowadays draw from Eastern and Western perspectives, introducing conflictual interpretations of the Self, well-being, and how the former achieves the latter. Watts linked pursuits of future ways of being, however virtuous, to the Western craving of a mythical “I” that is distinguished from reality. Building on Eastern philosophies, Watts contended that such a Self does not exist, and its illusion damages concrete awareness of the present and, thus, meaningfulness and well-being (Watts, 2011; 1951). Conversely, according to Watts, meaningful experiences of happiness imply the capacity to consciously inhabit and experience the present and overcome future-oriented imaginaries of the self, especially when pressuring and alienating. Following Watts, there has been an Eastern perspectives on the Self have become increasingly popular in Western philosophy and positive, evolutionary, and environmental psychology. Several authors have linked the experience of self-discovery to mindfulness practices that are intended to reveal and accept the self’s plural, context-sensitive, and modular nature (Lehmann, Kardum & Klempe, 2019; Wright, 2017). Accordingly, experiencing eudemonic well-being implies the development of concrete awareness of the Self in the present to relieve anxiety, stress, alienation, and negative thoughts (Harris, 2014). Apart from the frantic pursuit of virtuous ideals, self-knowledge through reflexivity, awareness, and acceptance are overlooked but essential dimensions of eudemonia in tourism. Such self-knowledge revolves around the mindful examination of one’s identity to discover meaning rather than the pressure to meet social standards of virtue, mastery, and achievement (Yang, Zhang, et al., 2021; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016).

Filep and Laing (2019) and Sirgy and Uysal (2016) argued that further research is needed into eudemonic dimensions of tourism experiences. Those authors have maintained that eudemonia needs to be used to study well-being in specific tourism contexts, lifestyles, events, activities, or niche experiences. In the context of the present thesis, eudemonic dimensions are explored on Instagram (Paper 1) and VR (Paper 4), and inform my pre-understanding in Paper 3.

2.1.3. Liminal dimensions of experience

Liminality, similarly to eudemonia, is a useful theoretical lens through which to look at how human experiences connect to dimensions of change, transition, and flourishment (Stenner, 2018; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Liminality is important in order to understand how tourism experiences are integrated into identities and personal lifeworlds characterized by processes of becoming (Helkkula et al., 2012). Liminality is the primary theoretical tool used for Paper 2, but it also influences the understanding of NBT tourists and experiences in Papers 3 and 4.

"Liminality" derives from the Latin word *limen* (border, boundary or threshold). Van Gennep (1960) was the first to use the term while describing rites of passage (that is, rituals) accompanying a change in a person's individual or social status. Such rites were distinguished into three phases by Van Gennep: separation, transition, and re-aggregation. The transition phase was the "limen", characterized by a social ambiguity, where the individual or the society was separated from the past socio-cultural condition and not integrated into the new one. While transitioning from one condition to the other, most cultural and social rules, such as economic, symbolic, or legal ties, were "modified, sometimes broken altogether" (1960, p.114). Victor and Edith Turner (1974; 1982) noted that a behavioral, symbolic, and geographical liberation from structural obligations proper of the social order characterizes transitions in liminality. In other words, in liminal experiences, people play with familiar behaviors, symbols, and geographies through subversive and ludic events. Stenner (2018) distinguished "spontaneous" liminal experiences, which happen *to* people while experiencing liminal events, from "fabulated" liminal experiences, which are constructed artfully and performatively *by* people due to psychosocial needs. In both scenarios, freedom, artfulness, and creativity generate new symbols, models, and paradigms of thought and action. Conversely, implicit or explicit rules, limiting these creative combinations to conventional patterns, represent the intrusion of a normative structure into what is supposedly a novel, free, and experimental region of culture (Turner, 1974).

Today, liminality is understood broadly as any "betwixt and between" situation, or a state of being "no longer" and simultaneously "not yet" (Wels et al. 2011, Bigger 2009, Thomassen 2009, 2012). In such a broad capacity, liminality has been used in tourism since Graburn (1978) to define journeys, experiences, events, places, and the identity of tourists. Tourists have been defined as liminal people who experience an in-between state between spaces, times and social norms and engage in journeys that bring them to distance from the old and access the new (Burns, 1999; Urry, 2002). Liminality gives lifeworld-related value to tourism's experiential dimensions of escapism, creativity, transition, and liberation, particularly in connection to remoteness (White & White, 2004). Liminality links well to Bakhtin's definition of the carnivalesque as a temporary suspension of lifeworld-related ranks, hierarchies, and similar norms that usually deny different bodies from coming into contact (1984; Pielichaty, 2015; Shields, 1991). In music events, Jaimangal-Jones, Pritchard and Morgan (2010) associated liminal experiences with the search for spiritual fulfilment, the need to experience unfamiliar places, the enjoyment of transitory encounters, and transformative experiences linked to pilgrimage. Virtually all spatial dimensions of tourism experiences are liminal gateways to an experience of Otherness, transitional spaces, and neutral limbos where standard conventions do not apply (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2010; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Shields, 1991). Old identities can be left aside and new identities can be played with, constituted, and performed according to how tourists imagine themselves at the moment, suspending ranks, hierarchies and norms that would typically deny or limit these performances (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006). Identities performed in touristic liminal spaces can lead to bonding with new communities and social networks of similar values or intent, so-called "communitas" (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; White & White, 2004). Turner (1967) conceptualized communitas as liminal societies characterized by the absence of rank, status, and other normalized social structures present in everyday life. Jaimangal-Jones et al. (2010) noted how travelers in remote areas seek communitas whose experience is driven by a sense of lost or desired community compared to the travelers' daily lifeworld. Being "in-between" social connections of the norm and creating new ones remarks the liminal qualities of the spaces, situations, and experiences in which the tourist is situated.

On the other hand, the way tourists experience liminality is always constrained to a certain extent by their everyday identity, and subjected to a degree of surveillance and scrutiny, which limit freedom (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006). For instance, Pielichaty (2015) and Hubbard (2013) claimed that liminal performances of gender carry out jargon of the social norm of gender. Moreover, the commoditization of experiences operated by the tourism industry leads to the commoditization of liminality, which turns freedom and creativity into boredom and routine (Thomassen 2012). Commoditization also encapsulates communitas into consumption phenomena that reinforce and maintain normal structures in power during the limen (Pielichaty, 2015). As a result, it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between liminal experiences and the norm in tourism. According to Turner (1974), "liminoid" connotes post-industrial experiences of liminality and is common in the modern realm of leisure. The "liminoid" is a break from normality, and a playful experience that can produce a subversion of the norm. However, according to Turner, it does not produce the same long-lasting effects of liminality. Liminoid experiences are not as rigidly ritualistic as liminality, while still offering room for experimentation, subversion and criticism (Caudwell & Rinehart, 2014). According to Thomassen (2009), the distinction between "liminal" and "liminoid" limits the degree to which liminality can be applied to contexts such as tourism. Several authors have used the liminoid concept instead of liminal to characterize tourism and consumption experiences (e.g., Veersteg 2011, Spierenburg 2011, Taheri et al. 2016).

Socio-cultural and technological changes affect liminal experiences deeply. Szakolczai (2000) characterized modernity and post-modernity as periods of "permanent liminality", where Van Gennep's separation and transition phases are liquified in never-ending searches for self-overcoming, testing, innovation, and breaking down of boundaries. Also, an existential and permanent experience of dislocation makes re-aggregation incomplete (Johnsen & Sørensen, 2015). Ybema, Beech and Ellis (2011) and Ellis and Ybema (2010) suggested that people in "perpetual liminality" constantly switch identifications, according to an oscillatory transition between groups and organizations that bring them to identify with none in particular and several simultaneously. Wilhoit (2017) conceptualized “routine liminality” as a permanent and normalized liminality experienced in modernity: a sacred but routinized experiential space in which a degree of imagination and creativity can occur. For instance, the diffusion of mobile Internet connectivity triggers perpetual liminality by introducing people to a wide array of creative activities and, simultaneously, forcing them into a constant connection with their everyday network. A somewhat critical perspective on the concepts of freedom and novelty in liminality is relevant to develop with the rise of digitalization and its impact on tourism.

2.1.4. Symbolic and Utopian dimensions of experience

Tourism research has underlined the importance of distinguishing symbolic dimensions of experiences and their valuation, or “sign value” (Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2015). “Sign value” reflects the symbolic identity of an offering as a commodity in a given social context; namely, what that offering is intended to be and to mean (Baudrillard, 1981). According to Baudrillard (1994), sign value dominates experiences of reality according to four consecutive steps. The first step is the engagement with a direct experience of reality; the second is representing or *simulating* the experience of reality in places of representation, called *simulacra*; the third is the consumption of such simulations; and the fourth step is the experience of simulations themselves as reality, also called *hyperreality* (Edvardsson, Enquist & Johnston, 2005). Thus, simulation is a term that has been implemented to describe the human valuation, desire, and captivation with hyperrealities, which are more appealing than the real world that they supposedly imitate (Eco, 1990). Simulations blur the distinction between "fake" and "real" to the point that the fake appears more real than the real itself (Eco, 1990; Baudrillard, 1981). Simulations are desired and valued for several reasons. Simulations' often-idealistic simplicity is preferable to the constraints and complexities of reality (MacLaran & Brown, 2005; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets, 2001; Lemke, 2002). Moreover, their experience implies contemplation, immersion, and absorption, yet also appropriation and co-creation of further meaning for others (Soica, 2016). Namely, the receiver of a simulation is also bestowed with the power to co-interpret, endorse, and share the meanings embedded in the simulation according to their interpretive agency, with little concern for reality (Lemke, 2002).

Tourists' lifeworld is important in driving tourists towards valuing simulations. According to Jensen (2001), marketplaces in the everyday are markets of stories and symbols more than tangibles or utensils, certifying a movement from an object-driven "information society" to a story-driven "dream society". The Internet is characterized similarly (Kozinets, 2022; 2019). Pervasive Internet-based technologies drive consumers to simulate dreams about the future; returns to a mythical, genuine past; or dreams about utopian love, adventures into the unknown, and a utopian sense of solidarity in digital simulacra (Kozinets, 2001; Jensen, 2001). Symbolic dimensions of experiences are intimately linked to *utopia*, which Foucault defined as a placeless place or a place with no real space (Bădulescu, 2012), and Deleuze as that which does not yet exist (1994, in Hayden & el-Ojeili, 2009). Utopia is usually linked to dreams and stories about ideal "new selves" and "new worlds", which act as a source of personal and collective experience values (Deleuze &

Guattari, 1988; Kozinets, 2002; Woodruff, 1997). Kozinets (2022; 2019; 2001) argued that marketing ignites utopianism in consumers' lifeworlds.

Other than highly intangible and service-oriented industries such as tourism, even traditional industries (such as livestock) are concerned with selling utopian stories about their products, which take the form of proper "value statements" (Jensen, 2001, p. 52). Free-range eggs and "fair trade" are not just a tangibly innovative way of producing and selling a product, but a compelling utopian landscape about a greener society that values animal welfare, freedom, genuineness and empathy, conveyed through symbols (Ulver, 2021; Varul, 2008; Jensen, 2001). Utopia's implicit optimism is functional to hide uncomfortable or undesired aspects of reality behind fantasized simulations (Kozinets, 2001). Accordingly, Maclaran and Brown (2005) and Kozinets (2001) presented utopia in an everyday consumption environment as both *ou-topia* (nowhere or a world apart) and *eu-topia* (a good place).

In tourism marketplaces, what is exchanged and valued are experiences of simulations of places and people more than of actual realities (Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2015; Edvardsson et al., 2005). In different ways, Urry (2002), Knudsen and Ricky-Boyd (2012), Lau (2014; 2011) and Fitchett and Saren (1998) presented the experience of tourist sites as constellations of signs more than spaces or sights. The crucial role of sign value in experiencing "Other" landscapes and communities is central in tourism research investigating the exotic (Greenwood, 2004; Urry, 2003; 1990; Hall, 1999). It has been said that contemporary tourism is centered on experiences of utopian hyperrealities (Berger, 2011; Steiner, 2010). Wilderness and Nature have been investigated as hyperreal, or "hypernatural", due to their unique ability to stimulate desires and dreams for pristine and Wild Nature in ways that "real" nature cannot do (Leather & Gibson, 2019; Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen, 2018). Theme parks and hotels have been associated with "daydream" demands of fantasy or real worlds that are otherwise inaccessible (Buchmann, 2010; Steiner, 2010; Eco, 1990). Buchmann (2010) showed how tours in the "fake" Hobbiton from The Lord of the Rings in New Zealand offer a "real" engagement with a valued fantastic world, which provides a sense of adventure that strengthens friendship bonds. Food and heritage have been associated with symbolic displays of locality (Noee, 2018) and idealized past (Houston & Meamber, 2011; Steiner, 2010; Chang & Yeoh, 1999). Tan (2014) studied the Thai *kathoey* as a locus of Orientalist "hyper-femininity", an ideal gender whose touristic consumption links to utopian ideas of the Global South. Such research often links utopia and simulations to authenticity (e.g., Vidon et al., 2018; Houston & Meamber, 2011). Vidon et al. (2018), Berger (2011) and Ong and Jin (2016) argued that the experience of authenticity in tourism is symbolic first and foremost. In other words, tourism experiences can be invested with hyperreal yet "authentic" and deep personal meanings and values based on utopianism.

Utopia is an important dimension to investigate in lifeworld-based perspectives on experiences, as it links the valuation of experiences to specific, lifeworld-related sign values and symbolic dimensions. For instance, utopia gives sign value to hedonic fulfilment: hedonic consumption is valued because of symbolic ideas of abundance, where scarcity is seen as the norm (Maclaran & Brown, 2005; Kozinets, 2001). Utopia expands the valuation of hedonic consumption from mere pleasure to encompass symbolic dimensions linked to fantasized pasts, presents, and futures and a lifeworld-related quest for “plenitude”. In tourism, Bakhtin (1968) claimed that festival experiences’ valuation links to symbolic experiences of abundance contrasting with the material paucity of the everyday. Utopia is also linked to liminal dimensions of experience. A utopian voyage or placeness gives sign value to the liminal experience of “nowhereness”, and a utopian sense of community gives sign value to liminal communitas (Maclaran & Brown, 2005; Kozinets, 2001; Woodruff, 1997).

2.1.5. Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer culture theory (CCT) greatly influenced the conceptualizations of experiences as multidimensional constructs (Jaakkola, Helkkula & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2015; Arnould & Price, 1993; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). CCT is also a robust framework for addressing questions around experiences from interpretive perspectives interested in consumers’ hermeneutic and lifeworld-based valuation (Arnould et al., 2021; Rokka, 2021). CCT demonstrates a particular synergy with CD logic and VALEX (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Helkkula et al., 2012; Heinonen et al., 2010) due to their focus on the consumer’s valuation process. CCT is the third theoretical pillar that this thesis is founded on when understanding nature-based tourism experiences and how they link to digital technology. CCT should not be regarded as a “grand theory”, but rather as an attempt to unify various research efforts born out of the cultural turn of the 1980s according to specific goals (Rokka, 2021; Arnould et al., 2021).

An essential goal of CCT is to link consumer research to the epistemological and ontological basis of socio-cultural sciences and interpretivism (Arnould et al., 2021; Zeithaml et al., 2020; Caldwell & Henry, 2020). This link has implications regarding how experiences and their valuation are envisioned in CCT. Building on the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz (1983; 1973) and semiotic perspectives on consumption (e.g., Baudrillard, 1960; Levy, 1959), CCT considers *culture* as "the very fabric of experience, meaning, and action" found on markets, as well as of markets themselves and the ideologies that animate them (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). With the correlated lifestyles, ritual practices, myths, symbolism, and stories associated with the consumption of products and brands, consumer cultures frame consumers' experiential horizons, senses, feelings, behaviors, and valuations concerning the marketplace (Arnould et al., 2021; Kozinets, 2022; 2021; 2002; Howes, 2019; Appadurai, 1990).

CCT has several defined research directions and critical concepts, some of which drive the research questions of the present thesis. One direction particularly guides my focus on the nature-based tourist when investigating experiences and their valuation. CCT seeks to illuminate the value of consumption experiences for experiencers' *identity projects*; that is, how identities and senses of Self are forged, enhanced, or transformed through consumption experiences (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Waqas, Hamzah & Salleh, 2022; Rokka, 2021). In CCT, the consumption and valuation of experiences do not merely reflect one's "real" Identity or what is a supposedly stable Self-identity. Instead, experiences contribute to assembling various identities marked by ambivalence, contradictions, and alienation (Kozinets, 2022; 2001; Rokka, 2021; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Eastern philosophies of the Self and consumption, such as those presented in Thich (2018) and Shiah (2016), as well as Western philosophers Lacan (1966), Jung (2013) and Marx (1992), presented alienation as a characteristic constituent of the Self, either natural or resulting from modernity. The Self feels "split" and in need of being made whole again, and while such a split cannot be resolved, it relentlessly and incoherently seeks things that supposedly fill this lack and give a sense of whole identity (Vidon et al., 2018). Thus, the Self is constantly engaged in identity-building projects, and one of the chief arguments of CCT is that the marketplace is a primary locus to address such projects. According to CCT, tourism experiences do not represent value propositions but *identity myths* whose consumption help tourists fulfil their identity-building projects (Fonseca, 2008; Holt, 2004). These include combinations of valued imaginaries, symbols, scripts, roles, and personas (Esau & Senese, 2022; Smith, 2021). The central question is how tourists integrate experiences into their identity work, which involves their sense of self, meaningful identity goals, and narratives that characterize the pursuit of such goals (Fonseca, 2008). Such a question implies an interpretive focus on lifeworlds, which aligns with CD logic and VALEX (Heinonen, 2022; Helkkula et al., 2012; Heinonen et al., 2010) and informs my enquiry into the experiencers of nature-based tourism experiences.

A second research direction of CCT of importance in this thesis is the study of *marketplace cultures*, which reflect the power of market resources in shaping cultures, values, and consumption experiences. In CCT, a marketplace is a cultural place, and marketplace cultures are "distinctive, fragmentary, self-selected and sometimes transient cultural worlds" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 872) generated by common consumption interests. The notion of community is central to explain marketplace cultures. Bauman (2013) argued that globalization and post-industrial consumer societies eroded the traditional structure of communities and specularly encouraged the seeking of liquid, individualist cultures, increasing alienation. In response, consumers draw from the marketplace to forge ephemeral and dematerialized “neo-tribes” tied by common lifestyle interests and solidarity, which generate valued social bonding and shared identities (Waqas et al., 2022; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Cova, 1997; Maffesoli, 1996). These ambiguously reflect, replicate, mask, or even run against persisting structural boundaries such as class, gender, and race (Caldwell & Henry, 2020; Kozinets, 2022; 2001). Group membership of marketplace cultures contribute critically to defining the valuation of resources available in the marketplace for specific identity projects, thus defining their experiential value (Waqas et al., 2022; Rokka, 2021). In the context of this thesis, one of my arguments is that marketplace cultures contribute critically to defining nature and the experiencer of nature in NBT. In tourism, marketplace cultures shape the experiential valuation of services, destinations, local communities, heritage, food, their imaginaries and symbols (Yang, Ismail & French, 2022; Esau & Senese, 2022; Podoshen et al., 2015; Fonseca, 2008).

Marketplace cultures are the center of dynamic relationships between *marketplace ideologies* and consumers’ interpretive strategies in dealing with them (Arnould & Thompson,2005). Marketplace ideologies are composed of dominant systems of meaning, taking the form of narratives, normative messages, dominant representations of identities and lifestyle ideas, which consumers experience and interact with according to specific interpretive strategies (Waqas et al., 2022; Arnould & Thompson,2005). Interaction and experience may reflect endorsement, criticism, and transformations of dominant systems of meaning (Caldwell & Henry, 2020; Kozinets, 2001). Both dominant systems of meaning and consumers’ interpretive strategies in dealing with them are primary objects of CCT research interested in marketplace cultures (Rokka, 2021; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Thus, a goal of consumer research is also to explore how marketplace ideologies around the object of consumption proliferate in marketplace cultures and to unpack how consumers read, make sense, "decode", respond, endorse, or resist such ideologies. In tourism, Cai and McKenna (2021b) investigated ideologies of "being digitally connected" and their resistance, which drives the experiential valuation of digital-free tourism as counterculture, lifestyle, and self-narrative. Such an approach significantly influenced the development of my theoretical understanding of digital technology in tourism experiences, which will be detailed in the following section of this chapter.

Beyond the conceptual understanding of NBT experience valuation in a digitally connected world, CCT drives this thesis towards specific paradigmatic and methodological choices. Although my papers do not elaborate on CCT as in the Kappa, they use CCT-informed methodologies, such as netnography and immersive netnography (Kozinets, 2022) in Papers 1, 2 and 4. In these papers I also use theoretical perspectives included in CCT's research venues. Examples include ANT in Paper 3 (Arnould et al., 2021; Arnould & Thompson, 2018; Lucarelli & Hallin, 2014; Bajde, 2013; Arnould & Thompson, 2005); experience value and VALEX across all papers, especially Paper 1 (Jaakkola et al., 2015), and liminality in Paper 2 (Appau, Ozanne & Klein, 2020; Cody & Lawlor, 2011; Cody, Lawlor & Maclaran, 2011). This is not unusual, as research papers whose theoretical framework is not built explicitly on CCT are regarded as contributions to CCT due to their contributions to CCT research domains.

2.2. Digital technology

Technology's etymology is rooted in the Greek word *techne* and represents concepts of craftmanship, production, art, and skills. *Techne* has been ported in such a capacity into Western philosophy, where it is normally opposed to *episteme*, the latter representing truth and knowledge (Parry, 2021). *Techne* denotes the modern scientific worldview, pragmatism and instrumental rationality, opposed to *episteme* or the similar concept of *theoria*, representing ideal knowledge of reality and truth (Parry, 2021; James, 2019). Given its roots in *techne* and its distance from *episteme* and *theoria*, technology seems neutralized of implications concerning the idea, knowledge, and experience of the world. What matters is a pragmatic imperative, from Greek *praxis*, or *prattein* – doing – and Latin *pragmaticus*, or efficient; that is, how to do something, how to practice it, and how to do it more efficiently (Monteiro, 2020; Walsh & Tucker, 2009). Such understanding of the word "technology" informs most research on the use, experience, and consumption of digital technologies and information communication technologies (ICTs) in tourism. Accordingly, these fields have been dominated by positivism, pragmatism, and technical reasoning (Cai & McKenna, 2021a; Fast et al., 2019; Mkono & Markwell, 2017; Xiang, 2018; Munar et al., 2013). As technological objects, digital technologies are supposedly void of any *episteme* or *theoria* about the world and its experience: the question is how they help practice tourism business in the "real" world and do so efficiently. In tourism, this leads to the view that, while experiencing digital technology, the tourist is *homo economicus* and values digital technology according to utility and efficiency (Gretzel et al., 2020; Pourfakhimi et al., 2019). Similarly, online communities of tourists are rational planners and traders of information and utility (Gymóthy, 2013). Theories of behavior in line with such understanding of users and communities have been dominant in tourism when investigating digital technology's experience and valuation (Munar et al., 2013; Pourfakhimi et al., 2019). The popularity of the word *smartness,* and its seamless expansion to every aspect of technology, evidences an undebated advocacy for stakeholders to implement optimal management of digital technology in tourism experiences (Gelter, Fuchs & Lexhagen, 2022; Gelter, Lexhagen & Fuchs, 2021). Particularly in SD logic frameworks, this is based on the undisputed idea that technological advances *always* increase or enhance tourism experiences and value creation (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015; Gretzel et al., 2015). My approach to digital technologies in tourism and NBT experiences is different, as will be explained below.

2.2.1. Digital technocultures

Studies that investigate technology, either by adopting the term "technoculture" or implicitly looking at technology's sociocultural implications for consumer experiences, particularly in CCT, view digital technology differently (Rokka, 2021; Arnould et al., 2021; Kozinets, 2019). Similar to "consumer culture", the concept of "technoculture" moves from Geertz's interpretivist definition of culture as "webs of significance" that humans co-create to make sense of the world, themselves, and their experience, and at the same time entrap humans within their sensemaking patterns (1973). Thus, "technoculture" indicates that technology shapes and constrains, rather than simply aiding, providers' and consumers' experience and valuation of themselves and the world (Kozinets, 2022; 2019; Law & Singleton, 2000; Berg, 1985). Accordingly, technology is *techne* and *prattein* within the world, yet it also contributes to defining *theoria* and *episteme* of the world, the self and how we consume, value, and experience them (Kozinets, 2022; 2019; Bates, 2019). Venturing beyond technology's "objective" functionality and efficiency, technoculture examines the role of any technology in constructing identities, consciousness, time, space, values, experiences, social life, economics, art, and consumption (Bijker, 2006; Shaw, 2020; Penley & Ross, 1991). The attention to technocultures is not born with digital technologies, as it is impossible to imagine humans as pre-technological almost as pre-cultural (Nye, 2007). Nevertheless, due to the increasing pervasiveness, ubiquitousness, and social nature of digital technologies, it is increasingly necessary to study digital technologies not as utensils or facilitators of predetermined experiences of the world and the Self, but as cultural agents of them (Kozinets & Gambetti, 2020; Kozinets, 2019). When viewed through the perspective of technoculture, digital technologies such as smartphones, tablets, social media, GPS, and VR have an immensely pervasive and proactive impact on defining consumer lifeworlds (Rokka, 2021; Arnould et al., 2021; Helkkula et al., 2012). Other than enhancing time management according to a "smart" *techne*, digital technologies reshape the experience and valuation of time in the everyday and thus leisure and tourism (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Martineau, 2017; Rosa, 2013). Other than answering consumers' desires, digital technologies shape experiences of desire, bringing the latter closer to social dimensions of comparison, recognition, and popularity, away from tangibility and towards inflated hyperrealities, virtual fantasies about people and objects (Kozinets et al., 2017). In addition to aiding consumers in expressing their identity and answering their identity needs, digital technologies also recast identities and the very notion of Self (Llamas & Belk, 2022; Rokka & Canniford, 2016; O'Regan, 2009). These are all examples of how digital technocultures impact the lifeworld of consumers ex-situ and in-situ, and are crucial to consider when investigating experiences from interpretive perspectives (Heinonen, 2022).

This thesis applies a technocultural understanding to digital technology in tourism by using, across the kappa, the term "digital technoculture". Differently from consumer studies, few studies have adopted the term technoculture or similar in tourism, as sociocultural aspects of digitalization remain under-represented in tourism research (Gössling, Larson & Pumputis, 2021; Pourfakhimi et al., 2019). However, the need to study the digitalization of tourism experiences while adopting new perspectives has been noted recently (Pourfakhimi et al., 2019; Werthner, 2022; Heinonen, 2022; Cai & McKenna, 2021a). Examples rooted in critical theory are embodiments of mobiles in tourism based on marketplace ideologies of technology (Cai & McKenna, 2021b), the replication of the neoliberal culture in digitalization (Rydzik & Kisson, 2021), and pervasiveness of middle-class consumer cultures in tourist apps (Jansson, 2020). Furthermore, cultural dimensions of Airbnb are gaining increasing attention due to its relevance within tourism. Therefore, the romanticization of hospitality in Airbnb consumer culture (Makkar & Yap, 2020) and mutual surveillance of Airbnb hosts and guests (Gössling et al., 2021) are other relevant examples. Some studies link digitalization to the pursuit of cultural imaginaries of destinations (Gretzel, 2021; Smith, 2021; 2018). Social media link to technocultural constructions of digital communities, destinations, and selves (Lexhagen & Conti, 2022; Munar et al., 2013), and research informed by semiotic, critical, and cultural lenses is emerging.

2.2.2. The Acceleration age

The skyrocketing development and diffusion of digital technologies led the tourism industry to discuss opportunities to exploit them for the sake of experience marketing and management (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Matias, Nijkamp & Neto, 2007). Xiang (2018) argued that such discussion evidences a movement of tourism research into an "acceleration" age. Rosa (2013) introduced acceleration to describe a progressive hastening of time in transportation, communication, production, lifestyle, and life rhythms encouraged by modernity. Rosa's "technical" acceleration describes a specific culture where the "optimization" of time and space through technology is linked to the *unquestionable* ideological imperative of doing *more*, *better*, and *faster* (Fast et al., 2019; Wajcman, 2018; Rosa, 2013; Robins & Webster, 2003). In digital technologies, acceleration is evident in the exponential growth of the Internet during the movement from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 (Xiang, 2018; Martineau, 2017; O'Regan, 2009). Web 2.0 "accelerated" the Internet by *expanding* it with a gargantuan amount of content and content creators and by making it *more rapidly* accessible by other tools and environments than desktop PCs, the home, or the workplace (Xiang, 2018; Hiremath & Kenchakkanavar, 2016; Choudhury, 2014). Web 2.0 and ICTs enabling or relying on ubiquitous Internet access, such as the smartphone, GPS, Wi fi, tablets and smart devices, are all entities that characterize the Internet in the age of acceleration (Xiang, 2018; Tavakoli & Mura, 2018; Rosa, 2013).

Web 2.0 contributed critically to the paradigmatic shifts towards SD and CD logics of production in consumption studies (Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2017; Neuhofer et al., 2012; Kelleher & Peppard, 2011). This is mainly due to how dominant the users of Web 2.0 are compared to those of Web 1.0. Compared to Web 1.0, Web 2.0 is defined by users and their interactions through so-called "user-generated content" (UGC) rather than by organizations (O'Reilly, 2009; Murugesan, 2007). A compelling example is user-generated Wikipedia rather than

Britannica Online (O'Reilly, 2009). The popularity of UGC indubitably depends on the growing array of multimedia formats available for the users of Web 2.0. In comparison to Web 1.0, they can rapidly craft and share rich narratives made of combinations of images and text, as well as emoticons, gifs, audio, and video (Leung et al. 2013). Such narratives enable tourists to communicate what they experience and to share them simultaneously with different digital communities (Cuomo et al., 2016; Rokka, 2010). Tourists can use a plethora of communities to share their experiences: mainly social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, but also forums, blogs, media-sharing sites, social bookmarking sites, and knowledge-sharing sites (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2014; Tham, Croy & Mair, 2013; Leung et al., 2013). Studies have argued that Web 2.0 enhances tourists' agency, creativity, and spontaneity and facilitates new interactions (Wang, Xiang and Fesenmaier, 2014; Lamsfus et al., 2014; Wang, Parks and Fesenmaier, 2012). Online communities in Web 2.0 are communities of value co-creators, rather than just simple exchangers of information (Xiang, 2018; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). In tourism, interactive UGC in specific Web 2.0 platforms is seen as forms of C2B and C2C value creation through electronic word-of-mouth – eWOM (Cox et al., 2009; Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015; Buhalis & Law, 2008). The user-dominance of Web 2.0 implies a shift towards a consumer-based value creation logic that has not been fully implemented yet (Heinonen, 2022; Moisander et al., 2020).

Thanks to mobile hardware such as smartphones, tablets and wearable devices, access to and experience of Web 2.0 in the acceleration age is ubiquitous instead of confined to home or work-related access points (Tanti & Buhalis, 2017; Dickinson, Hibbert & Filimonau, 2016; Rosa, 2013; Neuhofer et al., 2012; Binkhorst & Den

Dekker, 2009). ICTs and Web 2.0 are bounded to users' location, thanks to GPS tracking technologies, and "experiencing a place" is increasingly mediated by and performed through digital means (Fast et al., 2019). Xiang (2018) argued that, in the acceleration age, the ubiquity of access to Web 2.0 granted by contemporary digital technologies transforms human beings into spontaneous and ubiquitous generators of online data about what they experience. Ubiquitous UGC exposes tourists to regular screening and profiling by "smart" companies that, following Rosa (2013), are highly interested in gaining "more, better, and faster" knowledge about users' identity and mobilities to enhance the competitiveness of their offerings (Gössling et al., 2021; Jansson, 2020).

2.2.3. Accelerated destination experiences

In the acceleration age, digital technocultures have consequences regarding how tourists experience travelling and being at the destination. The contextual awareness of digital technologies (such as portable media players, cameras, accelerometers, GPS tags, and navigation) empowers tourists to interact with the world around them and to generate content online as they please (Dickinson et al., 2016; 2014). Tourists can create and stream content ubiquitously across different platforms and devices, allowing them to constantly reshape and re-contextualize the meaning of what they experience depending on where they are and where they share it (Jansson, 2020b). Tourists can also access their own experiential dimensions ranging from education and entertainment to aesthetic immersion, regardless of what is on location (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2014). Neuhofer et al. (2012) and Blinkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) underlined how tourists' never-ending Internet connection and creation of online content embrace every phase of the tourist experience, from the destination decision-making at home, the experience at the destination, to the phase of re-entry. In particular, digital technologies allow tourists to engage in the pre- and post-experiential phases during the destination experience through a variety of means (Dickinson et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014; Neuhofer et al., 2012; Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011). For instance, by using social media and email apps, tourists can remain connected with friends, family, and peers at home while away or connect to post-travel communities, such as reviewers, video makers, and bloggers (Prebensen et al. 2013; Munar et al. 2013; Neuhofer et al., 2012). In the pre-travel phase, tourists can engage in planning, get inspired, search for information, and compare alternatives by consulting blogs and video-sharing hubs such as YouTube, TripAdvisor, and Facebook threads and reviews. During the travel phase, tourists can share multimedia posts in real-time, retrieve information and influence their decision-making through social augmented apps and UGC review sites. Finally, tourists can relive the experience or keep their experiential engagement through sharing posts, blogs, photo albums, reviews and videos. At every phase, tourists can constantly interact with firms, friends, locals, peers, followers, and followed influencers and peers (Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2017).

Mobile connectivity in the acceleration age blurs traditionally sharp distinctions between being away and the everyday (Jansson, 2020b), as well as between physical and social presence, which are merged in a digital-physical co-presence (Floros et al., 2019; Tan, 2017; Hannam, Butler, & Paris, 2014). "Phygital" (Mieli, 2022), "constant connectivity (Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2017), and "digital elasticity" (Pearce, 2011) are all terms used to indicate that the digital and the physical constitute a "joint reality" of the tourism experience, which liquify traditional tourism mobilities to and from destinations. Digital technocultures dilute the tourism home/away dichotomy to the point where the very "tourist" disappears from the hyperconnected tourism experience, and a more generalized human being comes to be at its center (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). According to Neuhofer (2016), this can mean that as well as empowering tourists, ubiquitous digital technologies destroy experiential dimensions of being away. Potentially, geographical locations of the tourism experience become irrelevant, leading to disembodied experiences, loss of sense of place, lack of engagement with local communities and places (Voase, 2018; Floros et al., 2019), and unresolved conflicts between proximity to valued peers and valued distance from them (White & White, 2007). Digital technologies sometimes result in the maintainment of valued bonding, but also in the experience of harmful obligation, loss of time, and overwhelming pressures (Floros et al., 2019; Silas, Sundnes, & Ling, 2016). The dilemma between being offline and online could affect the tourism experience by causing distraction (Ayeh, 2018), self-estrangement (Tribe & Mkono, 2017), anxiety (Gretzel, 2010), and discomfort (White & White, 2007). These results reflect the relationship between digital technocultures and phenomena such as FOMO (fear of missing out), and Nomophobia (no mobile phobia) (Conti, 2022a; Egger, Lei & Wassler, 2020). Nomophobia is defined as anxiety, discomfort and "fear of becoming technologically incommunicable" (Yildrim & Correia, 2015, p. 131) when a mobile phone is unavailable, while FOMO is the concern of missing out on events, experiences or interactions occurring elsewhere and the consequent decreased well-being and immersion (Conti, 2022a; Kim, Lee & Kim, 2020; Hodkinson, 2016). In the acceleration age, FOMO also arises when, through mobiles, one is presented with an excessive number of mutually exclusive options and thus feels anxiety, pressures, fear of making a "wrong" choice and regret (Przybylski, Murayama & DeHaan, 2013).

Tribe and Mkono grouped multiple adverse outcomes of digital elasticity together under the concept of "*e-lienation*" (2017, p. 112), which encompasses tourists' alienation experiences associated with digital technologies and the estrangement from experiencing local communities and places. I argue that e-lienation depends on digital technocultures of the acceleration age shaping tourists' experience and valuation of presence, attention, and immersion in a destination context (Rosa, 2013). E-lienation seemingly jeopardize experiences of being away, yet White and White (2007) contended that even in a hyperconnected world, a valued experience of "being away" associated with tourism experiences is still personally constructed by tourists in relation to a similarly personal experience of "home". Up-to-date research is needed on how and to what extent pre- and post-travel digital technocultures are implicated in the experience of being away. Evidently, such research should be grounded on consumer-dominant perspectives attentive towards tourists'lifeworlds (Heinonen, 2022). A recent stream of research has analyzed strategies of disconnection from mobiles during the tourism experience as a way of distinguishing home-based connectivity from away-based connectivity (Conti, 2022b; Egger et al., 2020; Li, Pearce and Low, 2018; Tanti & Buhalis, 2017; Dickinson et al., 2016; 2014). Such studies greatly influenced Paper 3 and will be further elaborated later in this chapter.

2.2.4. Accelerated tourists

Digital technocultures in the acceleration age have implications for experiences as well as experiencers, with the latter having rarely been acknowledged in the context of tourism. O'Regan claimed that digital technologies are "new technologies of the self" that tourists use to recast identity and "transform their own subjectivity" (2009, p.76) in ways so far unseen. This remains an under-researched topic in tourism. According to Llamas and Belk (2022) and Sheth and Solomon (2014), digital technologies change the identity of the consumer by extending it digitally into several avatars, defined as digital subjectivities. In the acceleration age, these digital subjectivities are critical parts of one's "extended Self", which Belk (2016; 2014; 2013) defined as the use of consumers' possessions to build and define their idea of Self. Examples are profiles and alter-egos on Instagram, Meta, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, and MMORPGs. According to CCT, such digital subjectivities are valued commodities in developing, maintaining, and expressing consumers' identity projects (Ahmed, Ambika & Belk, 2022). As such, they are also marked by contradictions and ambivalence (Rokka, 2021; Arnould et al., 2021). To begin with, digital subjectivities may conflict with external definitions of one's Self. For instance, people defined by racialized and gendered mass media narratives use digital avatars to create valued counter-narratives (Llamas & Belk, 2022; Mauro, 2020). Moreover, different subjectivities within one's extended self – for example, one's profile on Tinder as opposed to that on LinkedIn – value the experience of the world according to different and contrasting dimensions (Kozinets, 2022; Belk, 2014; Ahuvia, 2005). Finally, even within single subjectivities, one may see ambiguous aggregations of attributes. For instance, "micro-celebrities" and influencers display a convergence between "famous" and "ordinary" personas that are "genuine" yet meticulously constructed to be likeable (Kozinets, 2020; García-Rapp & Cuberes, 2017; Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2016). Roux & Belk (2019), Bădulescu (2012) and Rokka and Canniford (2016) defined the Internet and social media as an example of *heterotopia*, which Foucault (1984) described as "spaces with no specific place", contested between fragmentary and contradictive identities.

The aggregation of such digital subjectivities in digital communities makes digital communities far more complex entities than networks of information or utility traders (Pourfakhimi et al., 2019; Munar et al., 2013; O'Regan, 2009). Again following CCT, digital communities are "e-tribes" of digital subjectivities built on liquid social affiliations based on identity interests, similarities, shared hierarchies, ceremonies, rituals, performances, and practices that help tourists build and develop communal moral standards and behavioral norms (Munar et al., 2013; Kozinets, 1999). Cuomo et al. (2016) argued that on social media, blogs and forums, such communities create emotional ties and share passions and experiences by means of ritualistic interactions. Gymóthy (2013) described tourists as online storytellers, opening up about themselves, their dreams, utopian ideals, past and future – *homo narrans*, rather than *homo economicus*. Gymóthy claimed that e-tribes provide the tourist with shared symbolic systems to perform and share dreams, fantasies, truths, emotions, and ideal, past, and future selves. On the other hand, these e-tribes are also cultural worlds that forge consumer cultures and ideologies about ways of being and experiencing, with whom the tourist must constantly negotiate by means of his/her digital subjectivities (Rokka, 2021; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The value of attention significantly impacts e-tribes and digital subjectivities. Davenport and Beck (2001) indicated that, in the "attention economy", attention is an increasingly scarce and valued resource due to the technological facilitation of information. While providers compete for the consumer's attention, consumers compete to be watched and endorsed (Zulli, 2018; Andrejevic, 2009; 2002). Clicks and "affective relations" such as likes, emojis, following, and retweets are all examples of digital valuation of attention directed towards one's digital subjectivity (Marwick, 2015). In CCT terms, while competing to be watched and liked, consumers reinforce existing marketplace ideologies by performing their dominant identarian myths; for example, by performing productive or attractive digital subjectivities for likes (Usher, 2020; Kozinets & Gambetti, 2020). Digital subjectivities compete for the experiencer's attention and dedication, which in the context of tourism potentially lead to FOMO and e-lienation from destination places and peers (Conti, 2022a; Tribe & Mkono, 2017). Beyond attention, digital subjectivities and e-tribes are disciplined by scrutiny and surveillance. The "surveillance economy" in digital environments is based on collecting, profiling, and trading digital user data as value (Walker Rettberg, 2014; Zuboff, 2015; Etkin, 2016). It also shapes what dimensions of tourists' digital subjectivities are valued in defining them as reputable and trustworthy (Gössling et al., 2021). Hosts and guests both perform, profile, and surveil their digital subjectivities according to such dimensions. Kozinets (2015, p.74) noted that digital avatars embedded in e-tribes "are watched by institutional actors, and watch institutional actors, but they also watch each other".

Digital subjectivities follow the ideological imperatives to expand, enhance, and fasten oneself in the acceleration age (Rosa, 2013). Namely, as described by Sheth and Solomon (2014) and Belk (2014), they are "unbound" from traditional limitations and consumers have the power to assemble them freely, instantaneously, and ubiquitously. At the same time, digital subjectivities are profiled, surveilled, and disciplined by marketplace ideologies of attention and surveillance according to algorithms owned by a few undisputed oligopolies (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022; Brown, 2021; Waters, 2020; Kozinets et al., 2017; Barhi & Eckhardt, 2017). In the acceleration age, NBT tourists carry their digital subjectivities, e-tribes, and ideologies that influence them ubiquitously while travelling. From CCT, CD logic, and VALEX perspectives, their ex-situ roles in the tourists' lifeworlds have consequences for the valuation of tourism experiences that need further exploration (Heinonen, 2022).

2.2.4. Online photography and Instagramming

Since the conceptualization of the "tourist gaze", tourism has been intimately linked to sight as a primary way of experiencing places (Urry, 2003; Dann & Jacobsen, 2003). Consequently, photography established itself as a central technoculture of tourism (Lo et al., 2011). The use of cameras has been associated with the very identity of tourism and tourists, both in terms of experiencing a destination, reliving and sharing such experience (Lo et al., 2011; Prideaux, Lee & Tsang, 2018). In the acceleration age, the attachment of digital cameras to smartphones provoked a massification of photography worldwide and changes in how photography is practised (Fast et al., 2019; Chopra-Gant, 2016; Borges-Rey, 2015; Pink, 2006), particularly thanks to the rise of online photography. In 2014, the average amount of pictures uploaded daily on the Internet was an unprecedented 1.8 billion (Meeker, 2014).

Online photography is one of the main digital technocultures assessed in this thesis, and particularly on Instagram. In the early 2020s, Instagram was the most popular photo-sharing social media in the world, with an estimated 1 billion monthly active users and more than 500 million daily active users (Statista, 2020). Bate (2013) defined online photography on social media like Instagram as "shoot-and-share". Perhaps because of the velocity of shooting and sharing compared to classic photography, such a definition suggests an immediate and linear taking-sharing process of pictures. However, the manipulation phase between "taking" and "sharing" means that the picture constitutes an iconic passage of overlooked importance, particularly in establishing Instagram and simila as a simulacra. Most online photography apps can emulate lens and post-processing effects. In tourism and other experiences, such as dining or sports, these allow users to manipulate the subject of the picture by performing, for example, a sense of authenticity (Bate, 2013), nostalgia (Chopra-Gant 2016), skilfulness (Prideaux et al. 2018) or, particularly in the tourism context, idealized ways of "being somewhere" (Lo & McKercher, 2015). Manipulation is added to a long-lasting perceived capacity of photography to certify reality (Barthes, 1984; Hall, 1981), coupled with a powerful, digital sense of proximity perceived among social media users. The combination can make online photography, albeit manipulated, appear more "authentic" than, for example, traditional media (Borges-Rey, 2015). Accordingly, users perform a "*phototruth*" that is a simulation of reality that can be experienced as real but is hyperreal (Wheeler, 2005; 2002).

Users attach several meanings to online photography. On Instagram, this is done through visuals, but also through the iconic power of textual hashtags, captions, and geotagging (Lexhagen & Conti, 2022), which are used to describe and tell user-generated stories about contexts, emotions, and opinions that may not be otherwise self-evident (Abbot et al., 2013) and to link the visual(s) to a specific group of posts with similar content (Cuomo et al., 2016; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). These features make communication in e-tribes of friends and broader groups of users who share similar interests, values, and experiences particularly convenient and appealing (Cuomo et al., 2016; Ting et al., 2015). Phototruths are effective, popular, desired, and valued for reasons that I have already discussed when discussing symbolic and utopian dimensions of experiences. To begin with, their simplistic performance of reality may hide undesired complexity and ensure the possibility of experiencing and consuming – even just visually and socially – something that is desired but not achievable (Vidon et al., 2018; MacLaran & Brown, 2005; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets, 2001; Lemke, 2002). Moreover, Instagram's simulations imply contemplation, immersion, and absorption, yet also empowered appropriation and co-creation of further meaning for others; for example, through screen shooting a post, re-sharing, liking, commenting, tagging, and hashtagging (Lexhagen & Conti, 2022; Soica, 2016; Lemke, 2002). In providing users with desired simulations, Instagram draws from marketplace ideologies exalting recognition, artistic, utopian or imaginative extremes, and turns them into technocultures shaping what is desirable and sought (Kozinets et al., 2017).

Contributions to how online photography (and Instagram in particular) connect to tourism experiences have increased since I started my PhD work. While I was working on Papers 1 and 2, Instagram was mentioned within general studies on social media investigating correlations between tourists' posts, itineraries, destination images, and consumption patterns (e.g., Rossi, Boscaro, & Torsello, 2018; Shuqair & Cragg 2017; Tenkanen et al., 2017; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). Following a general trend in e-tourism research, most of these studies used quantitative research designs, with few exceptions (e.g., Baksi, 2016; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Lo &

McKercher, 2015). In time, studies found that tourists' "Instagramming", as defined by Lexhagen and Conti (2022), can be autobiographical and disrupt institutionalized visual narratives, but can also strengthen commodified visual motives and introduce novel forms of colonial narratives or deviant behaviour (Cardell & Douglas, 2018; Hunter, 2018; Smith, 2018). However, studies of this sort are still scarce in nature-based tourism (exceptions include Fälton, 2021). One of tourism's most disruptive Instagramming practices is posting selfies (taking a picture of oneself). As digital technocultures, tourism selfies change the tourism gaze into a self-directed gaze, where the tourist persona becomes an object of experience, attention, scrutiny, valuation and consumption (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). Additionally, shoot-and-sharing oneself on-site transforms tourism experiences that were traditionally solitary into social experiences where the self at the centre stage of the destination experience is manipulated, collectively consumed, discussed, and endorsed (Cardell & Douglas, 2018). Travel diaries are an example of a selfie narrative in which users present themselves as attendees to others who are not attending, often with an explicitly or implicitly boastful message such as "you wish you were here" or "I wish you were here" (Eagar & Dann, 2016).

Online photography apps such as Instagram help tourists capture and express something significant about being somewhere and someone (Lo & McKercher, 2015; Pearce & Moscardo, 2015). Such significance is deeply intertwined with technocultures disciplining value, desire, experiences, and placeness (Kozinets & Gambetti, 2020; Zulli, 2018; Barhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Kozinets et al., 2017; Rokka & Canniford, 2016; Belk, 2016). Instagram's phototruths carry and endorse commodified and hegemonic visual motives about destinations (Smith, 2021; 2018), which in CCT terms can be seen as marketplace ideologies. However, they also unveil experiential meanings and values that are "authentic" to specific lifeworlds (Borges-Rey, 2015; Wang, 1999; Adams, 1996). Thus, they are a valuable source for addressing tourist lifeworld-related questions when investigating experience valuations (Heinonen, 2022; Rokka, 2021; Arnould et al., 2021; Helkkula et al., 2012).

2.2.5. VR tourism: new technocultures of tourism

The second digital technology through which this thesis studies digital technocultures in nature-based tourism, particularly in Paper 4, is virtual reality (VR). VR arguably represents the most critical technological advancement influencing consumption experiences in recent times (Kozinets, 2022). Advances in VR have clear implications for the tourism experience. VR is recognized as having the potential to reconfigure tourism as technocultural mobility based on interest rather than physical distance (Koo et al., 2022; Buhalis, Lin & Leung, 2022; van Nuenen & Scarles, 2021; Hannam et al., 2014). In particular, tourists can engage liquidly in valued "hyper-mobilities" to destinations, without concerns about physical travelling (Kang, 2020). Such mobilities are sought due to barriers to travel, such as physical distance, mobility constraints, and economic, political, and sanitary restrictions, and are defined as "ex-situ tourism" (Talwar et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2022; Kim & Hall, 2019). Ex-situ tourism boomed during the COVID-19 pandemic, among the main factors prompting VR popularization and implementation in tourism (Buhalis et al., 2022; Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022; Gursoy, Malodia & Dhir, 2022). In the post-pandemic world, ex-situ tourism is still rising due to health, security and sustainability concerns about physical travel and the rising popularity of VR in consumers' everyday lifeworlds (Talwar et al., 2022; Kozinets, 2022; Pratisto, Thompson & Potdar, 2022). Digital natives and tech-savvy travelers increasingly engage in "virtual globetrotting" by using VR apps (Gursoy et al., 2022).

In tourism, the literature is grounded on the notion that tourists use VR to experience sensorially immersive simulations of destination-based activities (Talwar et al., 2022; Fan, Jiang & Deng, 2022; Lu et al., 2022; Lin, Huang & Ho, 2020). Accordingly, VR tourism research is based chiefly on Guttentag's (2010) definitions of VR and VEs. Guttentag defined VR as "the use of a computer-generated 3D environment – called a 'virtual environment' (VE) – that one can navigate and possibly interact with, resulting in real-time simulation of one or more of the user's five senses" (2010, p.638). Destination VEs generate a unique sense of "being there" through *telepresence*; that is, "a psychological state of feeling present in a mediated environment" (Skard et al., 2021, p.2). Destination VEs can be generated fictionally according to realistic 3D modelling or through images and 360° videos of the real world taken by portable and affordable hardware (Pratisto et al., 2022; Yang, Lai, et al., 2021). These images and videos can be processed through photogrammetry software to build a higher sense of depth and visual fidelity of destinations (Spindler, 2022).

Such advances are significant in VR tourism, where visual fidelity, depth, and interactivity with the destination VE are highly valued (Kim, Lee & Jung, 2020; Lin et al., 2020). Visual fidelity helps avoid motion sickness; that is, the fatigue, discomfort, sweatiness, dizziness, and fear resulting from VR experiences (Beck, Rainoldi & Egger, 2019). Visual fidelity also strengthens perceptions of authenticity, genuineness, and realism of the destination VE due to the recognized importance of sight in certifying reality (Pratisto et al., 2022; Marasco et al., 2018). Based on Guttentag (2010), extant VR tourism literature approaches VR as aesthetic, sensorial, and isolated simulations of real environments and assesses individuals' reception and perceptions of VEs. Thus, VR tourism is typically defined as an ex-situ, sensorially immersive telepresence in an isolated VE of an attraction, destination, or visitor experience (Fan et al., 2022; Pratisto et al., 2022; Kim & Hall, 2019). The idea of an individual travelling to a near VR-enabled physical environment, instead of long distances, to experience a destination VE grounds the understanding of mobilities in VR tourism experiences (Kang, 2020). More in line with an SD logic of experience, Buhalis et al. (2022), Flavian, Ibanez-Sanchez and Orus (2019), and Jung and tom Dieck (2017) argued that a VR tourism experience should be understood as the multiple cognitive, affective and conative valuations triggered by VR during a journey comprised of pre-experience, on-site and post-experience phases. However, the dynamic relationship between VR and the physical world across these phases remains unexplored (Fan et al., 2022; Jung & tom Dieck, 2017).

In accordance with acceleration imperatives, VR is approached with overall optimism and advocacy. VR is implicitly an enabler and an enhancer (Buhalis et al., 2022), and its experience and valuation can be generalized according to quantitative reasoning and positivist theories of technology consumption (Pratisto et al., 2022; Beck et al., 2019). For instance, VR is a marketing prop to solicit the intention of visiting real-world destinations (Lu et al., 2022; Yang, Lai, et al., 2021), or a tool to enhance real-world engagement with destinations, personalize tours, guiding, and education for the sake of a generalized experiencer (van Nuenen & Scarles, 2021; Tussyadiah et al., 2018; Jung & tom Dieck, 2017). In different ways, Fan et al. (2022), Gao et al. (2022), Buhalis et al. (2022) and Jung and tom Dieck (2017) recognized that a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between VEs and the experiencer’s lifeworld is crucial for understanding how VR is valued in tourism experiences. Buhalis et al. (2022) and Gursoy et al. (2022) also recognized that consumer-dominant perspectives better describe VR experiences as such experiences become increasingly user-led. However, such perspectives are very scarce, if existent at all, in VR tourism research (Heinonen, 2022; Kozinets, 2022).

Disruptive and rapid advances in VR technology and mutating VR technocultures challenge pre-existing understandings of VR integration in the tourism experience (Koo et al., 2022). Nowadays, VR is driven by the growth of a portable virtual world, the “metaverse”, where digital selves interact ubiquitously to enhance or replace physical realities (Buhalis et al., 2022; Gursoy et al., 2022; Kozinets, 2022; Johnstone, McDonnell & Williamson, 2022). First envisioned in a sci-fi novel in 1992, the term “metaverse” is a combination of meta (beyond) and verse (a short form of universe) (Koo et al., 2022). The metaverse is defined as a nascent compilation of techno-utopian imagination and futuristic engineering where telepresence in virtual worlds links to social spaces, exchanges, and digital selves that persistently link to the real world (Kozinets, 2022). Its developers and investors envision the metaverse as a progressive, liquid transition between VR and real-world experiences (Buhalis et al., 2022; Koo et al., 2022).

On one hand, the progressive integration between social media and VEs, and the development of VR apps for smartphones allow users to interface with their VR avatars in the real world, which add to the possibility of streaming VR experiences on smart devices (Buhalis et al., 2022; Koo et al., 2022). On the other hand, the portable nature of contemporary VR technology elevates the possibilities of interaction with real-world contexts, even in full VR experiences (Johnstone et al., 2022; Ane, Roller & Lolugu, 2019). Accordingly, the metaverse introduces a principle of ontological equivalence between the real and the digital. Namely, VR could be experienced as realer-than-real, and a clear distinction between the real and the digital cannot be established from a phenomenological point of view (Kozinets, 2022; Rauschnabel, 2022). Similarly to ubiquitous digital technologies in the acceleration age, the “physical” and the “digital” are hard to distinguish in the metaverse (Mieli, 2022; Tan, 2017).

Advances in VR are creating a technocultural “metaverse tourism” that is, very broadly, “a collection of articulate objects, humans and avatars, interfaces, and networking capabilities in the tourism industry” (Koo et al. 2022, p.1). As the VR Metaverse develops, VR avatars and their VEs will flow into defining identities and experiences more than any other digital evolutions experienced in tourism (Kozinets, 2022; Sheth & Solomon, 2014; Belk, 2014). How technocultures in VR flow liquidly into the real world and vice versa, affecting each other, need to be further explored in tourism, with tourism being “one of six domains in which VR is expected to fundamentally change everyday life” (Kang, 2020, p. 244). Empirical studies of VR in tourism do not generally consider the implications of metaverse tourism, perhaps because of its incompleteness (Heinonen, 2022). However, the “metaverse experience journey” and its experiential valuation should be one of the main points in VR tourism research agendas (Heinonen, 2022; Gursoy et al., 2022).

2.2.6. Negotiating digital technology

Interpretive, critical, and social-constructionist perspectives on technology are particularly interested in how the meanings of technological objects are co-determined and negotiated by various entities (Gretzel et al., 2020; Fast et al., 2019; Pourfakhimi et al., 2019; Munar et al., 2013; Monteiro, 2000). Understanding the latter is very important when investigating technocultures. Notable examples of such perspectives are the social construction of technology (SCOT) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Introduced by Pinch and Bijker (1984), SCOT influenced the development of other interpretive, critical, and social-constructionist perspectives on technology (Fast et al., 2019; Van Baalen, Fenema & Loebbecke, 2016). While ANT is not mentioned explicitly in the papers, it profoundly influenced my understanding of digital technology across my thesis work, particularly when working on Papers 2, 3, and 4. Key concepts of SCOT provide an effective baseline for understanding ANT's specificity in relation to similar theories. Introduced in the 1980s by the work of Latour, Callon and Law, ANT is explicitly used in Paper 3.

SCOT postulates that technology is a contested socio-cultural construct, and different social groups have contrasting demands and expectations regarding what a technological artefact is, means, and does (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). For instance, there are contrasting interpretations of a smartphone or an app's accessibility, interactivity, and traceability (Van Baalen et al., 2016). These imply different ideas, across diverse groups, regarding how and why the artefact is experienced, valued, and to whom. "*Interpretive flexibility*" represents the diverse interpretive venues that an artefact can have at any stage of its design and experience (Pinch & Bijker, 1984; Monteiro, 2000). In the context of digital technology, one could think about all the different possibilities represented by mobiles in the acceleration age described so far, as envisioned by designers, researchers, managers, and tourists. However, according to SCOT, the meanings ascribed to a technological artefact are contested between groups. These try to reduce the object's interpretive flexibility and to bring it to interpretive "closure" against smaller and less powerful groups that may interpret it differently (Monteiro, 2000). Accordingly, "*closure*" represents that social groups attempt to reduce technology's design, use, and experience to specific interpretations. For instance, they try to establish whether, how, and to whom a smartphone or an app is accessible, interactive, and traceable and whether and how being "traceable" is interpreted as valuable (Van Baalen et al., 2016). Following SCOT, imperatives of attention and surveillance economy and the acceleration age (for example, to compete for likes, to surveil and profile oneself, to be facilitated, smarter, or faster) are attempts by specific groups to bring tourists' digital elasticity and metaverse journeys to closure. In CCT terms, marketplace ideologies regarding how to experience digital technologies bring closure to tourists' subjective interpretive strategies (Rokka, 2021; Arnould et al., 2021). SCOT and similar perspectives underline that the way digital technology is inscribed with values and paradigms of experience is not rational, linear, utilitarian, or pre-determined by suppliers, but is instead socio-culturally contested between differently positioned human groups (Gretzel et al., 2020; Fast et al., 2019). However, in research conducted according to SCOT, humans alone are considered actors that socially construct the experience of technology. The primary aim of SCOT research is to trace how that is done (Fast et al., 2019; Monteiro, 2020). Thus, a criticism of SCOT is that it substitutes technocratic determinism with social determinism. Technology itself is a mere effect, empty of value, as this is totalized by social groups (Fast et al., 2019; Van Baalen et al., 2016). In other words, as Winner

(1999) put it, in SCOT research “technical *things* do not matter at all” (p. 29) when investigating individual experiences of them.

In line with SCOT, according to ANT the attribution of meaning to technology, its experience and valuation are negotiated between humans (Fast et al., 2019; Walsh & Tucker, 2009). However, in ANT, technological artefacts are also entities that shape the meaning of reality, its valuation and experience, depending on how they are negotiated and embodied by individuals (Lugosi, 2016). In fact, “entities” in ANT range from social groups to individuals, technologies, but also facts, institutions, events, procedures, and ideas (Braga & Suarez, 2018), among other things. In tourism, examples are embodied performances and ideas about being a tourist and doing tourism, distance and proximity to home, spaces, technologies of transportation, information, and media (Yan & He, 2020; Van der Duim, Ren & Jóhannesson, 2017; Lugosi, 2016; Walsh & Tucker, 2009; Van der Duim, 2007). Relations between entities in ANT are constructed by the experiencer according to principles of symmetry and flat ontology. In other words, no predetermined order of meaning (scale, importance, spatial, etc.) or dualisms (such as nature/culture, global/local, physical/digital, human/non-human) can be imposed on entities, which are entirely defined by their role in a network (Latour, 1996). The only constant is that relations are always built according to negotiations between “*inscriptions*” and “*translations*”. Using the example of technology, “inscriptions” refer to patterns of use and meanings embodied in a technological artefact and reflect specific “visions” about the world that designers, innovators, influencers, and other social forces have (Monteiro, 2000; Law, 1992; Akrich, 1992). Such “visions” lead to assumptions about how an artefact should be embodied and used (Akrich, 1992). In CCT terms, these often represent marketplace ideologies (Rokka, 2021; Arnould et al., 2021), which linking to SCOT may bring the interpretation and experience of technology to closure.

However, an inscription in ANT is always "translated". "Translations" are individual and embodied reinterpretations, negotiations, and appropriations of an artefact's inscriptions according to the interpreter's networked self, contexts, needs, values, experience, and visions (Prout, 1996; Callon, 1991; Latour, 1991). The latter are excellent examples of actors within one's networked lifeworld. Accordingly, translations generate personal and contrasting uses, embodiments, and visions of the object depending on its role within a network (Cresswell, Worth & Sheikh, 2010; Monteiro, 2000). Crucially, actors are translated in a network and, at the same time, are networked assemblages of actors themselves, as hinted by the unified notion of "actor-network", all of which are translated in the network (Yan & He, 2020; Braga & Suarez, 2018; Latour, 1996). In tourism, a smartphone, a camera, the object on the screen, or a VR headset are actors networked to others in the tourism experience (for example, landscapes, imaginaries, services, landmarks, other tourists, and other technologies). At the same time, they are assemblages of networked actors such as apps, avatars, brands, haptics, cameras, and other hardware, all of which are networked to other actors. According to Van der Duim (2007), tourism experiences can be seen as complex orderings of relationships of various actor-networks entangled by complex processes of translation. Such processes create experiential tourism landscapes, or "*tourismscapes*", which often compete and collide with other touristic and local -scapes based on different translations (Yan & He, 2020). As such, ANT research within tourism always refers to tourismscapes and how they are negotiated, ordered, experienced, embodied, and made meaningful through experiential objects and actors (Lugosi, 2016).

SCOT is well-equipped to investigate the experiential implications of CCT's marketplace cultures and ideologies. It recognizes the latter as forces that reduce the subjective flexibility of valuing digital technology within the experience (Fast et al., 2019; Van Baalen et al., 2016; Monteiro, 2000). For instance, the attention economy pushes tourists to interpret and value their cameras and social media as tools for attention-seeking while experiencing a destination. However, through flat ontology, tourismscapes, and translation, ANT describes the subjective interpretive strategies in depth when dealing with markeplace cultures of digital technology (Arnould et al., 2021; Bajde, 2013). It describes in detail how identity myths are inscribed and carried by objects such as smartphones, social media, and VR technologies, but also how they are subjectively integrated through translation in consumer identity projects according to interpretive strategies. In other words, ANT recognizes that individuals in consumer societies negotiate with technology as an actor "introducing into consumers' contemporary life plots and devices thick with new meaning and action" (Kozinets, 2019, p.621).

2.3. Nature-based tourism

Nature-based tourism (NBT) is the context within which my thesis investigates digital technocultures, and an area of research to which I aim to contribute. As such, it is important to clarify the view of NBT that the thesis adopts and to situate my views on nature and the experience of nature. "Nature-based tourism" is an umbrella term for labels such as natural area tourism, nature tourism, wilderness tourism, adventure tourism, environmental tourism, wildlife tourism, geo-tourism, outdoor tourism, and ecotourism (Machnik, 2022; Fredman & Margaryan, 2021). As such, it is not easy to define in its entirety without risking being too broad. In Sweden, the definition of NBT is often narrowed down to leisure activities occurring when visiting nature areas outside a person's ordinary neighborhood (Fredman, Wall Reinus & Lundberg, 2009). Although I used this definition while working on this thesis' papers, I argue that it is a geographical definition mainly concerned with dividing NBT mobilities from more general outdoor recreation mobilities. As such, it does not entirely encompass experiences and the holistic nature of their subjective valuation (Heinonen, 2022; Helkkula et al., 2012). Within the umbrella term of NBT, definitions of NBT experiences vary depending on the natural spaces, resources (such as wildlife, landscapes), and recreational activities under examination (Machnik, 2022). Definitions of "natural" spaces, resources and "nature-based" activities are typically grounded on opposites such as natural/urban, outdoor/indoor and, most importantly, "wild"/"human", where "wild" is where the experience of nature of NBT is located (Machnik, 2022; Conti & Heldt Cassel b, 2020; Margaryan, 2017). Embedded in this approach is an understanding of nature as separate from the human world; in other words, a "non-human" world containing everything that is considered not to be a product of the human world (Grusin, 2004; Fälton, 2021).

Postmodern, social constructionist, interpretive and critical perspectives contend that such understanding is constructed arbitrarily on Western dualities between the human subject and the non-human or natural object (Descola, 2014; Castree, 2013; Mahalingam, Haritatos & Jackson, 2007; Cronon, 1995). Such dualities deeply inform NBT management, particularly in protected areas, where management is traditionally oriented towards containing and zoning human activities in relation to the pristine or wild environment (Mason, 2005). These dualities also imply that NBT is primarily about experiencing an objectified "wilderness", outside human societies and control, from a distance (Vidon et al., 2018; Cronon, 1995). Wilderness and the nature of nature in NBT are focal points of a vibrant debate, with realist, objectivist, and cognitive essentialist perspectives accusing other paradigms of denying nature's independent agency outside human interpretation. Unsurprisingly, this objection is advanced particularly by environmentalist perspectives. Paraphrasing Todorov (1999), nature as "Other" is conquered and destroyed by the claim of totalizing it ontologically through human interpretation and experience. While this is undoubtedly a solid argument, environmentalist studies rooted in non-Western perspectives argue that the similarly totalizing interpretation of nature as essentially detached from humanity facilitates the vicious cycle of possession and destruction witnessed throughout history (Randerson, 2015; Nakamura, 1992; Callicott, 1987). In other words, if nature is not "part of us", we care less about it than we care about ourselves, and it paradoxically becomes easier to say that nature is ours for the taking (Cronon, 1995). Having sustainability and empathy towards Earth's increasingly threatened ecosystems in mind, I tend to agree with the latter perspective from an ethical and personal point of view. However, following Margaryan (2017), I believe that pluralistic ontologies of nature as essential reality and human interpretation should coexist. These understandings and the dialogue between them are both valuable depending on what is being researched.

2.3.1. A market-based understanding of NBT

I maintain that research on NBT experiences departing from consumer-based perspectives is inevitably about humans and the way humans shape the experience of nature through meaning-making, valuation, and interpretation (Chen & Yang, 2022; Machnik, 2022; Fredman et al., 2012; Mossberg, 2007; Markwell, 2001). Interpretivist and constructivist approaches are well suited to understanding how we experience nature, place ourselves in relation to it, and approach it through interpretation (Rutherford, 2011; Fälton, 2021; Mason, 2005). On the other hand, similarly to research on digital technologies and experiences, I find narrow pre-determinations and objectivizations of nature proper of realist, objectivist, as well as cognitive essentialist perspectives on nature and NBT, problematic.

Market- and consumption-based perspectives define the "nature" of NBT broadly as an entity that generates value based on leisure consumption (Margaryan & Fossgard, 2021; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Gómez-Baggethun et al., 2010). For instance, Bori-Sanz and Niskanen (2002) conceptualized NBT as the economic value of leisure and recreation in natural and rural areas. Initially, these perspectives favored extractive logics proper of industrialization. Gómez-Baggethun et al. (2010) and Margaryan (2017) noted that the market value of nature as "land" was downplayed in comparison to capital (particularly in Smith and Ricardo) and labor (mainly in Marx). Since the late 1960s, however, market-based definitions of nature have changed according to disciplinary evolutions that are increasingly concerned with environmental sustainability and the provision of service experiences (Margaryan & Fossgard, 2021; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Gómez-Baggethun et al. 2010). Generally, market-based perspectives aimed to re-value nature through “a shift towards bringing back nature into the economic models and people’s minds” (Margaryan, 2017, p. 12). In ruralities, such a shift is known as “revitalization” (Bori-Sanz & Niskanen, 2002). Today, shifted market-based definitions based on re-valuing nature for consumption are common across businesses, marketers, and policymakers (Child, 2009; Bori-Sanz & Niskanen, 2002). According to Gómez-Baggethun et al. (2010), such a shift reflects changes in the capitalist commodification of nature. In service economies, market-based perspectives of nature frame aspects of nature as service units, assign value to them, and link providers and users in market exchange. Thus, market-based perspectives suggest the characterization of NBT as a value-based demand for nature from the visitor’s point of view, which corresponds to a linked interest from the suppliers’ point of view (Conti, 2021; Fredman et al., 2012; Fredman et al., 2009; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Bori-Sanz & Niskanen, 2002). Such correspondence underlines that NBT can be defined in market-based terms as a relationship of value creation between human providers and human tourists concerning an entity (nature) valued for leisure. I find such a perspective suitable to the context of my research, and I adopt it in this thesis concerning NBT. However, I acknowledge that the conceptual evolutions of the logic of value creation in experiences have been poorly implemented in most market-based perspectives of NBT. GD-logic, early SD-logic, and experience economy understandings of value are still dominant (e.g., Machnik, 2022; Margaryan & Fossgard, 2021; Gómez-Baggethun et al., 2010). Consumer-dominant market perspectives of NBT are paramount to develop (Heinonen, 2022; Zeithaml et al., 2020).

In market-based perspectives, natural resources, spaces, and activities are only a part of a multifaceted *servicescape* contributing to NBT experiences and their value (Margaryan & Fossgard, 2021; Mossberg, 2007; Fredman et al., 2012). Bitner (1992) defined servicescape as "a complex mix of environmental features around a service that influences internal responses and behaviour" (p.63). In NBT, environmental features are predominantly natural rather than built and are located on the front rather than in the background of the servicescape (Fredman et al., 2012). Moreover, human actors, which are typically dominant, have a limited degree of environmental access and control over most environmental features: as such, *access* is a dimension more relevant in NBT experiences than others (Buckley & Coghlan, 2012; Mossberg, 2007). However, NBT guides, accommodation owners, access providers, service workers at visitor centers, and DMOs maintain a critical role in shaping experiences of nature offered on NBT marketplaces (Mandic & McCool, 2022; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Mason, 2005; Markwell, 2001).

Such experiences are built around a notion of "*naturalness*", which in market-based perspectives is the "nature of nature" as a commodity phenomenologically valued, framed, and exchanged on the market in NBT (Fredman et al., 2012; Gómez-Baggethun et al., 2010). Fredman et al. (2012) defined naturalness as "customers' expectations of nature-based experiences and perceptions thereof, as well as how the natural servicescape is communicated, presented, and interpreted by both producers and consumers" (2012, p.292). Naturalness is the main focus of NBT's "soft approach" to management, which, particularly in protected areas, focuses on interpretation, staging, communication, and education about providers' naturalness (Mason, 2005). Naturalness is a central NBT phenomenon of interest in this thesis, particularly in relation to RQ2. Nevertheless, I interpret the concept in a way that more accurately reflects interpretive and consumer-dominant approaches to experiences. Accordingly, I consider naturalness to reflect both providers' and tourists' interpretation and performance of nature, other than perception (Helkkula et al., 2012). Valued and meaningful experiences, sensorialities, imaginaries, and practices of naturalness (their value-in-experience, more than perceived value) are intimately linked to both in-situ and ex-situ human hermeneutics and lifeworlds (Fälton 2021; Hellkula et al., 2012; Heinonen et al., 2010). In CD-logic terms, it is crucial to investigate how naturalness is shaped by ex-situ valuation in order to understand NBT experiences (Heinonen, 2022). In CCT terms, such ex-situ valuation links to tourists' identity projects and myths about nature and subjective negotiations with marketplace ideologies around nature (Arnould et al., 2021; Rokka, 2021; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

2.3.2. Dimensions of naturalness in NBT experiences

Access, *servicescape,* and *naturalness* compose the NBT experiencescape, which in market-based perspectives is defined as an extension of the servicescape to include aspects of the tourism experience beyond the provider's control (Sthapit et al., 2022; Machnik, 2022; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Mossberg, 2007; O'Dell, 2005). Examples are tourists' own resources, technologies, mobility, and networks. When understood in this way, the tourist's experiencescape in NBT is holistic and inclusive of various "-scapes", such as geographical landscapes, sensescapes, and cultural, imagined, symbolic, technological and ideological landscapes (Chen & Yang, 2022; Fagence, 2014; O'Dell, 2005). Consequently, naturalness within

NBT experiencescapes includes imagined, symbolic and ideological dimensions of nature (Rokka, 2021; Ulver, 2021; Vidon et al., 2018; Askegaard, 2006) and eudemonic dimensions (Cooper & Buckley (2021). These are often overlooked or outdated in current research, as studies on experiencescapes privilege perceptions, sensorial, and hedonic dimensions (Fagence, 2014).

On the tourist side, a primary experiential dimension of naturalness in NBT is the quest for authenticity and genuineness (Vidon et al., 2018; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011). Cronon (1995, p. 80) defined the socio-cultural construct of wilderness as "the ultimate landscape of authenticity". Here, the experience of authenticity is deeply linked to the duality of human/non-human: nature is valued as such due to its being assumedly free, untouched, pristine, unspoiled, and clean, which connects to aesthetic and utopian valuations of beauty (Saayman & Viljoen, 2016; Breiby, 2015; McIntosh & Wright, 2017). Such valuations imply passive sightseeing, but also more active embodiments and actions linked to enjoying and conquering "the view" through sports and activities (Machnik, 2022; Bergaust & Evjen, 2010). Authenticity and genuineness may also link to the valuation of an existential "Self in nature" (Nagle & Vidon, 2021; Vidon, 2019; Vidon et al., 2018; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Wang, 1999). Such "Self" is sought and assembled through experiences of solitude, liberation (Vidon et al., 2018), personal growth, change, and self-renewal (Arnould & Price, 1993). It is also sought in spiritual quests for the sacred, the magical, and the extraordinary, which feed – to various extents – on mythologies, religion, and rituals about the frontier (Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Heintzman, 2009; Waitt, Lane & Head, 2003). An example is Romanticism, a Western aesthetic movement that inscribes nature with sublime, awesome, and ineffable qualities. NBT marketers feed on Romanticism and reproduce it by exaggerating the wild, the unusual and the extraordinary (Margaryan & Fossgard, 2021; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Nevertheless, Romanticism is also a mythology of the frontier, where nature-based tourists seek a genuine idea of the Self. Genuineness and authenticity in nature may also be the focus of pursuits of minimalist lifestyles, harmony, reflexivity, and peace (Vidon et al., 2018; Bertella, 2016), and alternative and responsible forms of hedonism concerned with rejecting consumerist hedonism (Soper, 2009). Context-sensitive linkages among genuine naturalness, alternative hedonism, minimalist and Eastern perspectives on consumption are increasing and should be explored more in NBT (Li et al., 2021; Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Joshanloo, 2014; Harvey, 2013).

A second important dimension of naturalness is that “being in nature” is instrumental in pursuing psychological and physical states of being (Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Barić et al., 2015). This dimension is closely linked to “flow”, which means heightened focus and engagement (Csikszentmihalyi; 1990), which may be oriented towards physical achievements (Sorakunnas, 2020; Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013), as well as long-term environmental mastery (Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011). Tourists test their bodies and minds through psycho-physical activities such as canoeing, mountain biking, ski touring, and climbing (Fredman et al., 2014; Fossgard and Fredman, 2019). They may test themselves to achieve evidential material or immaterial trophies, as in fishing, hunting, and birdwatching, which may link to ethical lifestyles or extractive ideologies towards wildlife and the environment (Margaryan & Fossgard, 2021; Bertella, 2016; Cooper et al., 2015). The experience of risk while pursuing a state of being is significant in adventure tourism (Mykletun et al., 2021). Varley and Semple (2015) defined "fast adventures" as high-risk and high-thrill experiences linked to mythologies of heroism, catastrophic events, and voyeurism. In fast adventures, the tourist is driven by heroic mythologies of body and soul and strives to achieve control of an untamed environment through high-risk, sensation-seeking, and adrenaline (Varley & Semple, 2015; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011). Conversely, "slow adventures" build flow through a "fusion of mind, body and environment" (Varley & Semple, 2015, p. 84) experienced in less risky and lengthier activities where perceptions of time are slowed and relaxed states of mind are sought (Farkić, Filep & Taylor, 2020). Both slow and fast adventures can link to acquiring knowledge in connection to living and practising activities in unfamiliar places (Andersen & Rolland, 2018). Culture-specific mythologies may drive states of being. In the Nordic context, engaging in *friluftsliv*, an outdoor lifestyle common in Fennoscandia, is linked to slow adventures (Farkić et al., 2020), but also to the performance of national identity myths linked to conformism, status-seeking, ideal physical and mental strength, endurance, and self-reliance in the face of harsh nature (Margaryan & Fossgard, 2021).

From a CCT perspective, all these experiential dimensions and how they combine are expressions of meaningful ways to live sought through naturalness's symbolic and material consumption (Slater, 1996). They are ideoscapes and identity myths consumed in the context of identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and, at the same time, ideologies that consumers negotiate according to specific interpretive strategies (Waqas et al., 2022; Caldwell & Henry, 2020). From a CD perspective on experiences, their value-in-experience reflects meaning-making situated in the tourist's lifeworld other than perceptions of NBT service encounters (Heinonen, 2022; Helkkula et al., 2012).

Such dimensions of naturalness are not to be taken as opposites. For instance, research on spirituality and well-being in NBT suggests combinations between the valuation of genuineness and psycho-physical states of being (Hansen, Jones & Tocchini, 2017; Hjalager & Flagestad, 2012; Heintzman, 2009). This is particularly true in slow adventures (Farkić et al., 2020; Varley & Semple, 2015). The need for solitude and solitary escapism is linked to both dimensions, mainly when nature is phenomenologically on the opposite side of a dualism with a civilized, social, and daily human (Vidon et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2016; Barić et al., 2015; Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013). However, studies have shown that experiences of nature are also linked to the need for social bonding, socialization, and interactions (Barić et al., 2015; Sorakunnas, 2020; Margaryan & Fossgard, 2021). Socialization grounded on an identification within a specific sociocultural group or tribe may even be the main point of naturalness, where nature plays a vital role in the symbolic universe of a group (Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011). In other words, identifying oneself within a group (for example, hikers, surfers, mountaineers, glampers, photographers, or birdwatchers) may be a crucial point of pursuing states of being or selves in nature. From a CCT perspective, personal negotiations with such group memberships represent a focal aspect of how consumer identity projects are assembled and negotiated, as collectives are a source of identity myths and scripts, as well as of marketplace ideoscapes and ideologies about naturalness (Waqas et al., 2022; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Such collectives and the dynamics of relationships with them are situated in the tourists' lifeworld and impact the valuation of naturalness in NBT (Heinonen, 2022).

Most experiential dimensions of naturalness suggest the need to focus subjectively and hermeneutically on the tourist, his/her lifeworld, and dynamic relationships with consumer cultures. However, generalizations around site attributes, visitor segments, and activities are still dominant when assessing NBT tourist experiences (Mandic & McCool, 2022). This hints at the persisting dominance of specific logics of value creation in NBT consumer research, which orients RQs towards SD-logic and experience economy notions of experience design and business imperatives (Fredman, 2021; Margaryan & Fredman, 2021; Zeithaml et al., 2020; Gallarza & Saura, 2020). It also makes provider-dominant experiential dimensions of naturalness, such as aesthetics, education, and entertainment, overrepresented compared to others, such as eudemonic well-being and spirituality (Cooper & Buckley, 2021).

2.3.3. Digital technology and nature-based tourism

As human cultures change, human relationship with nature is also changing (McCool et al., 2013; Spenceley et al., 2021). There is growing recognition that advancements in digitalization experienced during the acceleration age, particularly mobile Internet connectivity, have impacted NBT experiences on several levels (Sthapit et al., 2022). In the first half of the 2000s, some studies had already hinted at a thematic change from 'purist' escapism in natural areas, concerned with remoteness and isolation from any human facilitation, towards escapism mediated by digital technology to achieve specific experiential goals (Fredman et al., 2012). Nature-based tourists use an increasing number of digital technologies as experience facilitators in interpreting, planning, guiding, accessing remote areas, or achieving hedonic relaxation (Mandic & McCool, 2022; Fennell, 2021; Phan & Schott, 2019; Elmahdy et al., 2017; Tan, 2017). However, due to their swift advances, the potentials that digital technologies represent, as well as the impacts they have on NBT experiencescapes, remain under-researched (Machnik, 2022; Fredman & Margaryan, 2021).

Ubiquitous digital technologies create lifestyles, such as digital nomadism, that are based on travelling while working remotely, particularly influenced by social media (Woldoff & Litchfield, 2021). Social media in the context of NBT experiences are the focus of Papers 1 and 2 of this thesis. Technocultures of social media such as Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube create and diffuse identity myths and scripts around digital nomadism and nature, linking digital nomadism to frontier mythologies of camping, glamping and "life on the road"; for example, "van life" (Gretzel & Hardy, 2019). Social media also build instantly accessible e-tribes where "selves-in-nature" network together ubiquitously and where symbolic universes and identity myths around nature, such as frontier mythologies and simulacra of wilderness, are shared, changed, or co-constructed (Vidon et al., 2018; Kozinets, 1999). Today, live sharing of selfies, blogs, social media posts, and portraits is common in NBT (Sthapit et al., 2022; Clark & Nyaupane, 2022). As is the case for other tourism experiences, these practices transform solitary NBT experiences (for example, solo adventures or independent travelers) into collective experiences where tourists can signal virtue, membership and be gazed at, discussed and endorsed by valued e-tribes (Cardell & Douglas, 2018; Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2015). According to Mykletun et al. (2021), this is particularly impactful for adventure tourism experiences, as less experienced adventurers increasingly undertake activities with a higher risk threshold. Changes in the experience and valuation of risk are significantly impacted by digital technocultures on social media, mainly due to the latter's link to FOMO. Holm et al. (2017) associate tourists' increased tendency to take risks with fear of missing an experience due to pressure from other travelers. Additionally, FOMO increasingly pushes NBT tourists to prove that their experience is the best possible, where "best" is defined as what generates the most valued responses within their digital networks (Holm et al., 2017; Hay, 2013).

A growing amount of attention is being given to the association between NBT and experiences of disconnection from mobile phones, which is the focus of Paper 3. Rural, natural, and remote areas are sometimes described as areas where disconnection from the Internet is enforced and stressful (Egger et al., 2020; Tan, 2017; Dickinson et al., 2016; Gretzel, 2010). On the other hand, recent studies also show that voluntary disconnection in nature is a way for tourists to escape e-lienation (Tribe & Mkono, 2017). Notably, it allows people to avoid unwanted intrusions and pressures from work and home-based peers (Dickinson et al., 2016; Li et al., 2018) while specularly helping to immerse in NBT spaces and relationships (Pearce & Gretzel, 2012). Voluntary disconnection also helps NBT tourists experience the authenticity and genuineness of the outdoors (Tribe & Mkono, 2017; Elmahdy et al., 2017). Pearce and Gretzel (2012) suggest that the experience of disconnection should include positive experiential valuations and negative experiences of enforcement, lack, and stress. Li et al. (2018) defined "Digital-free tourism" (DFT) as tourism where limited or non-existent technological access is positively valued. In NBT, DFT builds experiential and symbolic connections between remoteness, rurality, wilderness and "taking a break" from technology, "reconnecting", mindfulness, wellness, and authenticity (Egger et al., 2020). As such, one could argue that disconnection is itself a digital technoculture (Kozinets, 2019). There is currently a rise in "digital-detox" holidays based on leaving technological equipment behind and engaging in disconnected outdoor activities such as oxygenating nature walks, morning yoga classes and bird-watching sessions, forest bathing and nature therapy (Fuggle, 2015; Hansen et al., 2017; Tribe & Mkono, 2017). JOMO, the "joy of missing out", is emerging as a technoculture in response to FOMO that involves taking a break in nature from a daily environment saturated with Internet-based pressures and ideologies of attention, exhibitionism, rapidity, and surveillance (Conti, 2022b; Aranda & Baig, 2018). DFT in nature facilitates JOMO's valued quest of freedom not to participate in experiences shaped by marketplace ideologies and social pressures, such as the pressure to seek the best experience to share or to compare oneself to others (Conti, 2022b; Aitamurto et al., 2021; Crook, 2014). Given this, Gretzel claimed that the expansion of digitalization infrastructure to remote areas demanded by tourists "seeking out the unknown while being backed by mobile phones" (2010, p. 21) could jeopardize the DFT in nature sought by tourists who view mobiles "as a barrier to experiencing the natural environment" (Dickinson et al., 2016, p.195).

Remote and rural areas will be increasingly impacted by data mining technologies oriented towards demand and segmentation; the Internet of Things, oriented towards surveillance, profiling, and tracking; and AR and VR, which expand the real-world experience into virtual worlds (Roblek et al., 2021). VR is the focus of Paper 4 of this thesis and has already been introduced conceptually. In the context of NBT, although VR and metaverse studies are almost non-existent, literature analyzing experiences of nature-based VEs has increased since the late 2010s. As such, it stands to reason that studies contextualizing experiences of nature-based VEs in NBT experiencescapes will emerge shortly, depending on NBT's current and future exposure to innovation. It appears clear that sprawling urbanization, sustainability, health, economic, and safety concerns will make more and more people unable or unwilling to enact physical mobilities in natural and outdoor areas in the future (Talwar et al., 2022; Spangenberger, Geiger & Freytag, 2022). Given this, VR tourism could aid NBT in crowd management across seasonality, particularly in hotspots that are sensitive to visitation due to environmental concerns, and in providing a surrogate way of NBT for visitors experiencing barriers in accessing nature or who wish to minimize their ecological footprint (Fennell, 2021). Research suggests that Nature VR is an effective substitute for physical exposure to nature when the latter is impossible (Browning et al., 2020). Studies in environmental psychology, behavioral and cognitive neurosciences suggest that experiences of nature in VR contribute to stress relief (Annerstedt et al., 2013; Valtchanov, 2010), mood (Spano et al., 2022), and elicit feelings of peace (Scates et al., 2020) and awe (Chirico et al., 2017). Overall, research agrees that nature in VR has high restorative power (Reese, Stahlberg & Menzel, 2022; Li, Zhang, et al., 2021; Annerstedt et al., 2013), but several topics have received less attention, particularly nature connectedness (Spano et al., 2022). This is a vital topic to develop in VR research in NBT, considering the promising results of Spangenberger et al. (2022) and Markowitz et al. (2018), who claimed VR enhances connectivity and relatedness to nature, as well as cognitive and affective associations and knowledge retention about climate change. Effects on the experiencer's well-being seem to be greater for interactive and computer-generated VEs, such as through photogrammetry or 3D models (Li, Zhang, et al., 2021). This seems to promote the updating of studies conducted using outdated VEs and VR suites, as in most VR tourism research. Liu et al.'s (2022) study also showed promising results when using up-to-date VR suites, VEs, and highly intuitive haptics in terms of self-empowerment and self-transcendence – the latter is linked to empathy, gratitude, appreciation, inspiration, admiration, elevation, and love.

3. Materials and methods

This section outlines the materials and methods considered in this research and provides an overview of the research paradigm that provides the ontological and epistemological foundations of the research methods. Ontological and epistemological considerations of the philosophy of science are presented first, as they are common across all papers. The different methodologies are elaborated on afterwards.

3.1. Philosophy of science: Interpretivism

As described previously, my research follows research venues identified by CD logic, CCT and VALEX (Heinonen, 2022; Arnould et al., 2021; Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Helkkula et al., 2012), research on technocultures (Kozinets, 2019; 2022), and perspectives critical towards positivism, essentialism, and reductionism in human/technology relations (Pourfakhimi et al., 2019; Munar et al., 2013; Goldkuhl, 2012; Kelleher & Peppard, 2011). Such studies call for more interpretive contributions on the matter of digitalization and its relation to human experiences. My research answers such a call in the context of NBT experiences, and in this section, I will elaborate on how and why I position my research within interpretivism. I follow Guba (1990) in defining a paradigm as a set of basic subjective beliefs that guides our judgements during the research enquiry. Such sets of beliefs are composed of ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Guba, 1990). Defining ontology and epistemology is mandatory in defining one's methodologies, which, departing from notions of reality and knowledge, are concerned with how the enquirer should find knowledge about reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Guba, 1990).

3.1.1. Distance from positivism and objectivism

The first important milestone in positioning my research's ontology and epistemology across my PhD has always been its distance from positivism and objectivism. According to Guba (1990), both positivism and post-positivism are driven by objectivist ontologies and epistemologies; that is, by the belief that the object of research is an objective and essentialist truth, which can be known by neutralizing or reducing subjectivity, both of the enquirer and the inquired, as much as possible, as this interferes with the "real" truth. As introduced earlier, such perspectives on technology have been criticized in tourism and other fields due to their reductionist conception of human relationships to digitalization. Accordingly, users' relationships to technology are generalized, decontextualized, and essentialized, and users supposedly respond uniformly and rationally to a technological design crafted a priori (Fast et al., 2019; Munar et al., 2013). Such perspectives concur in shaping a technological determinism according to which technology follows a reductionist, undisputed, and unconflicted logic of "progress" that self-determines technology's interpretation, uses, affordances, and acceptance (Monteiro, 2000). Such logic assigns a semiotic neutrality to technological objects, with little attention given to subjective experiential meanings and embodiments attached to them (Lugosi, 2016; Walsh & Tucker, 2009). Similar considerations have been made on the shortcomings of these perspectives regarding experiences and experience value, against which interpretive perspectives build a diverse and complementary research agenda. These perspectives join a constellation of earlier non-positivist frameworks in problematizing human experiences and human–technology interactions with a focus on subjective meaning, appropriation, sociality, and identity (Munar et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, I do not entirely exclude the contribution of different perspectives on my research topic. In tourism, Paraskevaidis and Andriotis (2015) argued that where the paradigm is understood as "the fundamental image of the science's subject matter" (p. 2), paradigms are not to be taken as totally exclusive. The authors distanced themselves from Kuhn (1996), who claimed that paradigms evolve in such a way that a scientific "revolution" brings to the rise of a new paradigm that is normally incompatible or incommensurable with the previous paradigm. They contended that a Khunian approach to paradigms would make Marxist and Smithian paradigms of value incompatible with postmodern semiotic paradigms and that further conceptualizations would be incompatible with such paradigms. Paraskevaidis and Andriotis demonstrated otherwise by offering a rich account on value using Marxian and Baudrillardian paradigms together. Positivist and objectivist paradigms of value, which can be seen behind research on labor, utilitarian and cost/sacrifice dimensions, co-exist with meaning-based and semiotic dimensions in most of the experience value frameworks. Tourism and destinations' landscapes of services, tangibles, resources, experiences, and values are constellations of entities of different nature (Mossberg, 2007) and imply the use of different ontologies and epistemologies. I side with Tribe (2006), McFee (2007) and Bryman (2008) in arguing that, in tourism and social sciences, different paradigms should co-exist in a pluralistic environment and that understandings of a multifaceted phenomenon should not exclude competing and complementary perspectives. While acknowledging a pluralistic environment, I also find it important to acknowledge certain milestones of my specific paradigmatic stance regarding the phenomenon under study, which inevitably depends on my PhD work as well as my earlier background. These will be elaborated on below.

3.1.2. Interpretivist ontology and epistemology

Unlike positivism and post-positivism, interpretivist ontology does not claim to study an objective reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Kroeze, 2012). Interpretivism was among the first paradigms to contend that the ontological nature of the reality studied by social sciences is the one of a subjective and inter-subjective construct (Flick, 2009; Bryman, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Thus multiple realities exist, based on each observer's point of view on the meaning of their reality. Silverman (1970) distinguished social sciences as sciences concerned with meanings because, whereas in natural sciences meaning is imposed (by scientists) on a "natural" matter considered meaningless per se, social scientists investigate a reality that is *already* full of meanings, and whose study necessarily involves a hermeneutic effort to interpret those meanings. The "reality" of experiences under study in this research is the one of a construct reflecting a meaning-making process intimately linked to culture, such as in terms of sensoriality, identity, and embodiments (Helkkula et al., 2012; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). I use a Geertzian and interpretive definition of culture, which is also foundational to CCT and technoculture (Kozinets, 2019; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Geertz distanced culture from structuralist anthropology, due to the latter's view that societies and cultures *naturally* emerge from an objective "real world" and are ontologically depicted as such: "natural" objects (Geertz et al, 2008). Conversely, Geertz defined culture ontologically as "texts" that are socially and individually performed according to multiple interpretations. Thus, the study of culture is concerned "fundamentally about getting some idea of how people conceptualize, understand their world, what they are doing, how they are going about doing it, to get an idea of their world" (2008, p. 17). Different texts, and their readings, necessarily coexist together and, as a researcher, "you don't have to choose between them; you can't really unify them" (2008, p. 18). Thus, according to Geertz, research on culture is not an experimental science in search of law, but, rather, an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz, 1973). Therefore, generalization or prediction are not considered in this research tradition (Willig & Billin, 2011).

Interpretivist ontology links to the epistemological need to be open about the hermeneutic effort that researchers have made to understand reality (Willig, 2014; Gummesson, 2003). The epistemological claim of positivism and other objectivist approaches is that it is not only possible but desirable to acquire knowledge with no interferences, as eliminating interference allows the phenomenon to be reduced to its final and "true" objectivity (Bates, 2019; Guba, 1990). Geertz showed objective epistemologies as misleading in any attempt to study cultures, because in order to access and describe cultures as "texts" full of meanings, the researcher needs to acknowledge that he/she is there, interpreting them (Geertz, Panourgiá & Kavouras, 2008). "Being there" means participating, particularly by talking, listening, moving around the research context, and acknowledging that these are the ways that interpretation takes form. Being there inevitably leads to subjective interpretations, but an "objective", reductionist, essential and generalizable interpretation is not the goal of an interpretive epistemology. To again quote Geertz et al. (2008, p.18): "there is no sense that we are all going to finally zero in on one final interpretation on something like 'Javanese society' or 'Moroccan society'. That just isn't going to happen – not in this tradition anyway".

Interpretive ontological and epistemological milestones are acknowledged extensively in offline qualitative methodologies, particularly in naturalistic interview methods and fieldwork (Goldkhul, 2012). However, particularly in tourism, they need to be acknowledged more in research made online, as they characterize the Internet as an entity and its methods of study. According to Kozinets (2015), online research has been disproportionately prone to incorporating quantitative analysis and collection techniques. This is demonstrated by the popularity of Big Data, blockchain, and Smart Tourism studies that implement the online world as a source of massive amounts of customer-based data (Costello, McDermott & Wallace, 2017; Kozinets, 2015). Online methods are praised for the "smart" capacity of undertaking unobtrusive, supposedly unbiased, and quantity-oriented data collection (Bartl et al., 2016). This is particularly true in tourism (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). As noted by Morais, Santos and Gonçalves (2020, p. 443), extant online research underlies "the tendency to reduce humanity to numbers, decontextualizing its constituent elements and descriptors". This is in line with positivist epistemologies that are interested in dispassionately knowing about essential objects while neutralizing subjectivity. However, such approaches apply poorly to research interested in how technology changes human experience in a way that links to culture, identity, ritual, imagery, symbolism, roles, values, myths, and especially meanings (Kozinets, Scaraboto & Parmentier, 2018; Munar et al., 2013). Building on Geertz, Kozinets (2015) conceptualized netnography as an interpretive online method precisely to address such typologies of online research. Netnography follows an interpretive and Geertzian approach to technology (Kozinets, 2022; 2019), as will be explained further below.

3.1.3. Relationship to constructivism

Due to common agendas in relation to extant knowledge based on refusals of objectivism and positivism, diverse non-positivist/post-positivist paradigms merge in tourism and social research in more aspects than what distinguishes them (Kroeze, 2012; Goldkhul, 2012; Hollinshead, 2006). Interpretivism is particularly related to constructivism and social constructionism and it is almost impossible to concretely separate them in social sciences (Bryman, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Young and Collin (2004) underlined that, in psychology, "constructivism" should be distinguished from "social constructionism", in that classic constructivism underlies positivist epistemology and ontology, and is more focused on subjective cognition and less on inter-contextuality and intersubjectivity. Conversely, social constructivism (or constructionism) is anti-objectivist and does not see individuals as isolated in building a sense of reality (Bates, 2019). In social sciences, Bryman (2008) recognized that the terms *constructionism*, *social constructionism*, and *constructivism* are used interchangeably. My understanding of *constructivism* is delineated below based on Bates (2019), Willig and Billin (2011), Charmaz (2000), Guba (1990), and Denzin and Lincoln (1998), and should be considered akin to “social construction” or “constructionism” as in Bryman (2008).

Both interpretivism and constructivism “share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 221). Ontologically, both paradigms view reality as a human construction, which can then be epistemologically understood only through subjective interpretations (Guba, 1990). The attention to the subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and inter-contextuality of the phenomenon is paramount in both paradigms (Willig & Billin, 2011; Goldkhul, 2012). Subjectivity can never be neutralized in constructivist inquiries, as one’s ontology is always dependent on one’s epistemology, to the point that “inquirer and inquired are fused into a single (monistic) entity” (Guba, 1990, p. 27). This non-dualistic approach is very closely linked to the Geertzian impossibility of extracting the knower from the known when describing cultural phenomena (Geertz et al., 2018). As in Geertz’s interpretivism, “zeroing in” on a single final and generalizable interpretation about the phenomenon is nonsensical in constructivism, as there are no foundational ways to elect a decontextualized interpretation as “the one” (Guba, 1990). Methodologically, both paradigms stress hermeneutic and dialectic techniques based on collecting rich, in-depth data characterized by ambivalences and contradictions, and necessarily aimed at thickness and sophistication, other than objectivist simplification and harmonization. This is because thickness and ambivalence provide a truly naturalistic account of lived experiences (Moisander et al., 2020). It is sometimes recognized that what distinguishes interpretivism and constructivism is the purposes and aims of the enquiry (Hollinshead, 2006; Denzin &

Lincoln, 1998). Interpretivism is a paradigm that is mainly concerned with rejecting the application of positivist ontologies to phenomena studied by social sciences, and with proposing different lines of enquiry. Conversely, constructivism is particularly concerned with *deconstructing* positivist and objectivist realms of knowledge (particularly natural sciences) as non-neutral discourses and is more prone to engage in extra-academic criticisms towards the status quo found on the field (Gorski, 2013). Interpretivism's roots in Weber and Schultz's moral agnosticism towards the phenomenon mean that interpretive enquirers are not so driven by challenging the status quo of their fieldwork (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). However, I side with Goldkuhl (2012) in contending that such a depiction is unfair to several interpretive researchers. In fact, emphatic understandings of individual lived experiences differ from master narratives about the phenomenon with implications stemming out of academia (Willig, 2017). I believe this has been made clear across my theoretical framework when delineating interpretive agendas having clear critical and managerial other than academic implications (Zeithaml et al., 2020; Kelleher & Peppard, 2011; Helkkula et al., 2012). Within tourism research, I side with Hollinshead (2006) in considering the divide between interpretivism and constructivism to be too "soft" to make clear-cut distinctions. On the other hand, within broader consumer studies, Zeithaml et al. (2020) helped to position interpretivism in relation to constructivism. According to the authors, constructivist research agendas are more concerned with understanding how systems and social contexts are shaped through value-creation processes, whereas interpretivists focus on the phenomenological process of valuation itself, particularly how consumers value experiences.

In this thesis, I do not aim to deconstruct natural sciences. I do argue about the shortcomings of positivist and objectivist understandings of my phenomena of interest. I also "situate" and de-neutralize paradigmatic views on technology, value, and logic of production often based on positivist reductionism, but that is a point of departure to approach the field, rather than my main research concern. My main concern is to offer an in-depth account of sense-making starting from a customer-based understanding of how tourists value experiences (Zeithaml et al., 2020; Helkkula et al., 2012).

3.2. Positionality

Positionality reflects the researcher's position within a given research context (Holmes, 2020), how such position reflects power structures that may privilege specific voices over others (Moser, 2008), and the consequences in terms of knowledge production (Bakas, 2017). Detailing one's positionality is integral to interpretivism, once one acknowledges the interpretivist focus on de-neutralizing the researcher's persona and authority, rather than mere presence, when "textualizing" interpretations (Moser, 2008; Choi, 2006). Positionality influences the relationship to the phenomenon, the research participants, and the research process, possibly building biases towards them (Holmes, 2020; Choi, 2006). Positionality also helps clarify whether and how the researcher is an insider or an outsider of specific groups, statuses, collectives, and cultures under investigation (Merton, 1972). This influences the outcomes of the researcher's interpretation (Cloke et al. 2000; England, 1994). For instance, insiders arguably have easier access to the phenomenon, can ask more in-depth and meaningful questions, and may secure better, more in-depth, and authentic answers (Holmes, 2020). On the other hand, they may be biased, too close to specific members, or too bound by custom to show healthy skepticism when needed (Cloke et al. 2000). When informed by interpretive ontologies and epistemologies, netnography considers positionality a resource to help contextualize the research insights and relate them to the author-interpreter (Kozinets, 2022).

Thus, positionality helps in addressing quality in qualitative and interpretive research (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002), albeit with certain limits. In my opinion, a major issue in positionality is that it often and implicitly relies on Western, reductionist paradigms that essentialize the Self and equate the Self to Consciousness (Dmikov, 2020; Hood, 2012). In other words, I am always a specific Self, and supposedly conscious about who I am when positioning myself. In fact, conscious, and textual accounts of oneself always miss aspects that are unknown, hidden or distorted, or perceived by participants but not by the researcher (Holmes, 2020). Moreover, evidence in evolutionary psychology and neurosciences converge with Eastern perspectives in arguing that the conventional idea that the Self is an objective, unitary, constant, and coherently defined "object" is false (Dmikov, 2020; Harris, 2014; Hood, 2012). Conversely, "the Self" is an immaterial, experiential, and fluid construct that helps make sense of things in consciousness, and is therefore conceptually close to Identity (Harris, 2014; Hood, 2012). However, as explained across this kappa, I consider Identity to be a fragmented, incoherent, and context-dependent project work, rather than an essential object that can be allocated, or "positioned" inside or outside permanent and generalizable categories. As such, I agree with Holmes' advice against taking aspects of positionality artificially "fixed" textually as deterministic of specific research, or worldviews, not least because real positionality is never "fixed" in time as its textual representation may suggests (2020). Similarly, I agree with Herod (1999) and Bakas (2017) that Insider/Outsider dichotomies are not as sharp as they seem. Researchers and participants' unique, evolving, context-sensitive, and not necessarily coherent patchwork of identarian dimensions mean that they may be insiders and outsiders to each other in a different capacity at the same time (Kusow, 2003; Mohammad, 2001). Researchers perform different Selves according to different situations, sometimes subtly, and so do participants, to the point that supposed outsider–insider dialogues become insider–insider, or insider–outsider (Herod, 1999). This aspect is even magnified on social media and the Internet when these are seen as unfixed heterotopias where both researchers and participants interact as ambiguous digital subjectivities (Belk, 2016; de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2012; Rokka & Canniford, 2016). When I speak to an avatar online, whom am I talking to really, from a positionality point of view? Whom is my participant talking to? Furthermore, where exactly is our conversation located? Can it be located at all?

3.2.1. Reflexivity

In offline and online research, positionality is primed by an open and disclosed reflexivity on one's idea of Self and its contextualization in a cultural, political, and social context (Bakas, 2017; Bryman, 2016; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). A good reflexivity statement includes paradigmatic view and theoretical beliefs; the individual's background, values, gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity, as well as how these may influence the researcher's position as insider or outsider in relation to the participants; and, finally, a research-project context (Kozinets, 2022; Holmes, 2020). Mkono (2016) added the importance of reflecting on the author's ongoing relation to tourism; for example, in terms of tourism experiences or work within the tourism industry.

I am a millennial, heterosexual, cis-gendered male. I grew up in a European middle-class household, as defined by Hugrée, Penissat and Spire (2020), in one of the most touristic seaside districts of the resort town of Rimini, on the Italian North-Eastern coast. The "city resort" model of Rimini has been studied by Battilani and Farri (2008) and Conti and Perelli (2004) among others. Accordingly, Rimini developed tourism in a way that focused on family-run small companies and microfirms and built cohesion between different social groups. These aspects positively influenced my relationship with tourism in my teenage years and early twenties. My local network and I worked as service workers during the peak season and came into contact with national and international tourists, who usually came to attend events, visit recreational parks, discotheques, and experience "sun, sea, and sand" tourism. Due to Rimini's geography of tourism, almost all tourism spaces are shared with locals. However, growing up during the "crisis and stagnation" and "reduced growth" phases of Rimini's tourism system (Conti & Perelli, 2004), I personally experienced the lack of, or resistance to innovation in Rimini's tourism landscapes, despite what I and other locals perceived as enormous opportunities in terms of cultural, heritage tourism and NBT. I also experienced first-hand problems normally associated with high seasonal mass tourism destinations, such as seasonal employment, and low job formation (Cooper, 2016). Such experiences influenced me towards orienting my study and work experiences in tourism abroad. Overall, my life experiences oriented me to perceive tourism positively, but also to be aware of the need for tourism to adopt innovative thinking.

Being Italian and Southern European, my "whiteness" is context-sensitive and contested in relation to Anglo-Saxon whiteness (Guglielmo & Salerno, 2012). I was allocated such "whiteness" differently than others more than once. However, I am not aware of any context where my nationality (stated openly throughout my research methods) negatively influenced my relationship with my participants. If anything, knowing where I was from put some of the participants in Papers 1, 3, and 4 at ease during the preliminary stages of the interviews, as we could connect my city or my country of origin to their heritage or travel experiences. On the other hand, my positionality within a Western middle class with a high familiarity with digitalization makes me privileged in comparison to the other side of the digital divide, where, for a variety of people the Internet may not be accessible to the same extent. In tourism, the digital divide is not just a matter of a technocratic dualism between access/non-access to information (Herdin & Egger, 2018). Inequalities that are implicit in the digital divide have clear socio-cultural implications in terms of how digitalization is integrated within people's phenomenology of tourism, destinations, and the world (Frenzel & Frish, 2020; Minghetti & Buhalis, 2010). Despite several identarian traits of the participants of Papers 1 and 2, and the reviewers of Paper 4 being unknown, their online traces suggest high accessibility and familiarity with digitalization, which may be precluded to others that my research does not assess. Moreover, tourism, especially international tourism, is a highly privileged form of consumption. Some researchers have argued that, despite the attention to sustainable management, access to NBT is also becoming increasingly privileged and unequal (van den Born et al., 2018). Thus, I am aware that when drawing theoretically and empirically informed inferences on experiences I do so within a highly privileged context.

Finally, according to Holmes (2020), a researcher's reflexivity should also reflect changes experienced across the research. This is a point particularly important for netnography. The Internet has been experiencing paradigmatic changes, which influence its conception, how we situate ourselves in it, and how we approach it (Kozinets, 2022). Roy et al. (2015) provided an example of netnographic positionality that considers the researcher's personal motivation in doing research, and when and how netnography is implemented. I selected netnography in Papers 1 and 2 based on the idea of mobile technology and social media as something that expands, enables, and enriches experiences, following the techno-optimism common within acceleration perspectives (Xiang, 2018; Neuhofer et al., 2012). This is certainly linked to how ideologies around the Internet evolved within my lifeworld and my own use of social media during my travel experiences. However, while working on those papers, and later in the context of Paper 3, my understanding became more nuanced, as I was concurrently exposed to literature on disconnection and on emerging studies that problematized the relationships among ICTs, society, and tourism experiences. Exposure to theory and reflections on findings from the first three papers critically influenced my approach to immersive netnography in Paper 4, where I explored the metaverse with higher skepticism, at a moment when the literature on VR tourism seemed to replicate early optimistic perspectives on digitalization.

3.2.2. Research project context

The research project rationale is a very important aspect of the researcher's positionality, as it contributes to virtually every aspect of positionality itself (Holmes, 2020; Mkono, 2016; Roy et al., 2015; Moser, 2008). The framework that contextualizes Papers 1, 2 and 3, as well as the first three years of my PhD, is the Interreg project Ingoskog. Ingoskog's main aim was "*to increase research, development and innovation capacity among companies, cluster organisations, universities, non-Governmental Organisations and civil society in Inner Scandinavia*" (https://ingoskog.org/in-english/). This was done by focusing on forests as a composite resource for green transition and sustainable development. The project comprised eight major partners between Dalarna and Värmland Counties in Sweden and Hedmark County in Norway, and included universities (such as Dalarna University, Karlstad University, and Høgskolen i Innlandet), public bodies (such as Länsstyrelsen Värmland), and business associations (such as Trysilvassdragets Skogseierlag).

Our research unit within Ingoskog, which I joined in the fall of 2017, explored the possibility of seeing the natural landscape of Inner Scandinavia as an economic resource for the development of NBT experiences. Therefore, one of the main goals was to investigate what are NBT experiences in Inner Scandinavia's natural landscapes. My market-based understanding of NBT, as described in the theoretical framework, was developed within Ingoskog's goals. The goals were established during a meeting between the project partners in Trysil, in November 2017, during which the representatives of Trysilvassdragets Skogseierlag expressed interest in knowing more about experience design and development in the forests around Trysil, including the development of digitalization based on adding value for the tourist. I initially departed from provider-oriented issues of experience *design,* which I had also used during my MA in Tourism at Aalborg University. I then incrementally moved my understanding of the concepts of experience and experience value from GD to CD, CCT, and VALEX understandings of such concepts, based on results from Papers 1 and 2 and other publications, and on new knowledge.

3.3. Methodology: netnography

Papers 1 and 2 use netnography as a methodological framework. Conceptualized in the late 1990s, netnography has been constantly evolving following the mutations experienced in digitalization over the last 25 years (Kozinets, 2022). Papers 1 and 2 adopt Kozinets' definition of netnography as a "qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study the cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications" (Kozinets 2002, p.62). Netnography is one of the most suitable methodologies for studies that relate to "obtaining cultural understandings of human experiences from online social interaction and/or content" (Kozinets 2015, p. 17). As noted by Heinonen and Medberg (2018), the evolving online environments offer several opportunities for researchers who interested in understanding consumption experiences, not least because experiences come to be increasingly mediated online. Netnography is also relevant today when investigating highly intangible, idealized, and personal values from an interpretive perspective (Kozinets, 2022; Rokka, 2010). In this context, netnography can obtain knowledge of digitalization that is otherwise difficult to capture by using reductionist and objectivist methods (Costello et al., 2017). Netnography works with three main types of online data: archive data, elicited data, and fieldnotes (Kozinets, Dolbec & Earley, 2014). Archive data is spontaneously generated by online users with no involvement of the researcher (Venturini et al., 2018). Netnography's main archive data are so-called "online traces", or "digital traces", which are left by users online in various forms and accessible to others (Kozinets, 2022; 2020; Airoldi, 2021). Traces can be anything from pictures, videos, blog posts, comments, and reviews (Kozinets, 2022). Elicited data, as the term suggests, is produced by the researcher's involvement in the community (Morais et al., 2020; Kozinets et al., 2014). Finally, fieldnotes are the netnographer's field notes that are taken while immersing in the online community, which can be more or less reflexive (Mkono, Ruhanen & Markwell, 2015).

Differently from ethnographers, netnographers can choose the role they will assume in relation to the field, and this affects what type of data is collected and how. Normally, four possible roles are identified: *observers* and *lurkers*, who perform an active role in an online community, and *participants* and *spies*, who do not (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2012). *Observers* reveal themselves as researchers to an online community of interest, and normally ask permission to "observe" conversations without taking an active part in them. *Lurkers* adopt a passive role too, but without even revealing themselves to the community. At the other end of the spectrum, *participants* reveal themselves as researchers to the community of interest and take some form of an active part in it, while *spies* take an active part in the community without revealing themselves as researchers. *Observers* and *lurkers* will privilege archive data and fieldnotes, whereas *spies* and *participants* can also count on elicited data.

Netnography has been introduced as a method rooted in interpretivism and should therefore privilege active research roles (Kozinets, 2015; De Valck, Van Bruggen & Wierenga, 2009). Interpretive epistemology asks netnographers to dispute, expand, or confirm initial interpretations that are made solely based on the observation of online traces, which would be impossible by implementing only passive observations (Kozinets, 2002). However, the majority of netnography work in tourism and consumer research has implemented passive and reductionist roles (particularly as *lurkers*), which means the full implementation of interpretivism throughout relational and participatory research designs is lacking (Lugosi & Quinton, 2018; Costello et al., 2017). In relation to the complex and subjective hyper-modality of social media such as Instagram, such approaches risk leading to oversimplistic data accounts, which is counterproductive, particularly for qualitative enquiries (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). On the other hand, metaverses, Instagram, and other social media enable researchers to increasingly ask questions centered on "what they mean, what we are doing with them, and what we do with them as a civilization" (Kozinets 2015, p. 17), which encourage proactive conversations with users and creators (Pink 2006). As remarked by Salmons (2014), researchers who want to understand the complex significance that humans place on experiences shared online by "interpreting and reinterpreting meaning through lenses of memory and identity, culture, and prior experiences" (2014, p.1) need a netnography that implies a tailored mix of disclosure, participation, reflexivity, and relationality (Costello et al., 2017; Lugosi & Quinton, 2018). This is the case with Papers 1 and 2, where I, as a netnographer, assume a *participant* role.

Kozinets established guidelines for how to implement netnography, which took the form of more than 12 steps (2015; 2002). These steps are used by researchers in various ways (Rageh & Melewar, 2013; Rokka, 2010), and are summarized here in seven steps:

1) The identification, through careful planning, of a suitable online community for the research intent and the subsequent entrée (entrance) in the former
2) The consequent collection and analysis of data through in-depth observation and a varying degree of active/passive participation
3) The compliance with ethical standards
4) The provision of room for feedback coming from the chosen community members
5) The pursuit of trustworthiness of data interpretation
6) The compilation of a research representation

Costello et al. (2017) noted how most of the researchers modified, re-adapted or even ignored Kozinets' original steps. I personally attempted to follow all the steps in Papers 1 and 2 in a rigorous way. I will elaborate separately on entrée (Step 1) and data collection and analysis (covering Steps 2, 4, and 5) below. Ethics (Step 3, also linked to Step 5) is discussed comprehensively later and includes considerations related to Paper 4.

The research representation takes the form of Papers 1 and 2 of this thesis, as well as Chapter 4 in this kappa. According to Kozinets (2015), the research representation reflects the style of writing, which again is informed both by the researcher´s paradigm and aims. These led to the positioning my research accounts within the realm of *symbolic netnographies*. According to Kozinets (2015), these accounts compose the backbone of netnographic research representations and normally aim to “seek out and find interesting sites, cultures, groups and people and translate their meaning systems as values, practices and online social rituals” (p. 246) by means of an ethnographic thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the online field.

Despite the clear-cut steps listed above, Bruckman (2006) considered online research to be challenging even for an experienced researcher. A challenging aspect of netnography is that every aspect of this field is continually changing at a pace that is difficult for the literature to keep up with. Kozinets (2015) underlined this point by noting how outdated the first edition of his foundational book “Netnography” – written in 2009 and published in 2010 – was when he had thought the participation of a potential 1 billion people in online communities in the future was an overstatement. Nowadays an estimated 4.6 billion people worldwide use social media, a number that is projected to increase to 6 billion by 2027 (Statista, 2022). Existing methodological literature on Instagram was scant when I worked on Papers 1 and 2. According to Lexhagen and Conti (2022), Paper 1 was the first tourism paper to introduce the term “Instagramming”. Established guidelines can only help to a limited extent and many have argued against being afraid of using innovation and creative thinking in the way social media and the Internet are approached for research (Salmons 2014, Pink 2006).

3.3.1. Entreé on Instagram

The entrée – defined by Kozinets as “the most sacred and important” part of both ethnography and netnography (2015, p. 67) – represents the moment of connection with the community of reference that leads to data collection. Across all the steps mentioned by Kozinets, the entrée is the one that is most consistently maintained (Costello et al., 2017). It is preceded by the identification, made in the research planning, of a suitable online community to answer the RQs.

On Instagram, the act of logging/signing in can be considered as the first step in the netnographic entrée, as such an act makes it possible to cross the border between disclosure and conceal (Kozinets, 2015). However, a proper entrée is established when the researcher personalizes his/her profile and makes it "public", meaning it is visible to other users. This is mainly due to Instagram's following mechanism, which triggers the possibility of "being followed" by other users who can also interact with the researcher's profile on their own initiative by commenting on a picture, liking it, or contacting the researcher on Direct, which is Instagram's direct messaging function. Users can also see the researcher's profile (without the latter being aware of that) once they become aware of his/her presence. As I had already an Instagram profile before starting my PhD, I decided to use it and modify my profile description by including my PhD research interests, as well as my personal photographic interests (which incidentally relate a lot to natural landscapes). I believe this helped me create an interactive platform with which I was able to enhance openness and genuineness (Kozinets, 2015). I then started to follow hashtags, pages and users related to my RQs for Papers 1 and 2.

3.3.2. Data collection and analysis on Instagram

The lack of a systematic definition of NBT represented a methodological, rather than conceptual, issue in Papers 1 and 2, as it translated into a lack of keywords that could help distinguish an Instagram post related to, for example, a walk in the park of the neighbourhood from an NBT experience. I addressed this challenge by adopting a location-based approach and started by considering a number of national parks to orient the sampling. Geotags assessed in

both papers are Fulufjället, Tyresta, Tyveden, and Skuleskogen National Parks in Sweden. The approach was initiated by typing and selecting the geotag of a given park on the Instagram search engine. By doing this, I was presented with all the posts created by Instagram's users with the geotag attached to my Instagram feed. From there, a wide range of posts and user profiles could be assessed, and users could be privately contacted once I started following their accounts. An implicit limitation in this approach is that I could not be sure whether the author of a post was visiting the park as part of a mobility outside their neighbourhood, which Fredman et al. (2009) claimed defined NBT as opposed to outdoorism, unless the user was asked about it. Nevertheless, clues from the Instagrammer's post and profile (such as language, nationality, and other posts identifying their place of residence) helped me address this point when necessary.
Both papers are exploratory and adopt purposive sampling across the research, which is not unusual in netnography (Costello et al., 2017; Salmons, 2014). Specifically, they select posts and users in a salient way based on their capability to further refine an issue at stake, raised from the RQs or previously collected data (Salmons, 2014). Besides having a common purposive and exploratory rationale, the sampling strategy and the data implemented are characterized differently according to each paper.

Paper 2 presents findings from a sample of 14 participants. Other than being purposive, the sample was also both emergent and critical, meaning that users were chosen as opportunities arose during the fieldwork, and selected based on how the characteristics of their posts and profiles could relate to the advancing, understanding or explanation of the theoretical framework (Salmons, 2014). Paper 2 also makes use of reflexive field notes collected and coded during the sampling as external online observations (Salmons, 2014), which meant that they did not usually interfere with the interactions with the users. Nevertheless, they informed the subsequent methodological step, the interview of the participants about their posts, which will be detailed below. I collected field notes in Paper 1, but these are not represented in the research in a reflexive way as in Paper 2. Data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's framework of thematic analysis (2006), as it was deemed compatible with the research's aims, ontology, epistemology, and epistemology. Accordingly, "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (2006, p.79). A theme in the thematic analysis is anything meaningful interpreted within a corpus of data in relation to a RQ (Willig, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In coding and generating themes, thematic analysis can move flexibly between theory, grounded theory, other kinds of pre-understanding, and different types of data, and most of the iterations depend on the researcher-interpreter (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis makes use of a broad corpus of triangulated data (observations, visuals, documents, interviews, etc.). "Triangulation" is understood here according to Flick (2004), as aiming to enrich complexity and depth more than at an objectivist validation of a theme. Qualitative triangulation of this kind is in line with interpretivist and constructivist paradigms (Flick 2009; 2004; Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke, 2004; Guba, 1990). Themes in both papers are represented by the different sub-headings of the "Findings and discussion" section of both papers (for example, "personal timelines of experience valuation" in Paper 1 and "Resistant bodies: liberation, animals and mythological creatures" in Paper 2).

The most notable difference between the two papers is that data in Paper 1 was sampled, collected, triangulated, and analyzed following grounded theory in order to guide the analysis (Rose, Spinks & Canhoto, 2014; Charmaz & Mitchell 2001). I followed Helkkula et al. (2012) in considering the opportunity, when investigating VALEX interpretively, of implementing an inductive analysis methodology, with the phenomenon of value being the starting point of the research, and with the aim of identifying patterns and themes in the data. Thus, grounded theory represented a sensate choice. However, following Sebastian (2019), the grounded theory approach in Paper 1 contrasts with Glaser and Strauss's popular positivist approach according to the following milestones:

- The researcher is an engaged observer, not a detached one, and actively interprets data
- The researcher inevitably considers extant literature to be part of the interpretive effort and considers the literature as a resource to enhance the depth of interpretations
- Consequently, RQs are drafted vaguely a priori based on theory, but can be changed, and influence data collection
- The "theory" is a subjective interpretation rather than an objective representation

In netnography, data collection and data analysis are often seen as two distinct and subsequent steps (Bartl, Kannan & Stockinger, 2016); however, when implementing grounded theory, data collection and analysis happen at the same time, according to a systematic movement that sees themes and patterns being conceptualized and then constantly challenged and refined by new data (Rose et al., 2014, Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). This reiterative circle proceeds until saturation, the moment at which the analysis of new collected data will not add anything new to the existing explanations (Rose et al., 2014; Salmons, 2014; Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). In Paper 1, once a number of themes were refined through the collection and coding into field notes of online observations, the research proceeded by conducting interviews in a similar fashion to Paper 2, until an acceptable level of saturation was judged to be reached.

Other than the use of grounded theory and a diverse use of field notes, another notable difference is that Paper 2 presents only the posts of the interviewed participants in the findings, and includes participants whose posts were encountered during the online observations and not geotagged at the parks initially considered. The choice is motivated by the relevance of the posts in exam, which in emergent and critical sampling strategies grant the flexibility of adjustments (Salmons, 2014).

3.3.3. Netnographic Interviews on Instagram

Papers 1 and 2 both use text-based online interviews collected using Instagram's instant messaging feature "Direct" (Kozinets, 2015; Salmons, 2014). A limitation of text-based interviews of this kind, according to Kozinets (2015), is that they often offer a more superficial interaction than other kinds of netnographic interviews (such as video calls). This is mainly because non-verbal data that normally emerge from face-to-face interviews is not accessible (such as body language). From this perspective, text-based chat interviews are very similar to email interviews or, to a lesser extent, telephone interviews. On the other hand, they are also similar in terms of the advantages; for instance, the opportunity to obtain data from users who are otherwise difficult, if not impossible, to reach in person (Salmons, 2014). This ensures that sampling is less dependent on availability and logistics, and more congruous with the research questions, which in the case of Papers 1 and 2 matched well with the sampling strategy and the nature of both papers. Unlike email interviews, text-based chat interviews happen in real-time and make it possible to improvise and elaborate based on the participant's answer, making an unstructured or semi-structured interview approach more suitable than in the context of an email interview.

Another advantage of Web 2.0 instant messaging platforms such as Direct is the possibility of attaching multimedia material as part of the conversation. Such a feature turns classic text chats into platforms for multimodal communications (Kozinets, 2015; Salmons, 2014). As shown in Figure 1 below, the feature was exploited in both papers by posting a screenshot of the post in exam to the user, which then prompted the majority of the questions.

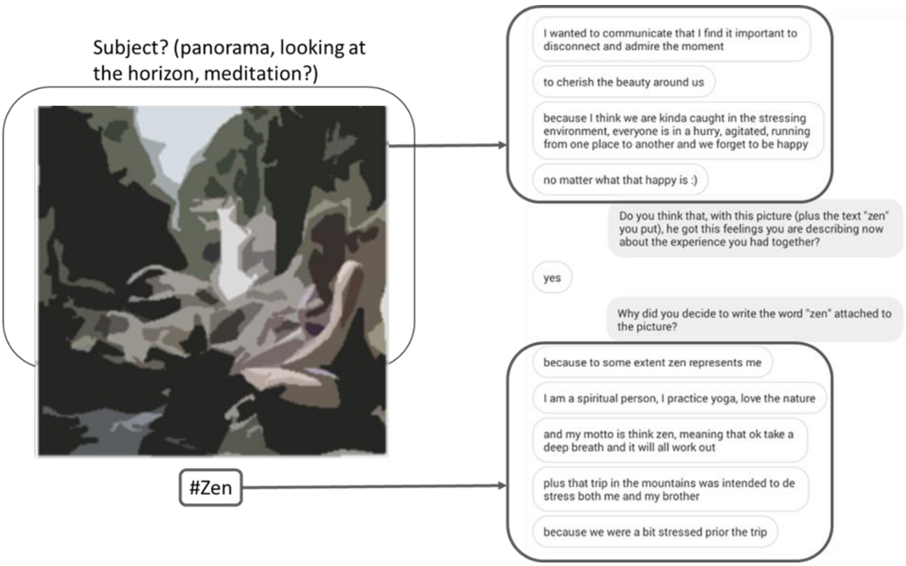

Figure 1 - Extract of interview, showing a sample of the relationship between observations and interviews.

Given the nature of Instagram posts, which are centered on user-generated pictures, text-based interviews turned into visual elicitation (Salmons, 2014; Schöps, 2018), which resulted in a series of related advantages. By making the user reflect on his/her pictures, communication was facilitated overall, and deeper elements and elaborations about portrayed visuals and texts could arise, especially if compared with text-based interviews (Goldstein, 2007; Harper, 2002; Meo, 2010). Potential idiosyncrasies between my interpretations and the user's interpretation of the subject of the pictures could be assessed as well (Kozinets, 2015). Interviews were not only based on my observations over pictures, but also regarded textual elements, such as hashtags, comments of the audience, likes and captions. Additionally, I could access time and space dimensions of the experience that were otherwise inaccessible (Näykki & Järvelä, 2008). According to Rose (2012), when the participant is the author of the visual material in exam, reflection, re-imagination, and re-creation of any experience related to it are prompted and enhanced. I argue that this degree of visual elicitation contributes to balance the disadvantages of a normal, text-only chat interview, as very detailed and deep statements were produced thanks to it, even in interviews that did not last as long as others (Salmons, 2014).

Overall, I found interviews of this kind very important to expand my understanding of Instagrammers' hermeneutic process, which, following Helkkula et al. (2012) is critical when trying to understand values and valuations of experiences from the consumer's point of view. Pink (2006) maintained that digital photography practices, as seen on social media, are different from traditional and analogue ones (on which much of the methodological literature on photo-elicitation is based) because the former acquire meaning through the constitution of networks, which give meaning to the picture. Interviews made it possible to elaborate on aspects that did not revolve around just one post, but on the user's relationship to the audience as well as his/her lifeworld behind his/her digital persona. I consider interviewing users as the most logistically sound way to expand on participants' general feelings, memories, and interpretations connected with the digitally shared picture in exam (Salmons 2014).

3.4. Methodology: Immersive netnography

Paper 4 uses immersive netnography, a very recent adaptation of netnography for studying the metaverse (Kozinets, 2022). Despite the massive growth of studies on VR in recent years, at the times of writing this kappa, immersive netnography has yet to be used in service, consumer, and tourism studies. To the best of my knowledge, Paper 4 was the first paper in VR tourism to make full use of this method while it was written. I recognize that a consequent limitation in using the method is that it does not count on a solid, well-developed, and context-sensitive methodological literature informing the researcher's approach, developing his/her skillset, and increasing his/her awareness on methodological pitfalls and strengths.
However, as recognized by Kozinets (2022), creative experimentation with the method at this stage is important to develop methodological considerations and guidelines, and I claim that Paper 4 serves such a purpose in the context of VR tourism.
Immersive netnography is an extension of netnography. As such, most of what I stated about netnography also provided my grounded understanding of immersive netnography. Particularly, immersive netnography maintains netnography's interpretive ontology, epistemology, and aims to obtain a "thick" and holistic interpretation

of human experiences, as described by Moisander et al. (2022), Heinonen (2022), Zeithaml et al. (2020) and Helkkula et al. (2012) in VR environments. It also maintains the same flexibility in terms of how and whether to disclose one's presence, although the capacity to do so varies depending on evolving virtual environments.

Much like netnography, immersive netnography favors qualitative and inductive RQs, although the nature of the questions is slightly different than netnography. Namely, immersive netnography favors questions concerning experiences that are discussed and performed in the metaverse, concerning metaverse experiences discussed on the Internet, or concerning metaverse experiences discussed in physical contexts (Kozinets, 2022). Consequently, immersive netnography is designed to use a sensitive mix of online data gleaned from VR, including netnographic fieldnotes about the researcher's own telepresence in VR, other digital environments, and real-world data (Kozinets, 2022; Skard et al., 2021). In the context of Paper 4, data is acquired by netnographic field notes on my own experience of the VEs considered in the paper, semi-structured interviews with a number of participants trying the same VEs for the first time, and reviews from VR users of their experience of the selected VEs. Immersive netnography follows a series of consecutive steps, which are slightly different from netnography: initiation, data collection (including immersion, interaction, and investigation), integration and incarnation (Kozinets, 2022). They will be detailed below in relation to Paper 4.

Initiation involves the formulation of a RQ or topic, the draft of an early research design that is open to change, and lastly reflections on netnographic ethics and positionality. A pre-understanding about VR, the metaverse, and its disruptive potential on tourism informed by the theoretical framework presented in this thesis, and Papers 1, 2, and 3 led me towards a first formulation of Paper 4's RQs. Considering Paper 4's RQ, initiation led to my initial approach on VR and the metaverse as an absolute novice, mainly by trying VEs of various nature and by collecting information about VR on the Internet. This allowed me to collect information in the form of digital traces (Kozinets, 2020; Kozinets & Gretzel, 2022; Airoldi, 2021) useful for my subsequent investigation. I started to develop preliminary fieldnotes about my VR experience already at this step, based on such digital traces, enriching my pre-understanding and moving it to a new understanding (Willig, 2014; Gummesson, 2003; Nåden, 2009). Ethics and positionality are both elaborated upon further in the methodological chapter of the thesis.

Investigation implies selection and familiarization with the VR hardware, as well as VR cultures, and also implies acquiring knowledge of norms, rules, codes of conduct, rituals, and customs, as well as a survey of research possibilities in terms of VEs and VR communities. In my case, based on the information collected during the initiation, I selected the Meta Quest 2 as the head-mounted display (HMD) to be used during the research. This choice was motivated by Quest 2's unique combination of technological novelty as of Spring 2022, portability, price accessibility and representativity of the VR consumer market, as well as its envisioned future by the time the research was carried out (Kozinets, 2022; Beck et al., 2019). I then purchased and familiarized myself with the Meta Quest 2 VR environments. This led to a purposeful sample of two apps: Brink Traveler and The Climb 2. Following Kozinets (2022), the apps were selected as my sample based on my evaluation of their update status, relevance, popularity, the diverse nature of the featured VEs of natural areas and how their features could link to Paper 4's RQs.

Immersion involves the experience in telepresence of the VEs and the collection of netnographic notes about the researcher's experience in VR. Immersion may involve reflexivity over one's avatar in VR, if relevant. In Paper 4, my reflections on the matter during immersion advanced my understanding during initiation and investigation and greatly informed the subsequent phase of interactions, namely the typologies of questions asked to the interviewees. For instance, the absence of leg haptics in The Climb 2 was noted as an avatar-related aspect that could affect telepresence in the climbing experience (which, based on the collection of digital traces during the previous two steps, appeared very solid), and translated into specific questions.

Interactions involve dialogues and relationships between the researcher and human actors, in telepresence, on digital platforms, and offline. It also involves dialogues with non-human actors, as, following flat ontology, these are not necessarily less important than human actors in virtual worlds and need to be considered (Kozinets, 2022; Fast et al., 2019). Examples are avatars, interface functions, VE features, and archive data that have been left by VR users online and are accessible to others in the form of digital traces (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2022; Kozinets, 2015). Paper 4 uses reviews as digital traces, as well as semi-structured interviews with human actors. These will be detailed in the sections below. Conversely, Paper 4 does not use live interactions with avatars experiencing the VEs together with the researcher's avatar, as neither Brink Traveler nor The Climb 2 made it possible to share experiences in real time. Paper 4 does not implement interactions with reviewers either, though these are possible through the app Oculus. Despite my initial intention to use Oculus to interact with reviewers similarly to Instagram Direct in Papers 1 and 2, my initial interactions led to an insufficient response rate. Considering the importance of interactions in immersive netnography, I recognize this is an important limitation to the phenomenological insight gathered in Paper 4 (Kozinets, 2022).

Integration is the analysis of data collected during the previous steps and follows a similar logic of netnography by aiming at "thick" phenomenological and interpretive descriptions of meaning, rituals, and identities. In Paper 4, meanings and identities are analyzed with a focus on eudemonia. As described in the theoretical framework, eudemonia is a lifeworld-based and identarian dimension of experiences, which is greatly helpful when investigating the meanings behind experiences of well-being. Integrated analysis of interviews, field notes and reviews in Paper 4 followed a thematic approach, akin to Papers 1, 2, and 3 and drawing from interpretive frameworks of Kozinets, Willig (2014), and Braun and Clarke (2006). Similar to qualitative triangulation, "integration" aims to enrich enriching complexity and depth more than at an objectivist validation or confirmation of the findings (Flick 2009; 2004; Flick et al., 2004; Guba, 1990).

Finally, incarnation is the representation of the analysis into a coherent and meaningful representation of the experiential data (Kozinets, 2022). In the present thesis, it takes the form of Paper 4 as well as further considerations on its findings presented in Chapter 4 of this kappa.

3.4.1. Collection and analysis of online reviews on the Oculus App store

The online traces considered as part of the interactions step of immersive netnography in Paper 4 are reviews about both apps on the Oculus store, and eventual developers' responses, which were collected using theoretical and criteria sampling (Salmons, 2012). The chosen criterion was, in relation to the RQ, the mention of aspects relevant to assessing eudemonia in the experience of the app's VEs. One of the main forms of e-WOM – online consumer reviews – critically influences consumers' and tourists' attitudes, awareness, and perceptions about products and services in the digital age (Mariani, Borghi & Gretzel, 2019; Kwok, Xie & Richards, 2017; Filieri, 2016). Consequently, reviews are now a featured data source in a plethora of studies on tourism, experiences, and consumption (Kwok et al, 2017). Research has acknowledged the inestimable value of user-generated reviews when assessing experiences, value and behavior online, both logistically and phenomenologically (Kozinets, 2020; Chatterjee & Mandal, 2020). As Kozinets (2016, p. 835) noted: "reviews and ratings offer consumers a social conversation, a communications environment that they use not only to talk about the objective and subjective characteristics of products and services but also to socialize and communicate about themselves". Thus, reviews are very important in research investigating lifeworlds and experiences embedded in digital cultures. Departing from an interpretive understanding of consumer experiences, netnography and immersive netnography recognize reviews as valuable online traces of how consumers value what they experience and themselves (Kozinets, 2022; 2020; 2016). They are used in Paper 4 in such a capacity. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of the review in describing the experience is an increasingly contested issue (An & Alarcón, 2021;

Akhtar et al., 2020; Xiang et al., 2018; Baka, 2016). The lack of representation of consumers who do not leave reviews or do not use a specific platform to leave reviews is problematic (Le et al., 2021). Other issues that are more poignant to qualitative research are the uncertainty about reviewers' identities and motivations behind reviewing, and suppliers' manipulation of language and reviewing environment, which can undermine reviews' trustworthiness as honest reports of experiences (Akhtar et al., 2020; Filieri, 2016). Findings about whether reviews are trustworthy in depicting valuations of experiences are inconsistent at best and highly context-sensitive in terms of typology of experiences and review context (Filieri, 2016). It is generally agreed that users consider reviews that disclose personal aspects of the reviewers' lifeworld (for example, travel interest or geographical area) to be more trustworthy (Park et al., 2014). Moreover, trustworthy reviews are relatively long, but also detailed, contain personal and relevant information about the experience, and are written in informal language (Baka, 2016; Filieri, 2016). Similarly to digital photography (Pink, 2006), trustworthy reviews reflect a "sense of reality" that is shared across a community online (Kozinets, 2016; Baka, 2016).

While assessing reviews as part of Paper 4's methodological interactions, I considered the strengths and limitations of reviews and the lack of consensus in the literature on their reliability and trustworthiness. Particular attention was given to reviews of highly personal and detailed content; which revealed personal aspects of the reviewer's lifeworld, which is, incidentally, one of the main contexts in which to study eudemonia. Immersive netnography was particularly effective in gaining an understanding of VR and Quest 2 users' "sense of reality" across all the phases that preceded interactions, which helped in gaining a user-based understanding of relevance and trustworthiness (Kozinets, 2022). In Paper 4, reviews were generally used to support or add depth to data coming from interviews. Many themes emerging from reviews were debated during interviews, and divergent themes emerging from interviews helped to refine my interpretation of reviews. As introduced earlier, when not oriented towards cumulative validation of themes generated by an initial data set, qualitative triangulation increases the solidity, richness, scope, and depth of these themes (Flick 2009; 2004; Flick et al., 2004; Guba, 1990). This was indeed the case in Paper 4. Reviews were collected starting from the initiation stage and within a period of four months before organizing semi-structured interviews. Their collection and hermeneutic assessment continued until the integration movement.

3.4.2. Semi-structured interviews on Meta Quest 2

The interview is considered the most commonly used and prominent method of data collection in qualitative research (Flick, 2009; Bryman 2008). Amongst the numerous definitions of the term, Fontana and Frey (1994) influenced the adoption of interviews in Paper 4; for them, interviewing means essentially *interacting*. Within frameworks centered on interactions such as immersive netnography, I agree with Fontana and Frey (1994) that interacting through interviews is “one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings” (1994, p. 361). In Paper 4, I used a semi-structured form of interviews, acknowledging it as a primary mode of access to subjective viewpoints in qualitative research (Flick et al., 2004). According to Bryman (2008), semi-structured interviews are used so much in qualitative research that researchers sometimes refer to “qualitative interviews” in a way that implicitly encapsulates semi-structured and unstructured interviews together. Semi-structured interviews are indicated when the researcher envisions the need to adapt to the interview situation, to allow flexibility to raise extra and context-sensitive questions, and follow-ups tailored to each interviewee (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Bryman 2008; Schmidt, 2004; Frey & Fontana, 1991; Spradley 1979). Thus, the interview is open-ended and follows an "interview guide", which contains a tentative list of questions and topics that need to be covered during the interview based on availability (Bryman, 2008). Flexibility and context sensitivity, while gravitating around eudemonia and VR tourism, was particularly important in Paper 4, due to its exploratory nature.

In Paper 4 I used a criteria sample of 16 participants, where the criteria was not identifying as VR users and not having tried the apps before (Salmons, 2014; Bryman, 2008). The criteria were chosen to aim for divergent and in-depth insights compared to those offered by reviewers, being mindful of the shortcomings of the reviews detailed above (Le et al., 2021). Interviewees tried all the VEs using the HMD considered in Paper 4, without any predetermined time limitation, while I was in the room taking notes, and were interviewed afterwards. On average, excluding the time spent familiarizing with the HMD, their experience with the VEs lasted 45–60 minutes, while the interviews themselves had an average length of 40 minutes. I planned for flexibility in the time allocated for experiencing the VEs in recognition of the importance of familiarization with VEs in VR research. However, a limitation is that participants did not have days or weeks to familiarize themselves with the hardware, which may have affected their experience (Puig et al., 2020). Participants encompassed a wide range of nationalities, but were mostly

European. While I did not plan any limits in terms of which generations to consider, all except one interviewee was a millennial. Together with Gen Z, millennials are identified as the main target of research on digital technology and experiences, especially in NBT (Clark & Nyaupane, 2022). Thus, I consider this a strength, although it obviously entails some limitations in terms of representativity.

Analytical techniques in semi-structured interviews vary and depend on the goals, questions, and methodological approaches that interviews belong to (Schmidt, 2004). Immersive netnography privileges thematic, hermeneutic, and narrative analysis that is able to "integrate" all data considered in the research (Kozinets, 2022). Thus, I conducted an integrated thematic analysis of field notes, interviews, and reviews, after the transcription of interviews and field notes (Kozinets, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although Kozinets allocated analysis to the integration phase of immersive netnography, I contend that concrete analysis of semi-structured interviews starts at the beginning of the data collection (Schmidt, 2004). This is due to the continuous hermeneutic interchange between interpretations of the interview field, how the latter evolves based on other sources of data, and theoretical pre-understandings. I agree with Gummesson (2003) that the analytical process of semi-structured interviews is always hermeneutic, regardless of the approach.

3.5. Ethics in netnography

Arguably the most discussed topic within netnography research ethics is the one of disclosure, which is the act of revealing the researchers' presence to people whose online conversations are observed. Disclosure is connected in netnography with the epistemological debate about whether netnographers should engage in passive or participant observation online. Although most netnographic research in tourism has been done as *lurkers* (Mkono & Markwell, 2014), Kozinets contended that disclosure is a fundamental step in netnographic research ethics. Kozinets considered disclosure to be fundamental in ensuring that several ethical milestones common with research offline are met (2010; 2002):

- Ensure informed consent, similarly to what is spelt out in Points 13 and 16 of the Act concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans in Sweden (SFS, 2003, hereafter the "Act")
- Ensure that the confidentiality and anonymity of participants are offered and guaranteed
- Seek and incorporate feedback from online community members, maintaining a relationship based on mutual respect and exchange
- Seek permission from community members before directly quoting any specific postings in the research.

While revealing themselves, researchers need also to be unequivocal about aspects of their identity and intents that connects to the aims of the research (Kozinets, 2010). Thus, following Kozinets, both *lurkers* (covert and passive observers) and *spies* (active but covert observers) are in a problematic ethical position. However, it is currently unclear whether the absence of disclosure always constitutes an issue in terms of ethical codes, not least because online research deals with different research questions and contexts (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). Langer and Beckman (2005) considered Kozinets' points to be overly restrictive for open online environments, in which digital traces shared publicly can be comparable to conventional public media (whereas that is not the case for private online conversations). Such a perspective changes the terms of the ethical debate, as the Internet is seen as a space in which hyper-textual content is published and made ready to be analyzed, rather than a social context in which real-time conversations and social actors are under study (McKee & Porter, 2009). Therefore, data is ontologically associated with static text more than active people (Postill & Pink, 2012). This is arguably the vision of the Internet that has been employed (either implicitly or explicitly) by so-called *Big Data* research, which does not implement any form of dialogue or disclosure and resorts to passive (when not automated) collection and analysis of thousands of items from online communities.

Even when the Internet is considered a locus of flowing conversations more than passive hypertexts, the ethical dilemma of disclosure remains open for online research made on sensitive topics. Sensitive research online frequently addresses "some of society's most pressing social issues and policy questions" (Sieber & Stanley, 1988, p. 55) and "illuminates the darker corners of society" (Lee, 1993, p. 2). The problem is that sensitive topics are often discussed online in a situation where disclosure of research persons and participants might lead to disturbance, as well as harmful or threatening situations (Kantanen & Manninen, 2016). According to Langer and Beckman (2005), the absence of disclosure ensures that participants do not feel that their feelings and opinions are on display or subjected to external judgement. Understandably, Sanders (2005) preferred not to alter the behavior of the participants, damage their privacy, harm the feeling of community or provoke hostilities by disclosing her identity. Moreover, Kantanen and Manninen (2016) reported more than one case of researchers being the target of racism or otherwise attacked while interacting online in public forums about sensitive topics.

Instances of disrespect of human dignity are likely to happen more frequently as hostile behavior and displays of negative emotions online become increasingly common (D'Errico & Paciello, 2018; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017).

A lack of consensus on the matter of disclosure leaves the responsibility to make a congruous choice based on the topic, the research design, and the subjects under study to the netnographer. In Papers 1 and 2, my role as a *participant* follows Kozinets' points, and I tried to address all these concerns throughout my research design, particularly when considering visual and textual material to share in the articles. Papers 1 and 2 consider social media as online communities where fluxes of communications composed of pictures, hashtags, comments, and messages constitute performances of value and value tribes (Cuomo et al, 2016), which I then examine according to different RQs. Consequently, I interact with a social context composed of conversations made by social actors (McKee & Porter, 2009) that need to be fully considered as participants. I do not consider the topic of Papers 1 and 2 to be sensitive enough to justify an aprioristic stance as a *lurker*, following the arguments of Sanders (2005) and Langer and Beckman (2005). Due to my positionality, I do not consider myself to be in danger of any kind from the Instagram community and the Instagrammers assessed in the papers, nor do I consider my disclosure to them to be disruptive of members' sense of privacy. I also consider talking with users to reflect on an interpretive methodological milestone (that is, engaging in dialogues) and an important way to refine my interpretations. Moreover, disclosure allows me to ensure a consensual use of posts that, other than being authored by participants, may portray potentially sensitive third-party subjects (Langer & Beckman, 2005). On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge a limitation, as I apply disclosure only to participants that I decided to interview, or whose posts I find important to display in my articles. In the case of grounded theory used in Paper 1, and my fieldnotes visible in Papers 1 and 2, my data is composed as well by posts that I observe, interpret, and analyze into themes. However, such posts are neither displayed on the paper nor downloaded into a research database, but only observed, and contribute to my personal hermeneutic process that generates grounded theoretical themes. In other words, in the context of the publication, these posts are part of a "passive" aspect of ethnographic observation that originates field notes, more than independent entities whose storage and publication would arguably require the author's consent.

On the other hand, in Paper 4 I used a *lurker* approach after a failed attempt to discuss purposedly sampled reviews with the Oculus reviewers as a *participant*, which led me to change the research design drafted during the initiation movement of immersive netnography (Kozinets, 2022). Whereas Oculus is technically a social platform that allows private messaging with content creators, similar to Instagram, I realized throughout my immersive netnography that Oculus is still used mainly as a review hub for the apps considered in Paper 4. Nevertheless, I do not find the choice of adopting a *lurker* stance in this specific context unethical, as reviews in the Oculus app are published in an open online environment that is accessible without any subscription, even as a webpage (Langer & Beckman, 2005). Thus, I consider the reviews analyzed in Paper 4 to be open-access hyper-textual content (Postill & Pink, 2012; McKee & Porter, 2009). As already mentioned, immersive netnography is a very recent method developed for a very recent phenomenon (the Metaverse). Thus, literature on ethics in VR research is even more limited than traditional netnography. Important ethical considerations in immersive netnography followed in Paper 4 include the provision of an empathic portrayal of the actors involved in the research (Kozinets, 2022). Other milestones identified by Kozinets (2022) are concerned with digital encounters between the researcher's avatar and other virtual actors in telepresence. They were not considered in Paper 4, as immersive netnography did not involve any encounter of that kind. Thus, the issue of disclosure concerning virtual actors encountered during VR experiences did not present itself.

Finally, a more intricate point that deserves some attention is the treatment of sensitive personal data, which according to the Act includes racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, information about health, sexual life, or sexual orientation (2003). It is understandable why such treatment is highly regulated in some research fields. However, in research studying consumption cultures and communities online, the situation is complex and context-sensitive. Bruckman held that participants in online communities are often "amateur artists" as UGC can be seen as "various forms of amateur art and authorship" (2002, p.229). This means that ethnicity, politics, philosophy, religion, sexual orientation and the like can be vital parts of the visual performances of a given digital subjectivity, that in turn become vital parts of both ethnographic and netnographic research accounts. Anonymity and disguise of any personal information, followed in principle in all papers of this thesis, are a way to ensure that no sensitive data is associated with a specific participant. However, it is less clear what happens when the very "amateur artists" *request to be associated with* the content displayed in a research account. Do we as netnographers aprioristically hide or delete sensitive identifiers at the risk of erasing part of what makes the post artful and meaningful, as well as denying a credit that is explicitly requested? Can we really count on an unquestioned authority to take over such a decision?

Research online still lacks a recognized systematic protocol, and different ethical questions related to disclosure are raised by different online contexts and depending on the ontological status associated with them in each research initiative (Kantanen & Manninen, 2016). In tourism, netnography itself is fragmented and lacks a proper systematic protocol of application (Mkono & Markwell, 2014; Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019). Outside immersive netnography, ethics in VR research are even less developed (Oliver, Rossi & Cohn, 2022), although Madary and Metzinger (2016) recently compiled a solid, if tentative, framework of ethical research in VR. In addition to aspects common to netnography such as informed consent and honesty, ethical frameworks of VR research stress that acts that are ethically risky or unacceptable in physical-world research should imply ethical concerns in VR. Examples are virtual sexual acts and torture. Although none of these acts presented themselves in the context of Paper 4, I argue that ethical frameworks for VR research should be bridged to tourism soon. Overall, I think that ethics in netnography and immersive netnography should be further discussed and questioned with the aim of leading to a more pluralistic framework in terms of research paradigms and designs. I side with Kantanen and Manninen (2016) in arguing that the capability of excessively strict and generalized regulatory frameworks to do that is very poor. Without necessarily being negligent, I agree with the authors that "ethical considerations should be more case-based and processual, rather than relying on one model for all solutions" (p.94).

3.6. Methodology: field group interviews

Paper 3 is the only paper in this thesis that does not make use of any form of online data. Instead, it implements interviews with groups of tourists touring Fulufjället National Park, Sweden, collected during one of the fieldworks at the park, which I conducted together with a colleague as part of the project Ingoskog. Interviews were collected during a week of fieldwork at the park, and as part of a more comprehensive fieldwork investigating guiding, mapping and information material provided at the park. We did not arrange groups themselves, as these were constituted by groups or dyads of tourists visiting the park together, who we invited to be interviewed at the local visitor center. Thus, the interviews followed the rationale of formal field group interviews (Frey & Fontana, 1991) and were sampled according to an emergent sampling strategy (Patton, 2002).

As is normal in these kinds of interviews, a comfortable set-up on the field was assembled to facilitate extensive enquiries and the emergence of interpersonal dynamics around a topic, which helps to gain phenomenological insights (Patton, 2002; Lyng & Snow, 1986). In particular, we assembled a table with comfortable chairs at the visitor center, and provided a Swedish "fika", a coffee break with side sweets, which in Sweden is a popular context of social gatherings and is generally known to tourists visiting the country. In my specific case, I was inspired to assemble such set-up by observing, during the fieldwork, how Swedish fikas at the end of guided tours offered by the National Park were used to encourage reflections and conversations (Conti, 2021). I was able to rely on the full collaboration of the visitor center's management in setting up the table at a panoramic location, which greatly helped tourists to refer to their experiences, as advised by Frey and Fontana (1991). My colleagues and I are very grateful for such collaboration.

Again following Frey and Fontana (1991), field group interviews are generally overlooked by qualitative researchers doing field work and ethnographers, who normally opt for individual, in-depth interviews with single informants. On the other hand, those authors argued that informal and formal field group interviews happen often during fieldwork, but are treated as individual interviews in research accounts. As a result, little to no research in social sciences ever refers to “formal” or “informal” field group interviews. They are also overshadowed by focus group interviews within qualitative group interviewing (Merton, 1987). However, focus groups are usually between a minimum of four to 12 elements and are formally and purposefully pre-arranged by researchers between otherwise unfamiliar participants, which means that the interviewer plays a more influential role (Nyumba et al., 2018; Bohnsack, 2004). As such, they are not always the best choice in field and naturalistic settings (Frey & Fontana, 1991).

Formal field group interviews lead to qualitative data “on realities as defined in a group context and on interpretations of events that reflect group input” (Frey & Fontana, 1991, p.2). They do not focus specifically on consensus, but on phenomena whose views within the group are diverse, complex, interpersonal, and personal, or where there may be disagreement over the reality under study (Frey & Fontana, 1991). Thus, the interviews capitalize on processes of internal “within-data” triangulations by allowing participants’ statements to “bounce back and forth” among them, and be modified, contrasted, deepened, and enriched within the group (Flick, 2004; Denzin, 1989; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). They can also be used to assess the perceptions and interpretations of individuals within the group (Frey & Fontana, 1991). In general, much like other fieldwork techniques, they are well suited for exploratory studies and for gaining an in-depth understanding of unresearched experiential contexts. The research design in Paper 3 aimed to stimulate the emergence of meanings attributed to connectivity and disconnection in a naturalistic and empathetic manner (Helkkula et al., 2012; Gopad & Prasad, 2000). Thus, although more formal and structured interviewing styles are possible in group interviews, we adopted a non-directive, emphatic and semi-structured approach, similar to the individual interviews collected for Paper 4 (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Bryman 2008; Schmidt, 2004; Frey & Fontana, 1991). Similarly to Paper 4, we also followed an inductive thematic analysis to analyze the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006), based on themes emerging from data. As in the other papers, such themes are represented by the subheadings of the Results and Discussion section of Paper 3, such as "social connectivity".

As both my colleague and I participated in the interview, the report and discussion of our findings in Paper 3 reflect a collaborative effort to confront our different hermeneutics in-depth, both when analyzing and collecting data, with attention to self-criticism. Such effort helped refine the quality of our analysis (Flick et al., 2014; Carter et al., 2014; Cornish, Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013).

3.7. Hermeneutics across the thesis

As presented in the Introduction, and reiterated when presenting this thesis' ontology and epistemology, I argue that this thesis is the result of my subjective hermeneutic effort. I strongly agree with Gummesson (2003) that all research implies a subjective hermeneutic effort of the researcher. Following Geertz et al. (2018) and Willig and Billin (2011), interpretivism acknowledges that such effort is inevitable, yet also desirable, because it is the very means for understanding reality. Thus, I argue subjectivity is not a limitation within qualitative and interpretive research. Conversely, subjective hermeneutic efforts lead to rich accounts, emerging out of a relationship between the researcher and the researched, of what it means to experience one's identity, humanity, sense of Self, time, and space (Willig, 2017; Willig & Billin, 2011). However, I believe this implies some reflections on my own hermeneutics across the thesis.

Following Ricoeur (1996), there are two types of hermeneutics. The first is a hermeneutics of empathy, or "empathic", also called hermeneutics *of faith* (Cornish, Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013), which aims to fully understand meaning from within data; for example, as intended by participants or their texts, visuals, and online traces. As such, it relies as little as possible on the researcher's theoretical pre-understanding (Willig, 2017). The second is a hermeneutics *of suspicion*, or "suspicious hermeneutics", and seeks alternative, contrasting, hidden, or latent evidence, which may lead to new meaning compared to, for example, what a participant is saying (Willig, 2017; Cornish et al. 2013). Such hermeneutics is more influenced by external theoretical constructs. As a researcher, I always carry on both hermeneutics, producing empathic readings as well as critical reflections. A researcher oscillates between both, throughout the analysis, according to his/her subjective hermeneutic spiral (Willig, 2014; Cornish et al., 2013; Willig & Billin, 2011; Gummesson, 2003). Following Willig, netnography and thematic analysis are involved in "continual back-and-forth between an ‘empathic’ and a ‘suspicious’ stance in order to generate better overall understanding” (2017, p.7).

The challenge implicit in a hermeneutic spiral is that the research-interpreter is bestowed with the power of transforming the meaning of the material that is interpreted at every step. Following Willig (2017), this is especially relevant when, as in my case, the researcher claims to understand somebody else’s experience. Does the interpretation tell something about the phenomenon, or does it say more about the researcher-interpreter and his/her assumptions or biases? According to Belton (2017) and Willig and Billin (2011), throughout their hermeneutic spiral, researchers are prone to put too much of themselves into their interpretations of new understandings. The issue relates both to ethics and to trustworthiness, which is the main concern of hermeneutics in qualitative research (Williams & Morrow, 2009). A tough limitation of hermeneutics is that it is not easy to assess the quality of an interpretation. Moving from Willig (2017) and Williams and Morrow (2009), I argue that two aspects in particular help researchers reflect on the quality of their hermeneutics. The first aspect is integrity of the data; that is, reflecting on the richness and diversity of the material grounding the researcher’s interpretation. Qualitative triangulation (of different data and different investigators) in use in Papers 1, 2, 3, and 4 helps in such regard, and I rely on it to a great extent (Carter et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the researcher needs to be mindful not to silence “opposing” interpretations coming from diverse data or investigators, and of different investigators and participants’ involvement and positionalities (Akkerman et. al. 2008). I acknowledge that Chapter 4 of this thesis, which represents a metasynthesis of the papers (Willig, 2017), involves mostly me as the main interpreter despite the richness of the data considered. Moreover, as explained earlier, addressing positionality was particularly challenging in the online research conducted in Papers 1, 2 and 4. The second aspect is the balance between reflexivity and subjectivity; that is, to go back to Belton (2017), evaluating the interplay between a participant´s voice and the researcher's voice when moving to a new understanding. In doing so, being open to divergence and competing interpretations – as offered by different data or interpreters, for example – helps greatly in increasing the quality of the interpretations (Willig, 2017). While working on the papers in this thesis, I took extensive care to share my hermeneutics with my fellow investigators throughout the research analysis, and with my participants throughout my data collection when possible. Moreover, multiple interpretive efforts of the same data departing from different stages of the hermeneutic spiral, such as those present in the metasynthesis, allow the researcher to refine or contrast earlier interpretations (Ludvigsen et al., 2015). However, a limitation is that relevant interpretations present in single papers may be lost in the metasynthesis (Willig, 2017), where I did not share my additional hermeneutics with my papers' participants of all papers, and with my fellow investigator of Paper 3.

There are additional limitations to consider in my hermeneutics. It was not always possible to share my interpretation with my participants, such as with reviewers whose reviews were considered in Paper 4. Even when shared during data collection, the interpretation as written in the papers may not reflect that shared with my participant. However, this is normal in the context of scientific publications, and it does not mean that the researcher interpreted the data wrongly, but that disciplinary language is not the same as the one used by participants (Langdridge, 2007). Willig and Billin (2011) suggested the use of direct quotations from participants as much as possible. I referred to participants' quotes and posts extensively throughout my papers, but not in my metasynthesis. Finally, while English was the language adopted throughout data collection across the papers, it was not my first language, nor that of my fellow investigators and several participants in Papers 3 and 4. If overlooked, translation may affect relationships with participants; namely, how the latter convey what they experience, how the researchers interpret it and how they communicate interpretations to each other (Filep 2009; Temple & Young, 2004). Following Filep (2009), a combination of curiosity, fluency in the common language, and readiness towards translation ambiguities helped to address the issue during dialogues between researchers and participants. However, it was not possible to implement this strategy in most situations involving netnographic archive data that was not supported by elicited data.

4. Discussion, conclusions, and implications

In this thesis, I claim that the massified proliferation of user-led digital technology during the acceleration age and the nascent Metaverse created pervasive consumer cultures of digital technologies, assessed here as digital technocultures. These impact and shape tourists' experience and valuation of their sense of Self and the world, including their identities as NBT experiencers, NBT destinations and activities, in ways that need further research according to innovative approaches. I argue that the four papers in this thesis represent examples of such approaches. In different ways, they all contribute to the understanding of NBT by highlighting how digital technocultures impact NBT tourists as experiencers. At the same time, they also highlight how digital technocultures impact the desire, experience, and valuation of nature in NBT. The papers' findings concerning the kappa rationale are discussed below as a critical hermeneutic movement to answer the RQs proposed in this kappa and draw my conclusions. The latter, representing a further and culminating hermeneutic movement towards answering the RQs, are presented afterwards, followed by implications.

4.1. Discussion of the papers

4.1.1. Paper I

The main aim of Paper 1 is to understand the role of online photography in creating experience value in tourism and what tourism experience values are conveyed through photography-based UGC. While investigating online photography in Paper 1, my preunderstanding of experience value was the one of a phenomenological construct that encompasses highly multisensorial, symbolic, hedonic, and eudemonic dimensions.

Following Agapito et al. (2013), the findings in Paper 1 reveal multisensorial sensescapes of "visible" yet also "smellable", "hearable", and "touchable" aspects of nature that are experienced and valued by tourists. The findings also show how such sensescapes, more than communicating mere perceptions, are intertwined with the tourist´s lifeworld of feelings, fantasies, dreams, interests, relationships, and goals. In addition to describing simply being or having been somewhere, I claim that they relate to valued wishes to be, or wishing someone else to be with the Instagrammer, and finally to provoking the audience's desire to be in nature as the Instagrammer. Overall, Paper 1 reveals a multi-faceted technocultural production of sensoriality about nature and that digital technocultures significantly impact the experiencer's production and performance of such sensoriality. I argue that whether the sensorial phototruths communicated textually and visually by Instagram posts are about a "real" or utopian, fabulated, and spectacularized sensoriality is beside the point in terms of NBT experience value. Following Howes (2019), Kozinets et al. (2017), and Gymóthy (2013), I contend that the point is how a technocultural *narrative about sensing*, produced according to tourists' networked resources (in this case, Instagramming), reflects ex-situ tourist identity projects and lifeworlds. Sensorial stories presented in Paper 1 show how NBT tourists imagine, nostalgize, dream and make a utopia out of nature by producing and performing sensorial stories of it through their Instagram profiles. Paper 1 also shows how tourists' identity work, which is made up of passions, professions, aspirations, reflections, tragedies, hobbies, and valued communities, is intimately connected to the multidimensional and multisensorial valuations of NBT's naturalness. This is the case, for instance, for epistemic values related to amateur and professional photography, eudemonic values associated with overcoming grief, and reflections concerning life paths, all of which lead to the subjective production of specific sensorialities by the tourist's digital persona on Instagram. To quote one of the participants, "*there's a lot that goes into these posts!*".

Moving from Cardell and Douglas (2018) and Dinhopl and Gretzel (2016), the findings in Paper 1 lead me to contend that it does not matter if the tourist itself is the picture's subject, as in selfies or portraits; the Instagrammer's gaze is always self-directed and oriented towards collective consumption of his/her tourist Self. Namely, whether explicitly (as in portraits, for example) or not (such as in landscapes), a tourist's digital persona and his/her story is always performed by the post, linked to posts' visuals and text and collectively consumed, scrutinized, and endorsed by the Instagram community. Evidence of the latter led me to question in my fieldnotes the extent to which tourists' Instagramming is influenced by marketplace ideologies of attention and surveillance (Gössling et al., 2021; Kozinets & Gambetti, 2020; Zulli, 2018). Such influence was not openly recognized by Instagrammers interviewed in Paper 1 who, even when promoting themselves professionally, described their avatars as "free" and personal extensions of themselves, their interests, peers, aspirations, dreams, memories, ethics, spirituality, and reflections. However, the Instagrammers interviewed in Paper 2 on the basis of my netnographic fieldnotes collected for both papers gave me a different picture, as I will elaborate on in the discussion on Paper 1.

Another important aspect discussed in Paper 1 was that the dynamics of the valuation of NBT experiences appeared less linear than suggested by SD pre/on-site/post-experience frameworks of experience valuation (e.g., Yachin, 2018; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). In fact, I agree with Helkkula et al. (2012) that consumers perform their own hermeneutic movements between pasts, presents, and futures when valuing consumption experiences. Accordingly, in Paper 1, I show that Instagramming gives tourists the agency to perform their own hermeneutic movements between pasts, presents, and futures openly when valuing NBT. Paper 1 provides several examples of such movements, where the experience at the destination is valued and re-valued through its subjective integration into subjective lifeworlds. Instagrammers did not post only about single memories of NBT destinations, anticipations of them, or in-situ encounters. In fact, the destination was sometimes not even at the center of the NBT experiencescape performed on Instagram, but online value tribes, deceased members of a network, fantasized future selves, and even reflections over past selves in light of the present or the future. At any moment, when Instagramming, tourists may create experience value from a network not at the destination or otherwise not easily localized into one phase or mobility of SD frameworks, and yet crucial in the valuation of NBT experiences.

Findings of Paper 1 suggest that physical mobilities of the NBT experience, the digital and physical world composing the tourist's lifeworld flow liquidly on each other in determining valued experiential dimensions of the NBT experience. As such, it is not easy to predetermine linkages between specific experience value dimensions, experience "phases", and mobilities in relation to NBT destinations as assumed by SD frameworks. In retrospect, I believe that one of the main merits of Paper 1 was to move my interest towards investigating the digital networks embedded in the tourist's lifeworld, more than aprioristic mobilities or perceptions, in order to understand the tourist's valuation of his/her experience of nature.

4.1.2. Paper II

Paper 2 explores how digital technocultures of online photography mediate and perform liminality in NBT experiences, particularly how they relate to tourist identity building and the experience of nature. The findings of Papers 1 and 2 represent an essential step in moving my understanding from SD to CD and CCT. Much of the understanding of Instagram and Instagramming in Paper 2 is grounded on the findings of Paper 1, even though Paper 1 was written and published slightly later.

Paper 2 displays Instagram posts of fabulated liminal "nature" and "selves in nature". Moving from Stenner (2018), I argue that these posts represent artful performances of valued "otherness" and intentions of "being other" in nature depending on the tourists' lifeworld. Following Lllamas and Belk (2022) and O'Regan (2009), I claim that fabulated liminal persona presented in Paper 2 can be seen as digital subjectivities recasting and re-performing the tourist's Self in nature by Instagram's technocultural means. Most of such means are also illustrated in Paper 1 and include hashtags, geotags, visual postprocessing, and captions. The findings in Paper 2 highlight a wide use of known frontier mythologies and identity myths about nature to operate such recasting of the Self as liminal. For instance, tourists show themselves in rugged landscapes or extreme weather conditions and use tags and captions to signal the value of being separated from a daily space symbolized by excessive comfort, noise, stress, Internet connectivity, technologies, and commodities. Conversely, the nature performed on Instagram is characterized by liminal "other" sensescapes of calm, silence, and solitude, associated with magic, spirituality, wilderness, soulfulness, or the complete absence of humanity. Instagrammers in Paper 2 usually employ such representations of nature while impersonating magical or folkloristic creatures, "wild" explorers, or more liberated genders compared to constraints experienced in their lifeworlds. Following Pritchard and Morgan (2006), in Paper 2 I claim these impersonations are digital equivalents of liminal "resistant bodies". While recurring to imaginaries known to the literature, tourists also display novel ways of building their liminal Selves in nature. A notable example is the impersonation of dogs talking about their NBT adventures to the owners' Instagram audience. Reportedly, expressing a dog's voice through Instagram allows the owner to "liberate" the dog's human-like empathy, intelligence, and independence against social stigma. As in Paper 1, I maintain that it is not important whether paper 2's phototruths are about real or hyperreal Selves or experiences in order to understand what is valuable in the Instagrammer's experience of nature. Again, the point is to understand how technocultural narratives about oneself doing NBT reflect valued ex-situ tourist identity projects and lifeworlds.

Like Paper 1, tourists' liminal personas in Paper 2 relate intimately to the tourist's identity work. They too are performed and conveyed by multidimensional stories about values attributed to nature, its experience, the tourist's identity, and social life. They create hyperreal embodiments and sensorialities of nature that connect to the tourist's lifeworld more than on-site perceptions. Regardless of the fantastical nature of the liminal persona performed on Instagram, participants often value such a persona as a truly genuine Self through an artful combination of captions, tags, and hashtags. Notably, in Paper 2, the combination of fantastic and authentic finds a vital symbolic link to nature as the latter is interpreted as a place where to experience the "authenticity" and "genuineness" of one's identity. In turn, NBT destinations in Paper 2 acquire an experiential value of genuineness by strengthening the genuineness of fabulated liminal personas performed there.

The findings in Paper 2 show that the freedom experienced by participants to craft personal liminal selves extends to the liquid e-tribes they take part in and co-create together by using tags, hashtags, following, liking, and commenting on each other. Following White and White (2004), I argue that such e-tribes constitute liminal *communitas*. However, differently from Paper 1, some participants in Paper 2 opened up about the interference of exhibitionism, fakeness

and popularity-seeking across their network. Following Airoldi and Rokka (2022), one could hold that marketplace ideologies of attention and surveillance dominate the entire marketplace of liminality provided by Instagram. The findings in Paper 2 suggest that these ideologies represent a pervasive interference with the anti-structural nature of liminality. Moreover, transitions between Instagram and the physical experience – which are theoretically "accelerated" by being liquid, instantaneous, and ubiquitous (Xiang, 2018) – represented a problem for most participants. Most felt the need to establish a clear divide by posting only once they were back home, although the findings indicate that even establishing such a boundary may be problematic. One participant ended up feeling the need to leave Instagram entirely, but said, "*the more I distance myself from It, the more it tires me*".
Nevertheless, according to CCT, findings also show that tourists resist marketplace ideologies through specific interpretive strategies while consuming Instagram to recast themselves in nature. Examples in the findings are setting a private profile, leaving e-tribes deemed too commercial, stopping to post for a while, or not using highly commodified hashtags.

Liminality addresses critical aspects of experience valuation of the Self and naturalness encompassing dreams, feelings, beliefs, life challenges, and routines. Despite not being a new concept, it represents a fresh lens to investigate tourists' identity work and its relation to nature in increasingly technocultural NBT experiencescapes. In digital technocultures, liminality is amplified by the rising number of creative resources, identity myths, and e-tribes available in current technocultural marketplaces, from online photography on social media to video making, to metaverses. On the other hand, findings show that, at any moment when Instagram becomes part of the NBT experience, the tourist's creative and liberating work on himself/herself is challenged by structural ideologies of conformity, attention, surveillance, and ubiquitous connectivity proper of the acceleration age (Gössling et al., 2021; Kozinets & Gambetti, 2020; Rosa, 2013). Through Instagram, these ideologies attempt to discipline what is valued in nature and the Self in nature.

4.1.3. Paper III

Paper 3 studies how tourists construct a valued experience of disconnection from mobiles in NBT. Work on Paper 3 started during my fieldwork at Fulufjället national park between 2018 and 2019, but findings were analyzed and interpreted several times before starting to write an actual paper between 2020 and 2021. In Paper 3, I question several theoretical approaches that, back in 2018, hegemonized the understanding of tourists' disconnection from mobiles. First, I question the understanding of disconnection as an objectivized, essentialist act of "switching off" mobiles as opposed to "keeping them on" (Tanti & Buhalis 2017; Gretzel 2010). Second, I question the privileged link of disconnection to connectivity addiction phenomena (Egger et al., 2020). Third, I challenge the overly optimistic consideration of mobiles as enhancers or facilitators of NBT tourism experiences and the idea of mobiles as entities whose contribution to the tourism experience is predetermined by providers (Fast et al., 2019). Finally, I cast doubt on the idea that ubiquitous mobile connectivity liquifies tourism's experiential distinction between being away and the everyday, altering, inhibiting or eliminating escapism in NBT (Jansson, 2020; Voase, 2018). Thanks to the implementation of ANT, the findings of Paper 3 move the understanding of disconnection away from all the points above and provide valuable knowledge about the themes considered in this thesis.

To begin with, in Paper 3, the experience of disconnection emerges as a subjectively ordered tourismscape of actor-networks, where translations of nature, the tourist Self in nature and digital technology play a critical role. Connectivity to mobiles was selectively negotiated by participants in the study depending on how single functions (such as mapping and tracking), apps (social media, email apps, etc.), and hardware (such as GPS, 4G+, the phone itself) were translated and networked within their tourismscape. Across the findings, negotiations between connectivity and disconnection eluded deterministic dichotomies between being connected and disconnected, following ANT's flat ontology (Latour, 1996). Namely, the findings in Paper 3 highlighted significantly different translations given to social connectivity as opposed to mapping, tracking, and orientation. For instance, even tourists "plugged" into GPS to map their path and track their steps experienced disconnection and defined themselves as "disconnected" due to simply not posting on social media as usual. Similarly, being unplugged from 4G connectivity implied being "disconnected" just due to the impossibility of receiving emails on Outlook from colleagues. Using social media, checking emails, and taking selfies often translated into being subject to unwanted attention and pressures, being addicted to approval, bragging about one's whereabouts, and being distracted. These were described as particularly invasive and problematic aspects of everyday society to "disconnect from" while in nature. Paper 3 found that even noticing such behaviors in others could jeopardize one's experience of disconnection.

According to the findings, "disconnected tourismscapes" generated by subjective translations of mobiles enable NBT experiences where escapism still plays a core experiential role in defining nature and the Self in nature. Identity myths and experiences linked to escapism in NBT, such as liberation, quiet, solitude, peace, survivalism, and genuineness, were common across the findings when assessing how participants interpreted the experience of nature. Following ANT, such translations of what it means to experience nature are linked to experiencing an escapist and "free" tourist Self in relation to one's lifeworld. In agreement with Cai and McKenna (2021b), the findings show that pursuing such an escapist Self implied negotiations with and resistance to how connectivity to mobiles is embodied daily, given that most tourists carried their mobile along during the trip. The need to construct experiences of freedom to embody mobiles in NBT, compared to the constraints experienced in the everyday, is noticeable in Paper 3 and in line with findings that emerged in Paper 2.

The findings in Paper 3 led me to believe that the meaning of escapism in NBT is profoundly linked to marketplace ideologies of ubiquitous connectivity that dominate the tourists' identities in daily life. Accordingly, tourists resist them by negotiating and embodying an escapist and disconnected Self in NBT. In Paper 3, the latter enabled different and genuine ways of living, sensing, and socializing in NBT that, moving from Brown (2013) and Wang (1999), served the perceived need to counter a daily alienated Self through NBT experiences. It also reportedly enabled participants' experience of nature as a tourismscape where one can feel free, alone, at peace, genuine, or positively challenged in comparison to a lack of these experiences in daily life. Consequently, in Paper 3 I argue that escapism as a core experiential valuation of NBT is not damaged or inhibited by digital technocultures. I show that experiential states of being away are needed today more than ever in one's identity, and well-known experiential themes of escapism in nature still strongly inform experiences of nature and their valuation. What is shifting, I contend, is how digital technologies are negotiated (as agents disciplining life, the experiencer's agency, and experiences), according to specific interpretative strategies that help construct valued escapist Selves and escapist experiences of nature. Thus, I argue that such subjective interpretive strategies of mobiles enable escapism in NBT. Interpretive strategies are shaped by marketplace ideologies of connectivity and how tourists negotiate with them in the name of specific identity projects (Kozinets, 2022; Rokka, 2021; Arnould et al., 2021). In Paper 3, such identity projects are about nature-based escapist selves and the experience of nature that they refer to.

4.1.4. Paper IV

Paper 4 was designed in the Spring of 2022 amid an explosion of both technological innovations and literature on VR. It focuses on how VR experiences of nature are valued based on their integration into the experiencer's lifeworld (Kozinets, 2022; Heinonen, 2022). In contrast to the dominance of hedonia in VR tourism research, Paper 4 proposes eudemonia as a critical lens attentive towards lifeworld-based dimensions of self-empowerment, determination, identity building, flourishment, and positive relatedness to others through VR. Paper 4's investigation of such dimensions shed light on experiences of well-being in nature-based VEs, a holistic understanding is still lacking, despite promising results (Spano et al., 2022). Following Koo et al. (2022), Heinonen (2022), and Gursoy et al.

(2022), I argue that the understanding of the latter presented in Paper 4 helps assess the experiential valuation of metaverse experience journeys in NBT.

The results from Paper 4 show that adopting eudemonic frameworks of experience valuation helps us understand the valuation of VR NBT experiences in a digitally elastic lifeworld. To begin with, the findings highlight the possibility of overcoming lifeworld-based experiences of fear, vulnerability, challenge, and other real-life limitations to accessing nature; following Yang, Zhang, et al. (2021), Galeone and Sebastiani (2021) and Filep and Laing (2019), these are critical eudemonic dimensions of the experience. I claim that these dimensions are particularly relevant in nature-based VR tourism. Indeed, Paper 4 shows that exercising one's interests, aspirations, and autonomy, as well as overcoming physical and mental challenges and health or mobility issues that hinder physical relatedness to nature, are core experiential dimensions in virtual NBT. The latter may even link to the pursuit of lifeworld-based epistemic and social dimensions of experience, such as skills development and environmental mastery linked to physical activities such as climbing. Notably, even when not being experienced as a substitution, findings show that the experience of such dimensions in VR help connect to significant others' physical experiences of the activity or the environment. A key finding of Paper 4 is that experiences of nature in VR by one's avatar empower ex-situ travelers to bridge with the real-world experiences of significant others. Thus, I claim that they enable a meaningful sharing of memories and feelings about experiences and destinations, which, following Yang, Zhang, et al. (2021), Filep and Laing (2019), and Ryan and Deci (2001), is a central aspect of eudemonic relatedness in tourism. Finally, in Paper 4's findings, nature-based destination VEs emerge as "daily destinations" where, regardless of time and space, one hyper-moves as an avatar to experience calm, silence, solitude, stress, and anxiety relief, as well as physical fitness and recovery valued in one's lifeworld. Due to the high portability of the VR device used in Paper 4, we see that happening in the findings according to integration within the experience of consumer lifeworld-based resources, which has so far only tentatively recognized in the literature.

Due to advances in VR and AR technologies, I agree with Van Neuen and Scarles (2022) and Hannam et al. (2014) that tourism is re-articulating itself as a consumption experience based on interest rather than geographical distance. In Paper 4, VR enables technocultural mobilities of tourist avatars to technology-enabled activities, imaginaries, and environments where mobilities to real locations are not at the center of the experience. Following Epps (2014), VR arguably refers to a generation of digital technocultures characterized by enhancement of body presence in physical locations, as opposed to disembodied, immaterial and ubiquitous projections of social media. However, one could contend that the smartphone is not qualitatively different, as it typically relies on contextual awareness to create content. Following Rokka and Canniford (2016) and Bădulescu (2012), I contend that VR is uniquely equipped to turn the tourist body into a heterotopian recipient of several tourist avatars that can "be" and "do" NBT tourism, regardless of physical bounds and constraints that normally hinder eudemonic dimensions of NBT. Nevertheless, In CCT terms, I maintain that both disembodied Selves and destinations on social media assessed in the previous papers and destination VEs and avatars assessed in Paper 4 can be seen as marketplace resources following similar dynamics of Self-expression and place valuation.

4.2. Conclusions and Implications

The following part of the chapter is concerned with providing qualitative and comprehensive answers to the two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) of this kappa. The answers are given as new understandings as part of Chapter 4's interpretive metasynthesis of the papers (Willig, 2017). Some implications are drawn from my conclusions at the end of the chapter.

4.2.1. RQ1: The NBT experiencer in digital technocultures

Tourism literature and, increasingly, NBT literature acknowledge how digital technologies enhance, facilitate, or damage experiences on-site. However, the holistic impact of digital technologies on the identity of tourists themselves has not been acknowledged to the same extent as in broader consumer studies (Yang & Kirillova, 2023). This is partly a consequence of the dominance of provider-led frameworks of experience in tourism, which privilege in-situ and destination-based experience valuation (Heinonen, 2022; Rihova et al., 2018). By studying digital technologies in tourism as digital technocultures, and informed by a consumer-dominant approach, the findings in my thesis address this important gap. Across the papers, they greatly inform how integrating digital technologies such as social media, smartphones, and VEs within tourists' lifeworlds shapes the identity of tourists as experiencers of nature in NBT.

Accordingly, my main argument in answering RQ1 is that digital technocultures expand the NBT tourist increasingly into a "tourist digitally extended Self", with several impacts on his/her identity as an experiencer, which will be detailed here. Such digitally extended Self is composed by a plethora of hyperreal digital subjectivities which, potentially at any point in time and space, the NBT tourist carries in his/her mobile or VR headset. Examples visible in Papers 1, 2, and 3 are survivalist adventurers, elves, talking animals, skilled photographers on Instagram, close friends or concerned partners on WhatsApp, and productive colleagues on Outlook. Like digital subjectivities on social media, Paper 4's non-disabled mountaineers or heroic skydivers globetrotting on personal and portable VR destinations can be seen as part of the tourist's digitally extended Self. Other examples common in digital worlds nowadays, that should be assessed by further research, are video-makers on YouTube, reel-makers on TikTok, and influencers on LinkedIn. As shown across the papers, digital technocultures enable the assemblage of digital personas around multidimensional combinations of, e.g., senses, hedonic appreciations, eudemonic desire for flourishing, liminal desire for liberation and experimentation, and desire for utopian genuineness and escapism.

In my findings, the tourist's digitally extended Self is ubiquitously immersed within a digital network of fellow tourists and humans' extended Selves, influencers, e-tribes, brands, and other meaningful actors in the tourist's lifeworld. Following Kozinets et al. (2017), Rokka and Canniford (2016), Askegaard (2006) and Holt (2004), such a network places the tourist in a relationship with collectively shaped marketplace cultures, which in NBT encompass identity myths, scripts, and frontier mythologies about nature and being in nature. I argue that these all represent resources for assembling valued experiences of the Self in NBT, and yet at the same time ideological pressures and imperatives on how to assemble, value, desire, and experience the Self (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022; Arnould et al., 2021). NBT tourists draw from them according to personal interpretive strategies that align their identity projects towards or against technocultural visions and ideologies. Interactions with marketplace cultures occur within digital worlds, as shown by Papers 1, 2, and 4. However, they also take place offline, as shown in Paper 3 by how tourists selectively negotiate with pressures and canons around mobile connectivity to smartphones in order to assemble and embody a disconnected Self. I agree with Nagle and Vidon (2021) and Vidon (2019) that Paper 3's disconnected selves may represent a genuine Self sought and found to counter alienation thanks to a different on-site relationship with biological wilderness. At the same time, findings from Papers 2 and 3 make me add that on-site relationships to nature established by disconnected selves are not necessarily separated from the digitally extended Self. As shown in Paper 3, NBT tourists subjectively network to their digitally extended Selves, across the experience, to assemble disconnected tourismscapes. Moreover, as shown in Paper 2, NBT tourists also perform disconnected Selves as part of the liminal subjectivities within their digitally extended Selves. Although sharing the experience online publicly (for example, on one's feed) is reportedly done mostly ex-situ in findings from Papers 2 and 3, this is sometimes a difficult resolution to live by, and the act of "taking" a picture in-situ may still be oriented by a technocultural idea of "sharing" afterwards. Finally, in Paper 3, private as opposed to public sharing in situ (for example, on WhatsApp) is sometimes interpreted as coherent with one's disconnected state. Overall, findings drive me to claim that the "disconnected Self" can be an hyperreal technocultural embodiment of what it means to be a tourist in the acceleration age, sought and desired by tourists in NBT. Tourists may disconnect, but they may also perform and experience themselves as “disconnected” in NBT without completely disconnecting from their digitally extended Selves and related identity projects.

Following Lugosi (2016), I argue that the tourist’s digitally extended Self is a primary experiential actor within tourists’ NBT experiences. Moving from Heinonen (2022), I further claim that the assemblage of the digitally extended Self represents a key ex-situ and lifeworld-based experience valuator of NBT. Thus, one of my conclusions, contributing to the CD logic’s fundamental question of what the tourist is doing or trying to do (Heinonen et al., 2010), is that digital technocultures lead tourists to seek anything within the NBT servicescape that helps them fulfil identity projects within their digitally extended Self. At the same time, lifeworld-based negotiations with one’s digitally extended Self drive the assemblage of valued in-situ NBT tourismscapes. The findings lead me to contend to SD logic frameworks that none of these dynamics of experience valuation is *necessarily* related to co-creation with providers. In digital technocultures, actors involved in the construction, experience, and valuation of NBT naturalness are many and mostly tourist-based: their hyperconnected lifeworld, the expression of such lifeworld within their digitally extended Self, the desire for nature on which the tourist’s extended Self feeds in the name of specific identity projects, and finally tourists’ interpretive strategies in dealing with their digitally extended Self.

The tourism literature, particularly in SD frameworks of experience and experience valuation, assumes dualistic distinctions between the NBT tourist, as a coherent valuing unit, and the outside nature experienced while moving to and from destinations according to such unit’s demand for experiences. Moving from Llamas and Belk (2022), Roux and Belk (2019), and Sheth and Solomon (2014), my findings suggest instead that digital technocultures may fracture the tourist Self into multiple networked identity projects. In fact, NBT tourists as consumers host an increasing number of digital subjectivities within their digitally extended Selves, interpreting reality in different ways. Tourists are contested between them in terms of who, what and how to value. In Baudrillardian terms, they are all compelling simulations of "you", demanding attention and telling "you" what to value and experience in NBT. On one hand, they are all very persuasive in terms of influencing what and how to value in one's experience as, to quote Ahn and Bailenson, "when an entity that looks exactly like you tries to persuade you, can you say no?" (2014, p.135). On the other hand, following Kozinets et al. (2017), they all differ depending on the digital environment they are networked and embedded in. Moving from Gymóthy (2013), I contend that digital technocultures value the projection of not one *homo narrans* but varied *homo narrantes* that are fragmented storytellers about the same person. An important consequence, which should be explored more in future research, is that the latter's contradictions can even impair and fragment a tourist's development of a clear and stable sense of self-identity as an experiencer. According to Appel et al. (2016), a lack of clarity, consistency, and uncertainty about one's Self, often arising from multiple and incoherent pressures of social comparison, are evidence of self-fragmentation in digital environments. Tourists' digitally extended Self emerging in my findings (especially in Papers 2 and 3) provides compelling clues of such pressures and attempts to escape them in NBT.

The liminoid, rather than the liminal, is often ascribed to tourists based on the supposed impermanence of tourism liminality. Findings from Paper 2 make me contend that digital technocultures turn what would perhaps be only liminoid moments of play, creativity, and leisure into liminal Selves permanently aggregated to the tourist's digitally extended Self and solidified in ubiquitous digital communitas. As such, they imply a long-lasting liminal contribution to the tourist's identity works in a digitally elastic lifeworld. Accessing liminal Selves, even creating or modifying them, is instantaneous, ubiquitous, and not located within a specific mobility recognized by the literature (for example, a pre-experience or re-aggregation phase). Thus, I argue that digital technocultures make NBT tourists' liminality potentially permanent, as no clear separation, transition, or re-aggregation phases can be determined a priori. Furthermore, moving from Wilhoit (2017), my findings suggest that instantaneous and ubiquitous access to liminal digital subjectivities also makes liminality in NBT a liquid "routine". The findings in Papers 2 and 3 show that the NBT tourist is pressured to negotiate with such technocultural liminality during their experience. At the same time, as shown in Paper 3, an experiential disconnected Self is created on-site, according to subjective and negotiated embodiments of disconnection. Findings in Paper 3 show these are based on interpretive strategies which oscillate ambiguously between resistance to and embracement of marketplace ideologies of connectivity. Even while operating disconnection strategies, the NBT tourist is contested in-between physical and digital selves and in-between diverse digital selves. Thus, moving from Wilhoit (2017), Ybema et al. (2011) and Ellis and Ybema (2010), I conclude that the assemblage of identity projects composing the tourist's digitally extended Self is in a perpetual state of liminality, which tourists may control, yet also find problematic to deal with.

Due to the dynamics animating the tourist's digitally extended Self detailed above, and to connect back to RQ1, I further argue that as well as extending the Self, digital technocultures transform the tourist body into a heterotopia, a space whose identity is contested between several identity projects. Their role and impact during the NBT experience depend on how digital technologies are embodied and negotiated across travelling. Figure 2 in the next page provides a graphic visualization to facilitate the reader's comprehension. Drawing on my findings, a limited number of examples of digital subjectivities and e-tribes gravitating around the tourist heterotopian body are provided in the text boxes. Hashtags represent digital linkages between the subjectivities composing the digitally extended Self and other actors networked to it (for example, e-tribes, marketplace ideologies, and other digital subjectivities). However, any "tag" (for example, @) works similarly as a connector depending on the situation. The lines represent mutual, negotiated, and co-constructive relationships between the different entities according to how they connect to each other, physically or digitally. The figure is loosely based on the popular "tourism experience network" of Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009), depicting experiences as networks. The notable exception is that, due to the impact of digital technocultures, it depicts the tourist experiencer himself/herself as a heterotopian network. As such, I believe my conclusions represent a contribution to networked definitions of tourism experiences.

I argue that the networked and heterotopian nature of the NBT experiencer in digital technocultures should make researchers and practitioners skeptical towards existing multidimensional frameworks of experience, particularly towards their capacity to predetermine clear divides regarding typologies of experiences of naturalness and associated value dimensions, at least from the tourist point of view.

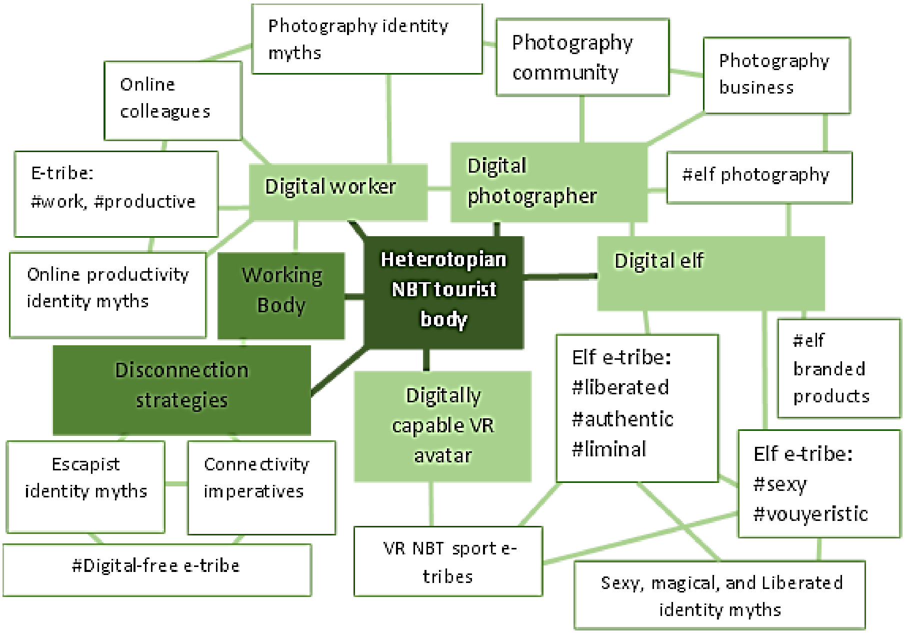

Figure 2: The tourist digitally extended self in NBT

Following Sheth and Solomon (2014) and Belk (2014), I contend that the tourist's digitally extended Self is "unbound" from these typologies in NBT. Namely, it can assemble *homo narrantes* about experiences liquidly from a plurality of consumer cultures, even in a way that existing literature considers inconsistent between different typologies of naturalness. Given the technocultural affordances illustrated in findings from Papers 1 and 2 and Figure 2 above, I can draw some examples. A tourist may perform themselves as #liberated from sexualized stigmas to a valued audience or e-tribe while simultaneously creating experience value out of being endorsed voyeuristically as #sexy by another valued audience. A digital elf in the forest, self-defined as #genuine and collectively endorsed as such within an e-tribe, may be part of the highly staged and commodified identity project of a microcelebrity selling branded products. Eluding a theoretical division between slow and fast adventures (Varley & Semple, 2015), a tourist may perform a valued digital subjectivity linked to slow adventures – for example, by using tags such as #timeless, #isolation, and #silence – as part of what physically is a high-risk, highly commodified, popularity-driven and crowded fast adventure. Eluding dualisms between escapism in nature and mobile connectivity (Elmahdy et al., 2017; Dickinson et al., 2016; Gretzel, 2010), tourists may perform escapist Selves while inhabiting working bodies; for example, as digital nomads or while checking emails. Tourists may even connect to the Internet ubiquitously on-site to perform a valued disconnected self by using specific tags, switching off connectivity, and then returning periodically to check attention scores. Eluding traditional divides between experiences of solitude and crowdedness in nature (Vidon et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2016), they may perform a Self tagged by #solitude to please a crowd, even in real-time. Tourists could construct several of these examples of digital subjectivities simultaneously in different private, public, or professional digital environments. Following Kozinets et al. (2017), these subjectivities greatly influence how digital subjectivities are constructed and valued. Overall, I believe that digital technocultures challenge theoretical frameworks attributing a coherent dimensionality to NBT experiences, because the tourist itself is extended into a heterotopian network of experiencers.

I conclude that NBT perspectives assuming "the NBT tourist" as an individual, coherent, and monistic experiencer separated from its environments according to tangible mobilities (such as home and destination) need to be problematized in increasingly pervasive and ubiquitous digital technocultures. This is even more necessary as we move towards metaverse-mediated tourism where, as recent studies have also recognized (Buhalis et al., 2022; Koo et al., 2022), I believe tourist identities are increasingly liquid and blurred. As shown in Paper 4, VR extends the tourist body into several dream-like avatars that can "be" and "do" NBT tourism, regardless of physical bounds and constraints. The NBT tourist is increasingly empowered to add these avatars to his/her digitally extended Self and as powerful ex-situ experiencers and valuators of tourism. Experience value dimensions (aesthetic, epistemic, altruistic, hedonic, eudemonic, etc.) shift ambiguously across the journey according to how they are constructed within the different personas composing the digitally extended Self. According to the emerging ontological equivalence between the physical and the digital in tourists' digitally elastic lifeworlds, some dimensions may exist only digitally and yet be valued similarly to (or even more than) physical ones within one's NBT experiencescape. There may be one tourist body in NBT experiencescapes, but, to reconnect to RQ1, digital technocultures extend the number of "experiencers" within it according to the dynamics illustrated here.

4.2.2. RQ2: Digital technocultures and naturalness

As well as the tourist's experience of himself/herself being in nature, I argue that digital technocultures condition the naturalness that is experienced and desired in NBT, as nature too is "extended" in the networks of digital technocultures. This section presents my arguments for how this is the case, answering to the second RQ of this thesis.

The literature acknowledges that tourists in the acceleration age move liquidly across experiential realms, regardless of where they are. As they do so, they also recast experiences of destinations ubiquitously as they please in their digital realms. I agree with Van Neuen and Scarles (2022) and Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) that this liquefies the ties between digital and material consumer experiences. Consequently, I maintain that digital technocultures move the naturalness of NBT further away from the materiality of nature of NBT destinations. My findings, particularly in Papers 1, 2 and 4, suggest that digital technocultures dematerialize nature's experience and valuation – such as from physical perceptions – yet they also spectacularize nature's immaterial mythologies and simulate their sensescapes. Consequently, and addressing RQ2, I argue that digital technocultures bring the experience of naturalness closer to a hyperreal experience of wilderness. I agree with Vidon et al. (2018) and Leather and Gibson (2018) that wilderness is craved for reasons that are embedded in the tourist's lifeworld, yet is increasingly impossible to attain in its materiality. Therefore, my findings lead me to hold that the nature of NBT is increasingly consumed, experienced, and valued as a simulation of wilderness by digital technocultures. Kozinets et al. (2017) defined digital technocultures of gastronomy as "food porn" and "gastro porn". "Food porn" designates unattainable, immaterial, symbolic, and utopian portrayals of food that value specific traits of food experiences (plenitude, thickness, vibrant colours, etc.) at the expense of others. Food is "pornified" due to the symbolic value of abundance, excess, and the plethora of a commodity in consumer cultures, which, when not attainable, are commodified and consumed as simulations. "Food porn" produces hyperreal imaginaries of food experiences co-constructed by digital communities. These populate digital subjectivities and move the experience, value and desire for food and eating habits towards extremes in marketplaces. Linking again to RQ2, the findings lead me to claim that nature in digital technocultures is increasingly subjected to a similar collective “pornification” as wilderness. Similarly to food, the latter is conveyed by the computer networks, smartphones, social media, and VEs considered across the papers as, for nature too, “the gigantic bonfire of our desires is online, all the time” (Kozinets et al., 2017, p.678). As it is fundamental in detailing my answer to RQ2, I will explain the dynamics of such pornification below.

Across my papers, and following Howes (2019), I argue that experiences of naturalness are constructed and valued in and by digital technocultures, other than materially perceived in situ and then shared digitally as in SD logic frameworks. In particular, my findings show that digital technocultures push nature’s sensoriality towards ideal and utopian dimensions whose experience value depends on one’s lifeworld. Other than sublime and highly contrasted visuals of nature, examples provided across the papers are sublime silence, emptiness, softness, cleanness, and coldness. Both real and utopian sensescapes are tied by tourists into experiential stories about nature where tourists contextualize their digital subjectivities. In the context of online photography examined in Papers 1 and 2, affordances granted by social media (such as filters, postprocessing, texts, hashtags, and geotags) make it possible to frame nature as sensorially extraordinary, sublime, grandiose, when not fabulated, untamed, and magical landscapes. Such qualities are emphasized to solidify states of being, particularly in connection to digital subjectivities and their stories about fantastical characters, survivalists, and challenging, solitary, and thrilling adventures. E-tribes of the digitally extended Self consume, certify, endorse, and further empower them on online social media such as Instagram. Recent literature speculates that this is increasingly done in the Metaverse too (Buhalis et al., 2022; Kozinets, 2022; Koo et al., 2022).

Indeed, Paper 4 provides examples of evocative stories about virtual experiences of the wilderness and how the multidimensionality of such experience is spectacularized and valued according to the VR tourist's lifeworld. This is particularly visible in reviews shared on the social app Oculus.

Digital technocultures wrap nature with hyperreal and fabulated experiential dimensions, which moving from Vidon et al. (2018), I regard as utopianist traits of wilderness. Nevertheless, my findings suggest that such wilderness' "genuineness" or "authenticity" may be ecstatically praised at the same time in pornified wilderness. Very recent literature has acknowledged that hyperreal dimensions of authenticity and genuineness are attached to nature in NBT to solidify the tourists' interpretation of themselves as genuine (Nagle & Vidon, 2021; Vidon, 2019). My findings indicate that crafting stories contextualized within a "genuine" experience of nature is particularly important for digital subjectivities expressing liminal and fabulated Selves. This is especially visible in Paper 2, but also to a minor extent in Paper 4, particularly in stories about VR avatars able to virtually overcome real-life barriers to experience nature. I argue that, by contextualizing such selves in a "genuine" experience of nature, the Self's liminality can be collectively interpreted and endorsed in the tourist's C2C networks as truly authentic and genuine, regardless of how fantastic or magical it is. Consequently, I conclude that digital technocultures facilitate the liquid flow of utopia and authenticity in pornifying wilderness for identarian purposes.

While Kozinets et al. (2017) linked "food porn" to hedonic dimensions of consumption, I contend that the pornification of wilderness link to liminal and eudemonic dimensions too. This is due to the intense desire for eudemonic experiences increasingly linked to tourism and NBT (Cooper & Buckley, 2021).

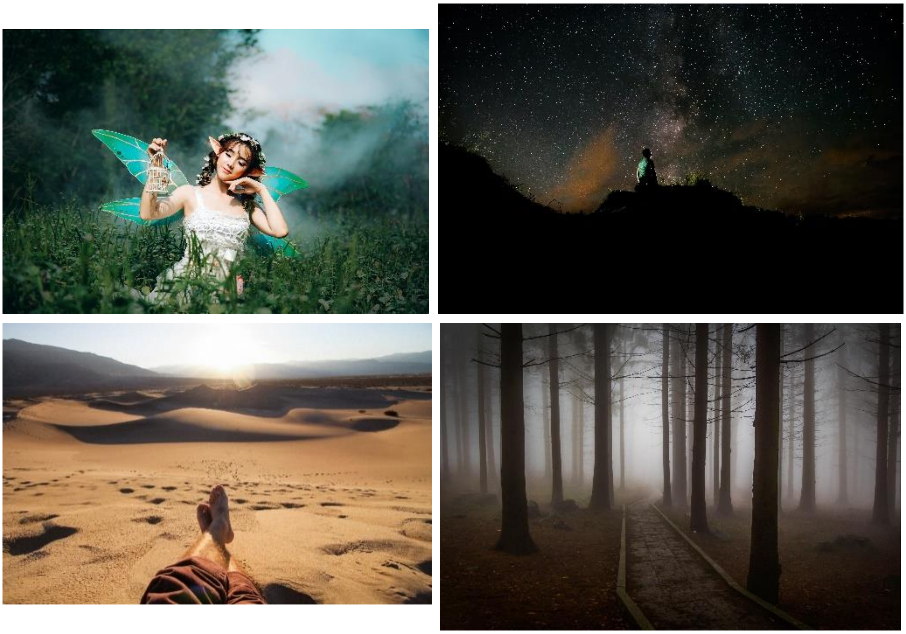

Figure 3: naturalness in online photography

Examples in Papers 1, 2, and 4 show that, through stories on social media and the Metaverse, digital technocultures pornify the wilderness' transformative potential and contribution to one's flourishment (Ahn et al., 2019; Filep & Laing, 2019), self-improvement and achievements (Galeone & Sebastiani, 2021), environmental mastery (Yang, Zhang et al., 2021; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016); contributions to skills and personal goals valued in one's lifeworld (Filep & Laing, 2019; Huta & Ryan, 2010). In the Metaverse, Paper 4 shows that dream-like empowerments of the body in nature, its mobility and sensoriality, and the sometimes transformational, fantastic experience of such empowerments, are meaningfully integrated into digital communities and real-world relationships and spaces. So too are the dream-like frontier and wild scenarios where such experiences occur.

I asserted before that the digitally extended Self is "unbound" from the materiality of the Self. Similarly, pornified wilderness is "unbound" from the materiality of nature, and tourists can shape it artfully as they please. However, digital technocultures also make such supposedly "unbound" digital recasting of nature subjected to marketplace ideologies about experiencing nature. From a point of view informed by SCOT, such ideologies attempt to bring closure to individuals' interpretive flexibility to recast their experience of nature, and discipline it into socially determined canons of pornification. According to the findings, such canons are particularly disciplined by attention and endorsement seeking, which, following Yang and Kirillova (2023), limit tourists' agency. Particularly in Papers 1 and 2, findings suggest that tourists contribute to "closing" such canons while aggregating their recast selves in e-tribes, surveilling themselves, and disciplining their experience of nature to attention imperatives. However, in agreement with CCT, the findings also suggest that nature's pornification in digital technocultures is contested across personal identity projects and e-tribal networks. I do not disagree with Smith (2021; 2018) that, for specific identity projects shown across Papers 1 and 2, wilderness is predominantly a canonical "landscape for likes", pornified and homologated by disciplinary powers of the attention economy. The findings suggest that tourists may value canonical pornified wilderness due to the endorsement it brings to some digital subjectivities (for example, an influencer or photographer). Competing for likes highly disciplines the pornification of wilderness according to dimensions such as status, esteem, and the social and epistemic values attributed to

experiencing the wilderness. Following Pielichaty (2015) and Thomassen (2012), such competition may represent a commodifying logic jeopardizing the liminal nature of pornified wilderness and the *communitas* gravitating around it.
However, the findings show that many tourists openly avoid such logic. In Papers 1 and 2 in particular, the pornification of nature's sensorial, hedonic, and magical dimensions is reported by participants as non-commercial, liminal, highly subjective, and non-canonical. As such, Paper 2 shows that pornified wilderness also has a crucial role within NBT tourists' assemblages of liminal selves and *communitas*. Thus, I believe that pre-determinations around how pornified wilderness is commodified, negotiated, interpreted, and valued by tourists are difficult. The literature acknowledges that VR experiences are increasingly social and integrated within one's social media presence (Buhalis et al., 2022; Kozinets, 2022; Koo et al., 2022). Thus, I believe that similar marketplace ideologies will likely animate the assemblages of avatars' experience of nature in the Metaverse soon. Immersive netnography in Paper 4 shows that avatars can already be discussed, scrutinized and endorsed on VR-only social platforms such as Oculus and VR threads on Discord and Reddit.

Whether facilitated or not by NBT servicescapes, tourists' digital technocultures condition naturalness on-site. My findings in Paper 3 are evidence that, following Kozinets (2019, p.621), every time we "refuse to take our mobile phone on vacation […] we are, inevitably, also consuming and co-creating technocultures". I am convinced that disconnection is a digital technoculture in NBT. Paper 3 shows that tourists' negotiations with ex-situ technocultures of the Self and nature embedded in their mobiles reflect and shape how nature is sought, desired, imagined, experienced, and valued on-site.

Following Mkono and Markwell (2017), my findings also provide evidence of how e-lienating such technocultures have become in the eyes of the NBT tourist. I argue that where daily, e-lienating uses of mobiles inhibit it, disconnection in NBT also exalts the construction of nature's experience, its valuation and desire. Following ANT, a "no" to mobiles is a technocultural no, translated into a liberatory "yes" to nature: but what" nature"? A technocultural nature, whose experience as a "disconnected" tourismscape is constructed and exalted in relation to a negative experience ascribed to mobiles. Thus, for instance, a sublime silence of nature is also experienced and valued due to the excessive noise translated into mobiles.
Most of the tourism literature on the subject of disconnection has abandoned the view of disconnection as referring to radically off-the-grid experiences in technology-dead zones (Gretzel, 2010), common while I was drafting Paper 3. I maintain that digital technocultures in one's lifeworld always define, to some extent, the escapism grounding experiences of nature and how such escapist nature is embodied, perceived, and projected to others who share the tourist's experiencescape of nature. Thus, pervasive and ubiquitous digital technocultures influence the pornification of nature in NBT experiencescapes holistically, in-situ and ex-situ. Within the disconnected tourismscapes of Paper 3, experience valuations of nature are always linked to digital technocultures of acceleration, surveillance, and attention. Against them, NBT tourists negotiate a new, disconnected, and hyperreal wilderness linked to utopian plenitudes of silence, absence, time, isolation, recovery, reflexivity, and eudemonic and hedonic liberation. Though not detailed by Paper 3, Paper 2 provides evidence that such type of wilderness experience (and the experiencer it belongs to) can be performed online by hyperreal #disconnected digital subjectivities later, earlier, or even

live during the journey, according to subjective embodiments of connectivity within a disconnected tourismscape.

Similarly to “food porn”, social media and the Metaverse diffuse pornified wilderness at an unprecedented scale in the tourist’s lifeworld and identity projects. The exposure to imaginaries of pornified nature and selves in nature competing for attention on a broad mix of social media, including Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, is incalculable. The rapid development of XR technologies such as VR and AR, the vision of VEs as user-created and interconnected within the Metaverse, as well as the decrease in access to nature and time spent outdoors, all mean that exposure to pornified digital wilderness is likely destined to increase in the future. This will make digital technocultures even more dominant in shaping consumption cultures of nature and thus naturalness in NBT experiencescapes. In response to consumer demand, NBT servicescapes are also becoming increasingly digitalized (Sthapit et al., 2022; Mandic & McCool, 2022; Fennell, 2021), which I believe will only multiply the exposure of NBT experiencescapes to digital technocultures of naturalness. Evidently, pornified wilderness drives tourists’ valuation of nature within their lifeworlds – which, following CD logic – greatly impacts how nature is sought, desired and valued in situ by NBT tourists. Pornified wilderness also represents a pervasive consumer culture with which, while becoming increasingly digitalized, NBT servicescapes interact across B2C, C2B, and B2B relationships digital and in situ. As such, it is extremely important for NBT researchers and practitioners to understand their breadth, complexity, and impacts over experiences and valuations of nature, as I have hopefully expressed in this section of the chapter.

4.2.3. Implications: Interacting with NBT digital technocultures

Marketers and branders across several industries feel threatened by how dominant consumers' technocultural networks are becoming in shaping experiences and their valuation and by how the locus of experience valuation is moving ex-situ (Moisander et al., 2020; Heinonen, 2022). However, I maintain that such fear indicates conservativism towards specific paradigms of knowledge dominating academia and business decision-making more than anything else. Across the thesis, I have provided compelling evidence to abandon the idea that quantitative, in-situ, provider-, and resource-based approaches *exhaust* consumer knowledge regarding NBT experiences and experiencers. Conversely, my findings provide evidence that "thick" knowledge from naturalistic, interpretive, and ex-situ research can be highly complementary in informing providers on tourists' valuations of the experience of themselves and the world. Such knowledge is crucial to understand how naturalness is constructed and valued in NBT. The understanding of naturalness and tourists in NBT as pornified wilderness and digitally extended Self suggested by my findings also represent what Kozinets (2011) define as "high-level consumer insights". These are the starting point for identifying experience trends, innovative strategies for co-creating value, relationship marketing, and positioning, as well as understanding how to manage personalized experience encounters (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015; Helkkula et al., 2012; Kozinets, 2011). Following Mason (2005), insights such as the ones provided by my findings are also crucial for understanding tourists' interpretation and experience of nature, which NBT experience management relies on.

While interpretive methods in tourism marketing and experience management are known (Yachin, 2018), their use according to consumer-centered understanding is scarce (Heinonen, 2022). Thus, I argue that this thesis represents a contribution regarding the way tourists and experiences can be studied in tourism to gain CD-based thick knowledge and high-level consumer insights. My insights have been developed according to a specific way of approaching and interacting with NBT tourists and their digital technocultures online. The importance of approaching and interacting with tourists is recognized even in extant SD frameworks of experience and value. I agree with Neuhofer et al. (2012) and Neslin et al. (2006) that "touchpoints" where NBT tourists and providers interact are many in digital technocultures and should be used to approach tourists. However, my findings lead me to propose some managerial implications in relation to dominant ideas of "interaction".

First, my findings show that other than helping providers to deliver value propositions or integrate consumer resources, digital technocultures construct and diffuse valued identity myths, marketplace cultures and ideologies about naturalness and the Self in NBT. When interacting with tourists, providers should learn about how tourists integrate such entities into their identity projects, as well as how they impact tourist experiences and their valuation. Drawing on CD logic, I maintain that "thick knowledge" of these aspects helps NBT providers understand, and thus manage, how their offerings fit into complex lifeworlds and what other relationships besides BC2 and C2B play a crucial role within such lifeworlds in valuing the experience of their offerings.

Furthermore, my findings imply that providers should not assume that the timeline linking touchpoints, and the experiential valuation they refer to, can be predetermined as hinted by most SD frameworks. In other words, in digital technocultures, providers cannot assume that tourists share with them an objective experience of time as clearly segmented according to SD pre/on-site/post-experience and B2C relationships. The latter relies on pre-deterministic tourism mobilities, which my findings contend are "unbound" in digital technocultures. Papers 1 and 2 both show that the ubiquitousness of tourists' digitally extended Self multiplies the C2B and C2C contexts and relationships where the tourist is "present" at any given time, and only a few of them are shared with providers in-situ. While being present in situ, the tourist may already be planning, fantasizing, nostalgizing, and daydreaming about pasts and futures, and about digital traces of them that can be reached instantaneously and ubiquitously. At any point in time and space, the tourist crafts stories online about the timeline of what they call their "experience" according to personal identity projects and marketplace ideologies expressed in their digitally extended Self. Following the ANT approach used in Paper 3, the tourist's pasts and futures embedded in timeless avatars and ex-situ pornification of wilderness are actor-networks of tourists' tourismscapes in-situ and ex-situ due to the ubiquitousness of tourists' mobiles. The evolutions of metaverse journeys further liquify linear and objective timelines of tourism experience valuations. When and where is the on-site "present" of being at the destination described by SD frameworks truly experienced and valued in VR? And according to what experience dimensions? How many of these dimensions are truly provider-led? The literature (e.g., Koo et al., 2022; v Buhalis et al., 2022) is starting to recognize that VR tourists can experience ex-situ hedonic dimensions of destinations normally seen as in-situ, when and where they wish. My findings in Paper 4 evidence that ex-situ tourists also experience eudemonic dimensions of NBT experiences in VR according to timelines and C2C networks belonging to their lifeworld other than BC2 encounters.

I argue that the above represent important theoretical implications for research on digitalization and its integration in NBT experiences. Overall, NBT providers and researchers should interpret "interacting" in touchpoints as listening and learning from the consumer about how his/her lifeworld entrenches digitalization before imposing experience value prepositions about nature that are guided by predetermined ideas about time, mobilities, and their experience dimensions online and offline. Other than inductive in-situ methods, NBT providers can easily use the digital technology tourists use to build their digitally networked Self and naturalness, such as social media, apps, and VEs within the Metaverse, to access tourists' digital technocultures. However, I maintain that before being interpreted deductively as an access that precedes an exchange, a resource integration, or a predetermined B2C value co-creation as in SD frameworks, such access should be interpreted inductively as an opportunity to learn.

When animated by such understanding of interactions, NBT practitioners can quickly implement netnography and immersive netnography similar to this thesis. Other than research methods, Kozinets (2022; 2011) defined netnography and immersive netnography as a "marketer's secret weapon" to both understand and relate to consumers and their experiences. Methodologically speaking, I argue that such a "secret weapon" requires NBT researchers and providers to develop, more than technical skills, an open reflexivity about where, who, and what to look for when investigating experiences, as well as to develop awareness about how "thick" the data that one collects about them really is.

Another important implication of netnography is that "touchpoints" in digital technocultures should not be seen by providers and researchers as predetermined depending on pre/in-situ/post mobilities. Conversely, they can be created at any moment as points of approach and learning through interactions. As exemplified visually in Figure 4 below, by establishing various netnographic entrees and interactions on social media and the Metaverse, NBT providers can create touchpoints to tap digitally into the network of the digitally extended Selves of the NBT tourist. Doing so provides in-depth knowledge of NBT tourists' lifeworld-based C2C and C2B relationships invisible to the provider, identity myths, and symbolic and experiential models of nature and the world embedded in marketplace cultures.

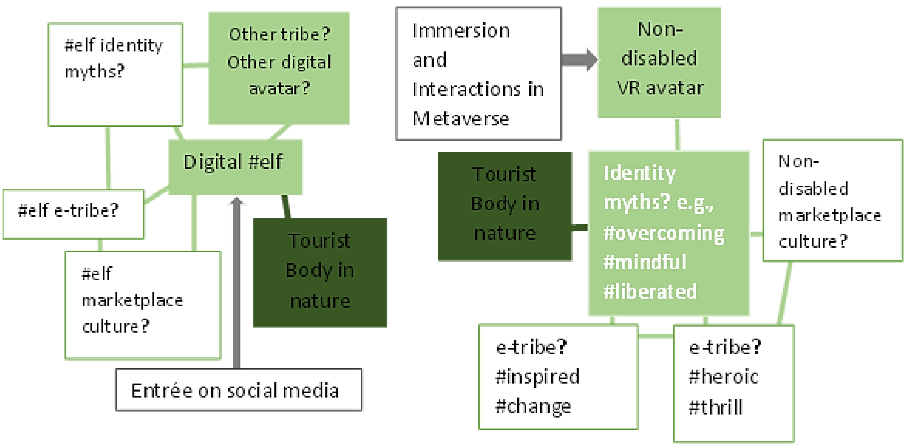

Figure 4: CD-based interactions with the tourist's digital extended self

I fully agree with Koo et al. (2022) and Gursoy et al. (2022) that understanding virtual personas in digitally elastic lifeworlds increasingly helps explore attitudes and values towards destinations and experiences of travelers. An implication is that it is crucial to advance our understanding of how to approach and interact with such virtual personas, and I believe this thesis represents an example of such advancement in NBT.

NBT practitioners may establish interactions with already known e-tribes of tourists that are deemed to be in line with their offerings or organizational goals, such as photographers, naturalists, adventurers, sportspeople, and environmentalists. Nevertheless, as I did, they can adopt a more inductive location- or activity-based approach and discover new and emerging tribes of digital selves depending on the location or the activity of interest. Examples from my findings are non-disabled, heroic, and meditative VR avatars in climbing, and artists, magical creatures, cynophiles, and digital personas related to emerging spiritualities, new age, Wiccan, and paganist groups walking in forests. These personas have been encountered inductively during netnography and immersive netnography in Papers 1, 2 and 4. Overall, these are poorly recognized by NBT managerial frameworks as NBT tourists compared to traditional outdoor leisure and sports activities segments, and should be better represented in NBT research. My findings also imply that personal contacts established as *participants* with digital personas and relevant e-tribes intensify the thickness of consumer insights that one can gather. Notably, following CD logic, this makes it possible to unveil further C2C valuing relationships that may be otherwise hidden from the netnographer. It can also allow the netnographer to better understand how the tourist's physical body in nature connects to digital identity myths, e-tribes and marketplace cultures disciplining experience valuation. These represent important methodological implications on how to study, gain knowledge and insights on NBT experiencers and experiences.

Drawing on Kozinets (2011), I maintain that netnographic approaches to digital technocultures help NBT providers gather knowledge more quickly, independently, and conveniently than traditional approaches. This has important managerial implications for NBT SMEs and micro firms, which often lack the resources and know-how to use traditional approaches to acquire consumer knowledge and insights (Yachin, 2018; Fiore et al., 2007). A wholly interpretive and humanistic netnographic approach can help providers tailor experience management according to tourists' symbolic landscapes and holistic experiential needs. It can also help build relationships within tourists' networked lifeworlds outside of on-site service encounters. According to Prentice (1995), in-depth consumer insights in NBT help craft adequate and tailored processes of experiencing and interpreting "the significance of a place so that they [the visitors] can enjoy it more, understand its importance" (1995, p. 55). Vespestad and Lindberg (2011) and Mason (2005) added the understanding and targeting of potential niche NBT markets, the providers' roles based on tourists' view of the natural phenomena, use of signs, and storytelling at information centers. Such knowledge is crucial for most of the servicescape of NBT tourismscapes, as it informs tourists' valuations of naturalness (Machnik, 2022; Fredman et al., 2012). Based on my findings, I contend that such knowledge is incomplete without an understanding of selves' and e-tribes' symbolic universes, identity myths, marketplace cultures, and digital practices linked to them. The experience of naturalness in NBT greatly depends on rituals, symbolism, deep feelings, escapism, utopianism, liminality, and relationships (Margaryan & Fredman, 2021; Hall & Page, 2020;

Turner, 1974). Thus, I argue that it is necessary to fully understand the identity projects and tribes that such dimensions and their valuation belong to in a tourist's own phenomenology. The latter implies the need for "thick" knowledge on which lifeworlds are NBT experiences valuable to, how and why. "Thick" knowledge, in turn, asks researchers and providers to re-evaluate how to approach tourists and their sense of Self and nature. I believe my thesis provides an alternative and valuable example of an approach.

4.2.4. Implications: The role of DFT in digital technocultures

The NBT tourist's digitally extended Self and the pornified wilderness presented in this chapter are evidence that digital technocultures do not merely *reflect* but *construct* identities of NBT tourists and experiences and valuation of naturalness. Accordingly, digital technocultures address tourists' needs to construct their identity in a way that extend the Self and pornify nature as wilderness. Based on findings from the papers, the tourist's need and dynamics of "building himself/herself" digitally has been linked in this kappa to CCT, liminality, and eudemonia, yet also to an alienation of the Self constituent of humans and exacerbated by modernity and capitalism. In Eastern perspectives, alienation is also linked to the human craving for making permanent and stable, through consumption, a Self that is by nature impermanent when not illusory (Thich, 2018; Shiah, 2016; Wright, 2017). These theoretical perspectives need to be more represented in the tourism and NBT literature, where they have clear theoretical implications. I believe they provide a much-needed humanistic theoretical understanding of why hyperreal subjectivities and experiences of wilderness are so diffused and valued in contemporary digital technocultures.

However, while building the tourist identity and their experience, digital technocultures also threaten to e-lienate (Mkono & Markwell, 2017) the tourist from their in-situ presence and their tangible and intangible dimensions. When informed by findings from Paper 3 on the matter, the findings in Papers 1 and 2 lead me to believe that a critical driver of e-lienation in NBT is the pervasiveness and ubiquitousness of the tourist's digitally extended Self. Notably, its ubiquitous entrenchment into myriad networked subjectivities competing for attention, presence, and experiential valuation, of which the tourist body is a conflicted heterotopia. Moving from Geertz (1973), I claim that the simulations of Self and wilderness that tourists co-create to help make sense of themselves also entrap them within e-lienating ex-situ marketplace cultures of valuation. Paper 3 shows that even in the absence of DFT experiences facilitated or encouraged by providers, NBT tourists seek to construct personally disconnected tourismscapes where "disconnected" is often translated as "liberated" and "able to escape". In Paper 3 I also show that experiencing such a "liberated" tourismscape is a crucial thing that "NBT tourists try to do with NBT" in digital technocultures.

Accordingly, I believe that digital-free travel (DFT) and the linked joy of missing out (JOMO) in NBT can be seen as a valued search for a sense of being truly present in nature, which is lost in digital technocultures. Furthermore, I argue that DFT experiences are a way for NBT tourists to escape from what Rosa (2013) called the "shrinking of the present" in the acceleration age. Notably, findings from Papers 3 and 2 show that "being less present" in the physical world is a crucial experiential theme driving participants away from their digital avatars on social media and mobiles. When not subjectively negotiated in situ as in Paper 3, the tourists' digital identities and the technological artefact that carry them link to estrangement from the materiality of NBT destinations and local actors, as well as the stress, distraction, loss of relaxation and immersion commonly ascribed to e-lienation. Such digital identities also suggest a link to FOMO, in that there is a constant fear of missing out on experiences and activities essential for tourists' networked digital personas composing their extended Self. Therefore, the NBT digitally extended Self emerges as a critical example in NBT of what Neuhofer (2016) called "weapons of mass distraction" from who, where, and with whom the tourist is physically at the destination.

B2C intimate interactions with tourists, particularly in-situ, are considered by NBT providers as opportunities to generate rich knowledge from tourists about the complexity of their experiences and the multiple dimensions in which value is created (Yachin, 2018). At the same time, B2C interactions are also a critical locus where providers feel they can co-create experience value with tourists (Yachin, 2018; Sørensen & Jensen 2015). Thus, I believe that being less present in-situ due to the plethora of C2C and C2B networks composing the tourist's idea of Self has important implications for tourists' intimate involvement in B2C experience encounters. It also turns NBT providers into stakeholders of DFT and JOMO the moment at which, I argue, the latter's experiential baseline is understood as the search for a valued sense of being "truly present" and thus able to engage in valued relationships in the present. Fortunately, NBT is uniquely positioned to help tourists by further facilitating and guiding tourists' achievement of DFT and JOMO, as NBT enjoys a privileged relationship with off-the-grid experiences (Buckley & Cooper, 2022). My thesis advances some managerial implications in this regard.

In relation to the emerging literature on DFT, I contend that DFT experiences should not limit the NBT provider to a passive role; for example, simply allowing NBT tourists to enact their selective unplugging strategies, or what in Paper 3 I call disconnected tourismscapes. As shown in Paper 3, NBT tourists often define themselves as "disconnected" while maintaining a personalized degree of connectivity or sharing their experience with more connected peers. Conversely, I argue that NBT providers can actively lead the tourists towards a more mindful "switch off" his/her digital extended Self during NBT experiences. Mindful DFT could be encouraged by building full awareness of the effects of e-lienation, self-fragmentation and FOMO caused by digital elasticity, some of them mentioned across this thesis. NBT providers could leverage on the tourist's desire to construct disconnected tourismscapes in NBT based on a thick understanding of how such desire is valued within the tourist's lifeworld, as shown in Paper 3. NBT providers could then design, guide, and facilitate mindful DFT mainly by incorporating them into existing NBT activities or by starting new well-being and mindfulness-oriented experiences where DFT plays a crucial role as facilitator of attention, presence, and immersion. Examples are spiritual and yoga retreats, forest bathing, and guided slow adventures, which the literature is starting to recognize as being increasingly and positively mediated by disconnection (Hansen et al., 2017; Tribe & Mkono, 2017).

Key experiential dimensions of such a mindful switch-off of the digitally extended Self, with proven linkages to eudemonic well-being, are self-discovery, self-acceptance and reflexivity (Conti, 2022b; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016). These should be targeted by NBT providers. Proactively guiding a mindful switch-off can lead NBT tourists to higher well-being through reducing anxiety and stress and, specularly, to increased focus, awareness, and mindful realization of what is in the moment. I refer to "being present" here as a mindful realization of both the destination and the tourist's physical Self. Achieving a mindful presence of this kind is increasingly linked to self-flourishment, restoration, and mental health, which today are some of the main drivers of tourists' demand of NBT (Buckley & Cooper, 2022; Cooper & Buckley, 2021). It can link to overcoming guilt arising from FOMO and not being afraid to be exposed to what novelty, memorability, and adventure arguably means in the acceleration age – that is, "being out there without technology" (Conti, 2022b). Moreover, it can also lead to being concretely aware and joyful about one's surroundings and thoroughly enjoying what is available based on concrete awareness of one's body and embodied feelings (Jacobsen, 2021; Harris, 2014; Watts, 2011; Crook, 2014). Overall, I suggest that mindful DFT experiences imply a guided stabilization of tourists' heterotopian body into a mindful body that enjoys missing out on the contradictive pressures of his/her digitally extended Self.

An NBT experience of this kind can be genuinely transformative, with societal implications aligning mindful DFT with sustainable experience management goals, particularly in protected areas (Buckley & Cooper, 2022; Fredman & Margaryan, 2021; Mason, 2005). On one hand, by guiding the forging of a mindful disconnected persona, networked more to its physical surroundings, DFT can also network tourists' identity projects towards a more mindful experience, empathy, and awareness of natural ecosystems in contrast to the massive flux of "pornified" wilderness his/her digital extended Self is constantly exposed to. Well-guided DFT can also encourage a lifestyle choice oriented towards having a more mindful approach to oneself and digitally extended Self in the long term, leading to extended health benefits (Aranda & Braig, 2018). Other than an increased well-being on the tourist's side, NBT providers will see the benefits of increased attention and focus brought by mindful DFT on any relationships that they want to establish with the tourist in-situ. While researching guided tours at Fulufjället National park, I noticed how guides' pathfinding and reflective storytelling, conducted in carefully managed, enclaved experiencescapes, could introduce highly focused tourists to transformative ideas of natural ecosystems' sense of time, placeness, and lifecycles (Conti, 2021). A mindful DFT's focus on presence is highly synergic with experiences of this kind, as it helps tourists be more receptive to in-situ transformative events, storytelling and experiential encounters.

The implications of adopting a CD perspective on experiences are not that the NBT provider is denied any active role in NBT experiencescapes. What CD logic does is to tell NBT providers to base such role on an emphatic, inductive and human understanding of what tourists desire, experience, and value in NBT, based on their identities, hermeneutics and lifeworlds. Together with CCT, CD logic posits that the latter are powerfully impacted by ex-situ cultural actors, invisible to the provider unless investigated, and located outside B2C relationships in-situ but shaping them at the same time. From this point of view, I believe that the mindful DFT management presented here is an implication coherent with my paradigmatic understanding of experiences and their valuation. While suggesting NBT providers to be inductive listeners, the insights provided in this thesis also suggest that they be pro-active in interacting with digital technocultures when needed.

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