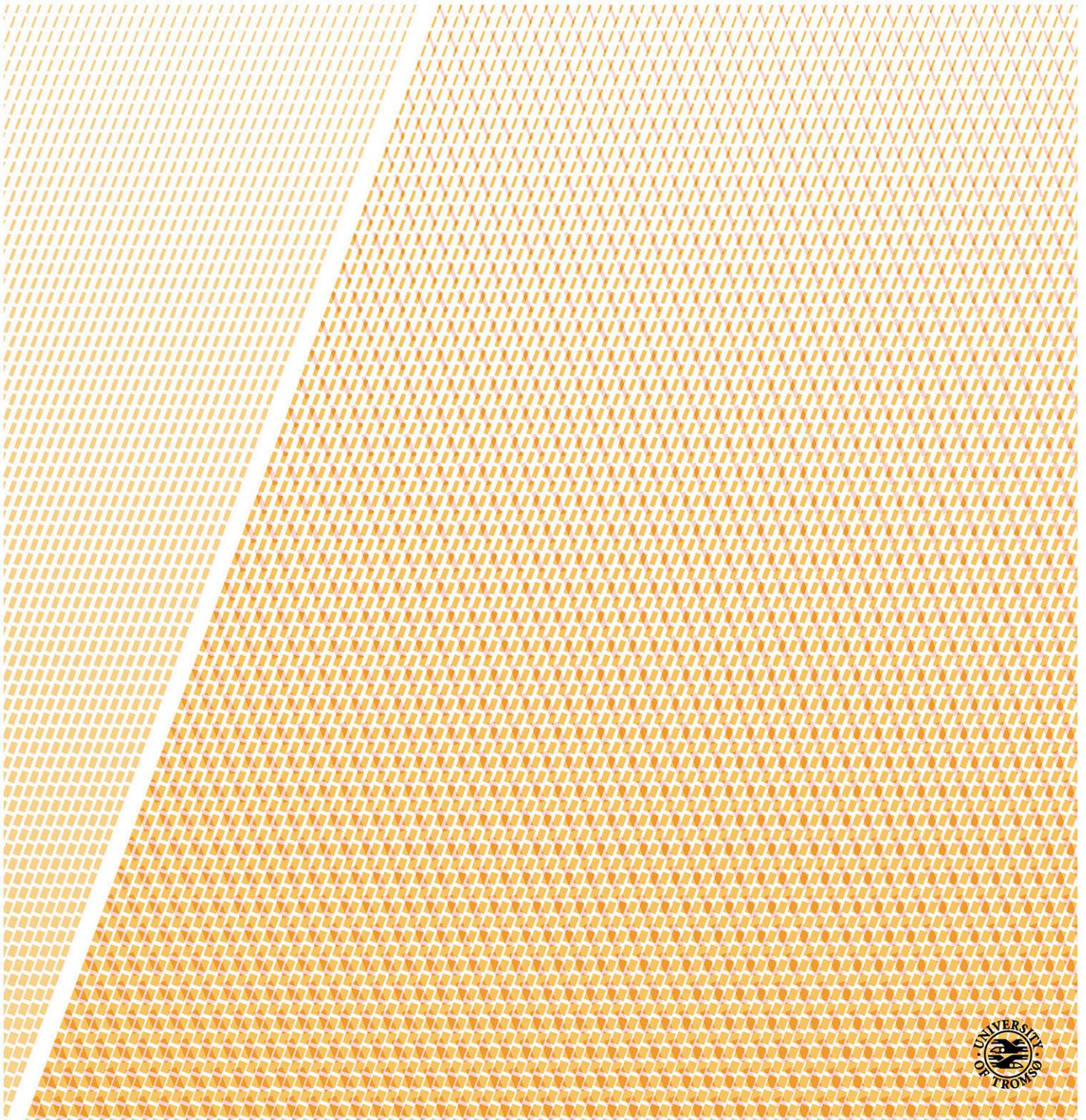


# Storytelling and story staging

*Co-creating value in tourism*

**Line Mathisen**

*A dissertation for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor – November 2013*





# Co-creating value through stories

## Storytelling and story staging in tourist activities

Line Mathisen

A dissertation for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Faculty of Biosciences, Fisheries and Economics

Tromsø University Business School

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	i
Abstract.....	ii
List of articles .....	iii
List of figures.....	iii
List of tables .....	iii
1. Introduction .....	1
Aim/Research questions (perspectives and precisions) .....	5
Storytelling as essential for value co-creation in tourist experiences .....	6
Summary of Study 1 .....	7
Summary of Study 2 .....	8
Summary of Study 3 .....	9
Summary of Study 4 .....	10
Structure of the thesis .....	11
2. Theoretical foundations .....	13
Co-creation .....	13
Storytelling and enhancement of value co-creation in tourist activities .....	15
Enacting the story .....	20
3. The research process.....	25
Philosophical foundations.....	25
Pragmatism.....	27
Symbolic interactionism .....	28
Research strategy.....	31
Elaboration on choice of methods .....	32
Ethical considerations.....	38
4. Findings and implications related to the individual studies.....	41

Key issues in Study 1 .....	41
Key findings in Study 2 .....	42
Study 3 and 4 .....	42
Key findings in Study 3 .....	42
Key findings in Study 4 .....	43
5. Summary of the findings .....	43
6. Implications for research and practice .....	45
7. Limitations.....	49
8. Future research .....	51
References .....	53
Articles (1-4).....	62

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is about tourism firms as co-creators of value in tourist activities. It will explore how tourism firms communicate, particularly by using storytelling, to enhance co-creation of value with tourists. A central perspective used in this thesis is Service Dominant Logic, a logic that posits that service providers can only co-create value with their customer, not for them (Vargo and Lush 2008). Through four articles, this thesis discusses and shows different ways to tell stories to engage with tourists during tourist pre-visit and visit encounters: storytelling as a value enhancer, storytelling as promotion, storytelling in guide-tourist interaction and storytelling as a way to stage a tourist activity.

The studies used an explorative quantitative and qualitative approach when collecting information: a quasi-experiment was used in order to collect information via a web survey, while semi-structured interviews and participant observation was used to explore interaction in tourist activities. An overall comparison of the study findings supports the thoughts on co-creation of value put forward in Service Dominant Logic, and suggests that an integrative perspective on storytelling can enhance value co-creation. This perspective on storytelling emphasises the importance of human resources, thus increasing the level of knowledge and skills in this domain becomes an important issue for tourism firms seeking to enhance value co-creation.

*Keywords:* Storytelling, communication, service dominant logic, tourist experience, operant resources, natural environment, tourism firm



## List of articles

Mathisen, L. (in press) Storytelling in a co-creation perspective, Chapter of the book: Co-creation of experience value – A tourist behavior approach, Eds: Joseph S. Chen, Muzzo Uysal and Nina K. Prebensen. CAB International (CABI Publishing)

Mathisen, L. and Prebensen, Nina K. (2013). Dramatizing an event through a promotional film: testing image effects. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(7) p. 672-689.

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## List of figures

Figure 1: Three ways storytelling can enhance co-creation of value .....5

Figure 2: Tourism firms and tourist communication, interaction and resource integration (adapted from Arnould et al., 2006) .....7

Figure 3: The extended use of storytelling (adapted from Schechner, 2003) .....23

Figure 4: Philosophy and theoretical perspectives .....31

## List of tables

Table 1: Comparison of philosophical approaches and their relation to knowledge and truth .....27

Table 2: Overview of the studies: Study 1 .....36

Table 3: Overview of the studies: Study 2 .....36

Table 4: Overview of the studies: Study 3 .....37

Table 5: Overview of the studies: Study 4 .....37



## 1. Introduction

Recent research in marketing and tourism addresses the importance of value co-creation in the interaction processes of consumer experiences as key for firms to inspire and increase the experience value of their offers (Prebensen, Woo and Chen, 2013; Prebensen, Woo, Chen, & Uysal, 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Marketing, through the mind-set of Service Dominant Logic (SD-Logic), has acknowledged that a focus on interactive offers is a prerequisite for firms seeking to stimulate co-creation of value (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006; Prebensen, 2013b). Nevertheless, the SD-Logic approach to co-creation has scarcely been explored. Consequently, this thesis focuses on the strategies of tourism firms towards increasing co-creation and tourist participation in their proposed activities.

The dynamic and processual view inherent in the value co-creation perspective on tourist experiences makes tourist involvement intrinsic to value creation, and thus foregrounds the focus on the co-creation process in the development of tourist activities. This implies that high levels of active participation increase the potential to enhance experience value through co-creation, as increased levels of activity influence a tourist's level of involvement (Prebensen, Woo, & Uysal, 2013). Active and involved tourists are linked to tourist satisfaction and intentions to revisit and recommend the experience, which adds to positive revenues for the firm and the destination (Prebensen, Vittersø, & Dahl, 2013; Prebensen, Woo, et al., 2013). Thus, for tourism firms, considering how to develop their offerings in such a way that they encourage the tourist to partake in the production of their experience can increase value for both the tourist and the firm, as experience value for the tourist and economic value for the firm (Prebensen, Vittersø, et al., 2013). Tourism firms can seek to co-create value with tourists by influencing their level of action through physiological and/or psychological activities, i.e. storytelling, in the consumption of the tourist activities, and in particular during interaction. During interaction, there are different ways to increase the tourist's level of participation, and this thesis proposes that both these levels and co-creation can be enhanced through (1) promotional activities, (2) guiding, and (3) staging (Fig 1). Central to all three premises is communication, in particular communication through storytelling. Storytelling constitutes an integral and specific resource demanding a perspective of communication that sets the agenda for the construction and management of the tourist activity. The framework suggested in this thesis encourages tourism firms to use storytelling as a

communication tool in terms of dramatizing promotional material, and in the guiding and staging of the environment.

Tourism firms often seek to attract tourists by creating particular images and communicating them through promotional stories generated by destination marketing organisations and/or other types of destination actors, such as event organisations (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). These stories often use the natural environment as a stage for tourist experiences, which are assembled and communicated in order to suggest specific values. Further, these values can be linked to particular understandings that generate sets of meanings related to the destination culture and/or nature (see e.g. Finnmarksløpet, 2012).

Communicating through stories can influence co-creation through imagination (Denning, 2006). For a tourist to be able to cognitively imagine themselves “in the story”, the promotional story or storyteller must gain their attention and influence their emotional attachment to, for example, the characters in the story (Jennifer Edson Escalas, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). This has implications for resource development in tourism firms, as both their storytelling resources, in terms of promotional activities and guide performance skills, and knowledge becomes important in order to maintain, or increase the level of identification, e.g. sharing values and knowledge that reflect tourist values and resources during storytelling. Finally, storytelling can be used to stage activities for tourists, i.e. to conceptualise and construct an activity as a story by using story themes or a story structure in the construction of an activity (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Mossberg, 2008; Mossberg & Johansen, 2006; Mossberg, Therkelsen, Huijbens, Björk, & Olsson, 2010), which constitutes the third premise. Storytelling as an integral perspective can be strategically incorporated and operationalised by adopting a performance metaphor, as this metaphor provides tourism firms with a useful process perspective in order to increase active participation, and the potential for value co-creation (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2007). Hence, the co-creation of value perspective in this thesis emphasises the joint effort of consumers and firms in value creation as illustrated in the SD-Logic mindset (Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, & Chan, 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2008), while the performance metaphor elucidates the use and allocation of resources in the co-creation process.

The managerial focus in this thesis implies concentration on tourists actively partaking in tourist experiences, and the resource use of tourism firms in terms of efforts to increase levels of

participation and involvement. Involvement is linked to issues of personal concern, such as tourist values (Celsi & Olson, 1988). Tourist values reflect cultural and societal value systems that can be influenced by situational stimuli such as promotion, a guide's knowledge and the use of skills and levels of staging (Celsi & Olson, 1988). Involvement, depends on the interplay of interaction processes (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka, 2008). Thus, a challenge for tourism firms is to offer activities that resonate with tourist attitudes and values. Tourist activities often propose different dimensions of interaction. Such dimensions include interactions with hosts and environments on different psychological and/or physical levels. Realisation of value propositions includes a focus on tourism firm resources, particularly in terms of communication knowledge and skills, and their sharing practices. In this thesis, sharing practices are linked to a tourism firm's ability to tell stories that tourists can use in order to create self-relevant meanings of their experience as it emerges. It is implied that indulging in storytelling and sharing stories makes tourists feel "better off": Sharing stories contributes to reflection and increased participation through resource integration e.g. learning, which enhances participant values related to identity and life (Chathoth, et al., 2012; Chen, Drennan, & Andrews, 2012; Prebensen, 2013a). The particular benefit for tourism firms is that by performing storytelling, and sharing stories, they can gain insight into tourist values and thoughts by observing responses to the stories performed. By analysing the way stories impact tourists, tourism firms can gain new knowledge during interaction processes which can be developed and used to further improve their offers (Christian Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008). Tourism firms access to tourist values through storytelling demands specific competencies with regards to storytelling, which go beyond just being able to tell a story.

Stories are meaning-laden, and so are values (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). By using stories to communicate and share multiple values, i.e. identity, social, functional, emotional and epistemic values (Prebensen, 2013b; Sweeney, Soutar, & Johnson, 1999; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008), tourism firms can increase their potential for creating resonance with tourists, and the subsequent value co-creation. One reason for this is that an individual tourist can interpret and find inspiration in the story communicated in terms of desired meaning (Bruner, 1990). Thus, storytelling can incorporate multiple meanings in tourist activities, which also can be used in order to stage tourist encounters with the natural environment. The importance of staging natural environments is also linked to the effect of the environment on participant behaviour, such as their desire to approach

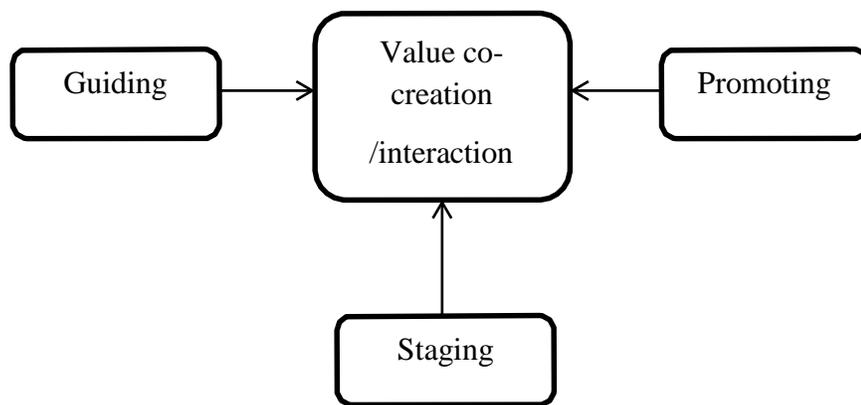
or avoid situations (Bitner, 1992). Unlike the human constructed environments discussed by Bitner (1992), natural environments, such as a mountain plateau, constitute a stable structure that conditions activities which are difficult to stage through physical reconstructions. They can, however, be staged through people's communication (Arnould, Price, & Tierney, 1998). This can be done through storytelling, and there are two ways to stage a natural environment by using stories: to use story structure elements in order to shape and integrate the different stages in the activity, and to tell stories intended to give special meaning to something that is encountered, e.g. nature (Arnould & Price, 1993). To emphasise interaction in the product development implies that where, how, when and in particular, by whom the stories are told, is critical in how an offer is valued (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). By focusing on the integration and enactment of value infused stories, particular meanings with which tourists can identify can be negotiated and tourism firms can engage tourists on a personal level (Jennifer Edson Escalas, 2004; Escalas, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schechner, 2006). Consequently tourism firms may stage tourist activities that, in addition to the immediate on-site effects, positively influence meanings that are of concern to the participant's quality of life, before and beyond the interaction process at the moment of consumption (Chen, et al., 2012; Helkkula, Kelleher, & Pihlström, 2012).

This thesis perspective on storytelling as a communication tool involving tourists through dramatization, integrates the promises made through promotional stories, and the values realised in the actual tourist offers (see Christian Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). The thesis' inclusive approach emphasises the integrative perspective through storytelling. The approach involves looking at the effects of a promotional event story, in addition to how stories are staged and socially performed by guides. For instance, when exposed to promotional stories about destinations and what they offer, tourists already imagine and expect that particular offering will contribute to their existing values. The subsequent experience of the activity is compared to formed attitudes (through expectations) and an overall evaluation of value is made (Parasuraman, et al., 1988).

In summary, the aim of this thesis is to investigate storytelling as an integrative perspective that can facilitate and enhance the co-creation of value offered in tourist activities. The thesis investigates three ways in which tourism firms can enhance tourist participation in value co-creation: (1) by exploring the relationship between a potential tourist and a story, (2) by exploring

the interaction/co-creation process from a guide's perspective, and (3) by exploring co-creation in terms of how it is influenced by the staging of a natural environment. Theoretically, this thesis contributes to marketing and SD-Logic research by emphasising the importance, in interaction processes, of company communication resources and practices, in terms of co-creation of value. In particular, this thesis discusses the importance of storytelling as an integrative perspective, and links storytelling to resource integration and co-creation through participants levels of activity, i.e. activity as influenced by imagination, emotion and cognition.

Figure 1: Three ways storytelling can enhance co-creation of value



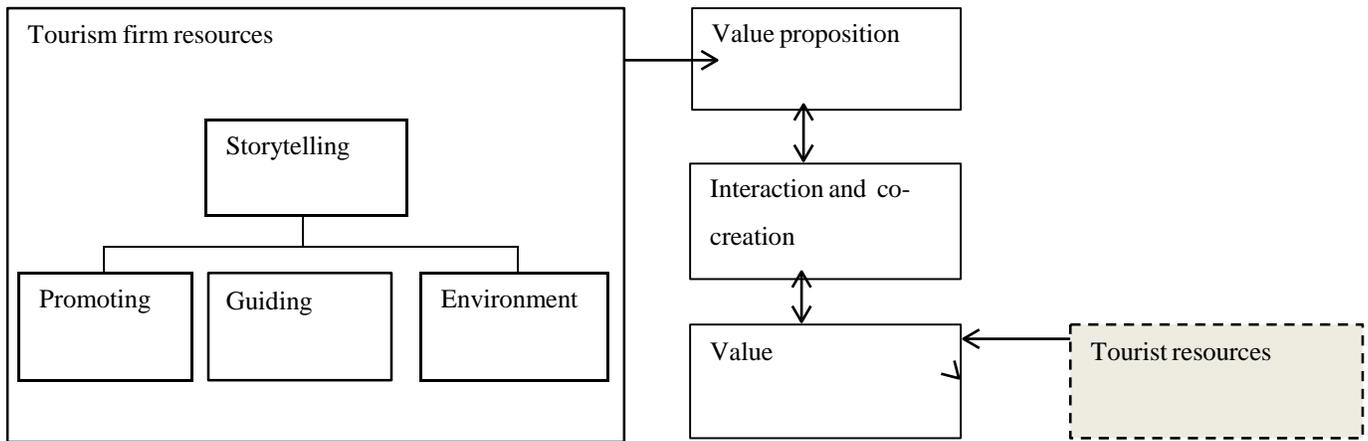
### **Aim/Research questions (perspectives and precisions)**

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate and elaborate storytelling as an integrative and important communication resource for tourism firms seeking to employ SD-Logic in their construction of tourist activities in order to enhance value co-creation. Through exploration of spectator effect on a promotional event story, and of tourism firms and, in particular, guide co-creation strategies, this thesis discusses how storytelling can influence tourist participation in an offered activity, and how this can be a key to enhancing value co-creation. However, the focal constructs pertaining to this thesis are first delineated and illustrated before the individual studies are presented in the next section.

## **Storytelling as essential for value co-creation in tourist experiences**

for the relevance of stories to tourism managers is linked to their use as emotionally charged, imaginative, meaning-laden representations and incarnations of various types of experiences such as adventures and quests. Stories are told in different ways, settings and with a variety of intentions, but always seek to involve someone emotionally or cognitively, i.e. to entertain, to teach and to excite. The different studies in this thesis elaborate on and discuss different ways of using stories when the aim for tourism managers is to enhance co-creation of value during interaction processes in tourist experiences. When performing the stories, tourism managers can focus on various unique and emergent aspects linked to the transfer of values. The interaction between participants, participant resources, story structure and organisation, and the story environment constitutes the conceptual parameters of the story. The performance metaphor guides tourism managers to focus on the type of knowledge and skills, that are important in order to engender emotions and involvement in the story (Baumann, 1986; Denning, 2006; Goffman, 1997; Schechner, 2003). Central to this interaction process is the connection between emotions, cognition, and the telling of the story, i.e. a good story should offer something of value to tourists. Figure 2 illustrates the process whereby tourism firms use their operant resources, i.e. human knowledge and skills, in the creation of value propositions. The operant resources include storytelling as a higher level resource, and promotion, guiding and the environment as lower level, or basic resources (Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008). These resources are integrated so as to offer value propositions that enhance co-creation of value through interacting and integrating tourists' operant resources.

Figure 2: Tourism firms and tourist communication, interaction and resource integration (adapted from Arnould et al., 2006).



*Summary of Study 1*

Study 1 is conceptual in nature, focuses on storytelling from a co-creation perspective and discusses stories as an essential marketing resource. The importance of storytelling as a marketing resource is linked to the influence stories have on consumer experience processes through emotions and comprehension (Chronis, 2008; Jennifer Edson Escalas, 2004; Fog, Budtz, & Yakaboylu, 2005; Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, & van Riel, 2012; Mulvey & Medina, 2003). This study provides a theoretical foundation that elaborates on and discusses storytelling in relation to marketing communication and the development of tourist activities. Further, the study discusses co-creation in terms of its extended value judgement, as not merely value in exchange, but also as value in use and value in context (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2008; Wang, Chen, Fan, & Lu, 2012). Unlike value in exchange, value in use reflects value as extending beyond a specific service encounter, while value in context embeds value in use in the context of an extended network (Vargo, 2008; Wang, et al., 2012). The relevance of storytelling for value co-creation is linked to the importance for tourism firms to understand the influence that tourist’s own values and attitudes on have on how they understand their experience. Similarly, firms have to understand their employees’ values and attitudes, which have an effect on how they perform in an interaction process. Tourism firms thus have to include a social and cultural perspective in order to succeed in the creation of value-

enhancing tourist experiences (see e.g. Arnould & Price, 1993; Arnould, et al., 1998). The study is a contribution to understanding the value-enhancing properties of storytelling, with a focus on co-creation. Moreover, it illustrates the importance of storytelling as an operant resource that can be used to manage host-guest interaction in a way that enhances the value creation taking place during the interaction process for all participants. From a research perspective, this chapter adds to the body of knowledge about how to “storify” communication and of how storytelling, through involvement, can act as a value enhancer.

Stories are always told for a reason, and the focus of this thesis is on different ways tourism managers can develop, tell and manage a story, in other words, how they can “storify” and communicate their offers. Study 2, which focuses on a promotional story, begins to elaborate on this.

### *Summary of Study 2*

This study focuses on how a story is communicated through film, and explores the relationship between the effect of a story and the potential images, or attitudes a tourist holds. In particular, the study explores the effect of a film promoting a dog sledge event on spectator perceptions of the event and the destination. By drawing on research related to image building, it explores how stories can have value for tourism firms (Arnould, Price, & Otnes, 1999; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007). The study shows that destination stakeholders, i.e. event promoters and a destination promoters, can benefit from combining their efforts in destination image development. In particular, it emphasises that there is an increase in popularity for places portrayed in films, indicating a unexplored potential for places to be used in films and movies as promotional tools in order to attract tourists (Roger W. Riley, Baker, & Van Doren, 1998; Roger W. Riley & Van Doren, 1992; Tooke & Baker, 1996). The study follows the lead of Kim and Richardson (2003), who depict theoretical underpinnings linked to the effect of motion pictures on destination image (Kim & Richardson, 2003), and utilise a quasi-experiment as a method of testing the effect of a promotional film of a sporting event in northern Norway on image change among the spectators regarding the event and the destination.

Promotional films affect perceptions of the dramatized event and subsequently perceptions of the nearby destination. The study shows that a promotional film is effective in communicating emotional and value-related destination attributes which give this form of marketing

communication persuasive power. Emotional and value-related cues also give meaning to functional destination attributes. The study also suggests that dramatized events manage to contextualise powerful contact with forces representing emotional and experiential realities, such as “magic” and “fairytale”. These are features that have a desirable attraction and their relationship to story values gives meaning to tourist experiences. As such, a dramatized event, made into a story and communicated through film, is important as a point of reference for potential tourist experiences. This study shows that a dramatized event can impact the future intentions of spectators, in this case to visit a region and/or to try dog sledging. This is expected to augment interest and market potential for the event as well as the destination (Prebensen, 2012).

### *Summary of Study 3*

This study focuses on the role of guides and the subsequent co-creation strategies regarding the tourist experience. A guide’s role and guide-tourist interaction are explored using a qualitative research design. In order to illustrate the way guides perceive their role and the strategies adopted in order to co-create experience value for tourists, two different experiences are analysed: a guided tour at a rock art site and a guided nature-based tour in a northern landscape. Interpretive data analysis reveals how the tourist context may encourage or restrain a guide’s uses of different co-creation strategies.

A guide’s perspective enables communication in interaction processes to be explored in terms of storytelling. The article goes beyond confirming the guide as a central actor in relation to tourism, by exploring guides’ own perceptions of what kind of strategies they prefer to employ in order to interact with the tourists. The focus is on storytelling, but the article seeks to discover what it is that enables guides to tell stories, how they tell stories and what kind of stories are told. An important foundation for this study is the indication that guides are vital in the constitution of a memorable tourist experience (Arnould & Price, 1993; Arnould, et al., 1998). This establishes a managerial research focus on the tourist activity in the study, as tourism managers have to recognise the strategic importance of guides beyond the idea that they deliver information and conversation, and learn how to empower them to be co-creators of the tourist experience. The findings will be discussed in relation to the research process, however, they indicate that working in interaction processes and with co-creation demands a different view of a guide’s role and resources.

#### *Summary of Study 4*

The next article focuses on storytelling as a communicative staging element related to natural environments. This study considers the importance attached to the scenic qualities of natural environments in the communication of tourist activities and the study illustrates potential staging strategies by discussing two different tourist experiences: a dog sled race and a hunt for the northern lights. The focus is still managerial and the study uses an interpretative data analysis of staging strategies in each case in order to shed light on how they stage the natural environment. The study emphasises the concept of co-creation and explores how natural environments can be communicatively staged, by using storytelling, in order to enhance interaction and subsequent value co-creation in tourist experiences (Arnould, et al., 1998; Prebensen & Foss, 2011).

The concept of co-creation of value sees tourists as active and with a desire to use their own knowledge and skills to interact with other tourists, objects, and environments (Christian Grönroos, 2011; Prebensen, Woo, et al., 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The importance of the study's focus on interaction is linked to this process, bringing forth a potential for tourism firms to influence tourist attitudes and involve them in co-creating value (Prebensen, Woo, Chen, & Uysal, 2012). The study illustrates that it can be beneficial to use storytelling to stage activities in natural environments. Destinations natural environments are a part of their ontology and ethos, and is therefore a unique resource for tourism firms (Anholt, 2010; Chronis, 2012a, 2012b). The study emphasises that understanding the natural environment in terms of only its visual qualities limits the scope of action for tourism managers and subsequently their creation of meaning through interaction and co-creation. Thus, the study moves beyond the natural scenic attributes into a new domain for tourism managers linked to a multidimensional and interactive perspective on the natural environment. This study concentrates on exploring how the natural environment is staged in two different cases. Findings reveal that tourism managers can benefit from using dimensions such as exploration, education and play in order to involve tourists in the activities offered, and for co-creation to occur. The study findings, implications and limitations will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

## **Structure of the thesis**

The next chapters will discuss the theoretical foundations of the thesis, philosophical, theoretical and methodological perspectives and issues linked to the studies and the research process. The next chapter elaborates on the theoretical foundations associated with co-creation and storytelling, before the thesis delineates and explains the different philosophical, theoretical and methodological choices made in the research process. Subsequently, individual and summated findings and implications are discussed.



## **2. Theoretical foundations**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the relevant literature pertaining to the aim of this thesis. It will explain the concept of storytelling as a managerial and integrative communication resource supporting the co-creation of experience value in tourist activities.

### **Co-creation**

Emphasis and focus on consumer participation in the co-creation of value in consumption experiences (Carù & Cova, 2003; Prebensen & Foss, 2011; Prebensen, Vittersø, et al., 2013) enhances the importance for marketing research to explore new approaches that increase the participation of consumers, or tourists. For instance, tourism firms interested in enhancing co-creation should aim to involve tourists in co-creating value, based on their self-identity values and the value of the destination (Prebensen, Vittersø, et al., 2013). Moreover, as tourists seek to fulfil multiple goals while travelling, tourism firms may seek to integrate a strategic combination of multiple values in their offered activities (Lynn & Lynn, 2003; Prebensen, 2013a). The idea of co-creation is explained in this thesis in light of SD-Logic, where one of the core premises is the application and integration of operant resources (i.e. knowledge, skills) in order to enhance co-creation in interaction processes (Vargo & Lusch, 2004b, 2008). Consistent with SD-Logic, tourism firms can create activities that propose to enhance value co-creation through increased resource integration and participation. However, as value is subjectively determined, tourism firms have to be careful of how they propose to engage tourists, as the tourism firm and their tourists may differ in their evaluations of value (Carù & Cova, 2003; Prebensen, 2013a).

The subjectivity of value is reflected in the definition of consumer value as being preferential (Holbrook, 1994). In addition, consumer value is suggested to be interactive and relativistic, and all three requirements are viewed as fundamental in order to give consumers behaviours direction and meaning (Holbrook, 1994; Kahle & Xie, 2008). From a tourist experience perspective, value can reflect an individual's functional, emotional, social and epistemic values (Lynn & Lynn, 2003; Prebensen, 2013a; Sweeney, et al., 1999) and value co-creation efforts in a tourist experience are reflected at all points of interaction between the tourism firm and tourists. Throughout the experience process, these interaction points offer the potential for creation of a

dynamic interplay between tourists in terms of their value expectations, and the value co-created in the interaction process with tourism firms, e.g. guides (Sousa & Coelho, 2011). This provides tourism firms with multiple possibilities for enhancing the co-creation of value by encouraging tourists to actively use their resources and partake at each single point of contact. (Israel, 1992; Kotrlik & Higgins, 2001; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Such an experiential view of value (as co-created and not offered) promotes human practices, thoughts and emotions as important in order to facilitate enhanced value co-creation (Meyer & Schwager, 2007; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Tourism firms should thus focus on how their operant resources can be used to integrate and share values related to different cultural and social practices, levels of understanding, and emotions. Through the use of operant resources, tourism firms can influence tourist reflections on their own interpretations of values, and enhance the understanding of the value connected with the constituents of the experience (Gylling, Elliott, & Toivonen, 2012). By conceptualising, bundling, integrating and mastering the resources that facilitate the communication and performance of stories that reflects values, such as social, emotional and epistemic values, tourism firms can increase their potential for value co-creation (Kahle & Xie, 2008; Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008). The basic resources of tourism firms, their resource combination and use has implications for what and how they propose to co-create value with tourists whenever tourists interact with the tourism firm. (Edvardsson, Ng, Choo, & Firth, 2013). It is through their operant resources that tourism firms can inspire and enable, i.e. predispose tourists to use their own resources, and thus to be active and involved. Involvement is linked to co-creation through interaction and the integration of resources, in addition to consumer's existing values, latent needs or desires (Arnould, Price, & Malshe, 2006; Kristensson, Matthing, & Johansson, 2008; Sousa & Coelho, 2011) For a tourist, involvement and the process of co-creation can begin with exposure to promotional stories that resonate with the tourist's values and make the tourist aware of, and pay attention to, their needs and desires. Through imagination, tourists can co-create self-relevant stories based on their own social and cultural resources (Arnould, et al., 2006; Celsi & Olson, 1988; Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009). Identifying value enhancing links that facilitate imagination and identification with stories can lead to increased participation and participants viewing the activity as more relevant, and for the co-created value to be extended into value in the use, and shared within, tourist networks (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Jennifer Edson Escalas, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000; Vargo, 2008). The constellation and integration of physical, social and cultural resources between guides and tourists

are suggested as prerequisites for developing activities that enhance the co-creation of value (Ballantyne, Frow, Varey, & Payne, 2011; Baron & Harris, 2008; Edvardsson, et al., 2013). In interaction processes, participants create value through enactment of various activities that extend beyond the interaction process and into their life worlds. Their participation in a particular activity can be an explicit sign of an expected value creation when based on promotional stories (imagination) and previous experience (operant resources) (Helkkula, et al., 2012). This implies that tourism managers, by using storytelling, can facilitate co-creation of value through the contextual aspects that tourists encounter, and that reflect their expectations and operant resources (Christian Grönroos & Voima, 2013).

The development of operant resources, their use and integration potential, demands an understanding of participant role perception (e.g. self-identity) and how the different intangible and tangible elements that constitute a value proposition can be communicated. Thus, a guide's operant resources are important in order to gain access to tourist value spheres, and to inspire them to engage in behaviours that facilitate resource integration that enhances co-creation of value. Three types of guide operant resources can be viewed as especially important for resource integration within SD-Logic: knowing, relating and communicating (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). Knowing is personal, tacit and explicit; relating refers to how knowledge is integrated within the environment and the participants; and communicating refers to the way tourism firms use their knowledge when they engage in communication with tourists and how they enable tourists to respond (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). The latter may be of particular importance for increased levels of activity and resource integration. Resource integration in consumption experiences is viewed as central to the creation of activities for value co-creation (Arnould, et al., 2006; Prebensen, Vittersø, et al., 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). In order to enhance co-creation, tourism firms must present and arrange their resources in such a way that tourists perceive their offer as personally relevant and worth pursuing, e.g. in terms of learning. The importance and relevance of storytelling as such a resource is elaborated on in the next chapter.

### **Storytelling and enhancement of value co-creation in tourist activities**

Storytelling as a point of departure for tourism firms is linked to promotional stories and their generation of destination images aimed at creating interest in destination offerings and influencing

the demand for travel (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Govers, et al., 2007). This includes promotional stories created by other stakeholders such as event organisations, which are considered of equal importance as those generated by destination marketing officials (Govers, et al., 2007). Images created by destination stakeholders other than destination marketing associations represent a different, and more credible level of destination meaning due to their independent status (Anholt, 2010). Unlike destination marketing stories, promotional stories of events portray “real” interactions between people and environments, thus, they can represent a broader value conception with a particular appeal to potential tourists (Arvidsson, 2005; Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011). Promotional event stories may offer a better fit with multiple destination stakeholder values as event stories represent value consensus between multiple destination stakeholders who play different roles in the enactment of the event (Prebensen, 2010). The multiple values that can be embedded in promotional stories allow a story creation process where different promotional stories and the different elements portrayed in promotional stories can serve as a foundation for a construction of tourist activities that offers tourists a potential for value co-creation.

The benefits of using storytelling more actively and strategically in marketing communication and in the value propositions of tourism firms, are linked to the qualities inherent in the stories, particularly their “emotional power” and relational, meaning creating and memorable properties (Bruner, 1990; Jennifer Edson Escalas, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1988; Schank & Abelson, 1995; Wachtman & Johnson, 2009). The events in stories can activate particular emotions, i.e. the relationship between the event, the characters and the action can produce cues that influence tourists’ emotions, such as well-being or excitement (Damasio 1999). Emotions exist on different levels and are necessary for rational thinking (Damasio 1999). One reason that stories can be effective in the communication of values and knowledge may be that their layered and structured relationship between emotions, cognitions and behaviour reflects the current emotional state (e.g. related to well-being or excitement) of tourists and links this state to future action and to self in the current situation (Adamson, Pine, Van Steenhoven, & Kroupa, 2006; Damasio, 1999; Denning, 2006). This reflects the suggestion that different purposes require different stories, i.e. different objectives require a different structural organisation of stories in order for them to have the desired influence (Denning, 2006).

In general, stories are recognised by their particular organisation: they are structured with a beginning, middle and an end (Jennifer Edson Escalas, 2004). Actions are causally described in

time and space through events, with emotional and cognitive cues suggesting future decisions (Bruner, 1986). These meanings are implicitly communicated by goal driven characters, i.e. a protagonist or a storyteller, through words, symbols and behaviours linked to a particular reality (Bruner, 1986, 1990). The plot and its relationship with the context have a central role, and different plots can be used in order to organise the same set of events (Bruner 1990; Polkinghorne 1988). For instant, a plot may involve creating excitement linked to particular events experienced by tourists, where tourists have to partake in actions leading to goal achievement. Thus, the plot directs causality and “ties” the elements of the story together in a meaningful way (Gabriel, 2000). The structure, plot, goals and performance of stories illustrate storytelling as an higher level operant communication resource that needs to be created and developed in order to be effectively used (Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008).

Storytelling, broadly understood, includes all forms of purposive communication (Fisher, 1985, 1989). It is implied is that all communication goals are achieved through the telling of stories with plausible characters, that are in relation to a social reality and that include both rational and symbolic interpretations in their value assessment of various aspects of the world (Fisher, 1985, 1989). This social and cultural perspective of storytelling means that stories can be socially negotiated, and that the values reflected in stories depends on participant interpretations and interplay in a social setting: the storyteller, the tourists and the context. The subjective and agreed interpretations and value assessments related to interplay in interaction processes change in relation to the dynamics of the interplay and the context.

Another relevant understanding of storytelling is found in organisational research. Organisational research employs a more narrow understanding of storytelling as a way to understand, organise and perform social practices, and collective actions, and is also widely discussed in organisational literature (Czarniawska, 2004; Denning, 2006; Weick, 2012). As a social and environmental practice, storytelling in organisations is an interactional practice undertaken in order to determine actions, facilitate interpretation and create meanings that facilitate identification with company values and behaviour (Czarniawska, 2006; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). The nature and purpose of stories are discussed in different ways i.e. as a way of creating a shared experience and aligning values by emphasising important social conventions and acceptable behaviours, and as a creation performed in order to create meaning in particular

situations (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). The organisational understanding of storytelling as a suitable way to communicate and share values, and create individual and collective meanings, thus supports the perspective of this thesis on storytelling as an operant and dynamic resource focused on value co-creation where all participants have to take an active role in order to negotiate and create meaning.

The understanding of storytelling in this thesis includes all types of stories told, and performed in interaction processes where storytelling may enhance co-creation of value between a tourism firm and a tourist during the pre-visit and visitation phase of a journey. As values are said to be meaning-laden (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), the meaning-creating qualities inherent in stories imply that storytelling can be used to enhance the co-creation of social, emotional and epistemic values that are part of a tourist's value domain (Kahle & Xie, 2008; Prebensen, 2013a). Social, emotional and epistemic values are part of a hierarchically structured value system, in which some values, and in particular social values, are considered more stable in nature, from which the more specific, and more emotional attitudes emerges (Li & Cai, 2012). As previously mentioned, a tourism firm's storytelling is linked to a destination's promotional stories. In a promotional, or pre-visit phase, the salience of particular values to a tourist's decision process is believed to influence tourist choices, in particular choices associated with the creation of meaning and personal relevance (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Hansen, 1969; Kahle & Xie, 2008; Madrigal & Kahle, 1994). Stories that make sense and are perceived as relevant to the tourist in terms of their values, can enhance co-creation of value, as value fulfilment is believed to direct human action and can thus activate tourists and engage them in co-creation behaviours (Kahle & Xie, 2008). Stories are described as "distilled attitudes" because they "crystallise and highlight" essential elements, such as common values and beliefs that often do not emerge in ordinary conversations (Adamson, et al., 2006; Gylling, et al., 2012; Pearce & Packer, 2013 p. 394). Novel, interesting and unexpected stories connected to participants life projects are particularly suggested as having the power to change attitudes during interaction processes (Pearce & Packer, 2013). Consequently, attitudes can be derived, communicated and updated through promotional stories, in addition to stories performed during the tourist experience. This thesis supports the relationship between a story and attitudes, or images, and suggest that a promotional story (e.g. a storied event) can thereby act as a prequel to the actual experience, assuming that the spectators, or potential tourists, can identify and imagine themselves in the story (Petrova & Cialdini, 2008; Woodside & Megehee, 2010). A

promotional story facilitates a tourist's imagination by providing them with knowledge and vivid cues, such as emotions, that they process more fluently than other types of promotional messages (Petrova & Cialdini, 2008). Storytelling can therefore be a more suitable way to communicate value promises that offer value enrichment or fulfilment to tourists, than other types of promotional messages (Arnould, et al., 2006). The value propositions that appeal to tourist value domains and are viewed as compatible with the operant resources of tourists make sense to tourists, and connect them to the destination via the promotional story. The relevance of the storied message for tourist depends on whether the images created are viewed as a way to strengthen existing values, such as those related to, for example, enjoyment, self-identity or self-fulfilment such as learning (Arnould, et al., 2006; Chang, 2013). In particular, the emotional power that makes stories more vivid can frame value-related cognitive processing and give rise to approach or avoidance tendencies (Fog, et al., 2005; Petrova & Cialdini, 2008; Woodside, et al., 2008). However, in order for these emotions to influence behaviour through cognition, they have to be accompanied by additional affective states (Damasio, 1999). Such states can be influenced by particular stimuli or intensified by stimuli offering value fulfilment (Kahle & Xie, 2008; Madrigal & Kahle, 1994), thus letting themselves "be known" in a knowledge producing relationship between the tourist and the stimuli, i.e. a story (Damasio, 1999). A story brings elements from the past into the present in a form that enables identification of meanings through its depiction of human interactions with each other and the environment. Stories facilitate interpretation and adoption of their meaning (Gabriel, 2000).

Tourism firms that use storytelling and base their activities on the core value propositions of promotional stories may benefit from extended value co-creation linked to imaginative co-creation of values salient to the tourist when exposed to promotional stories (de Chernatony, McDonald, & Wallace, 2011; Hansen, 1969; Iversen & Hem, 2008). Through storytelling the promised core values may target both the articulated and unarticulated meanings that tourists seek to experience, while enacting the stories encourages tourists to partake in the activities and co-create values with other participants. The use of storytelling when interpreting a tourist activity means that guides can predispose tourist resources which facilitate involvement, and subsequently enhances the potential for the co-creation of participant behaviours (Carù & Cova, 2006; Prebensen, Vittersø, et al., 2013). Involvement is linked to personal relevance and thus also the creation of individual value (Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001; Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2002). The degree of involvement, however, depends on how tourism firms engage and

merge with tourists, and thus how they operationalise or practice the stories. One way of doing this is by adopting the performance metaphor. Conceptualising the activity as a performance can give it a particular direction, or goal, which identifies the roles that are to be played by the guides and those actions and events which are to be communicated and interpreted (staged) (Carù & Cova, 2006; Deighton, 1992; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Selstad, 2007). Consequently, involvement depends on who performs the story, how and where they perform it and how the tourists are assessed. These issues will be the focus of the next chapter.

### **Enacting the story**

The assumption in using a performance analogy to elaborate on the operationalisation of tourist experiences is that, similarly to theatrical experiences, tourist experiences can be viewed as liminal continuums of framed, social interactive and purposive human actions (Goffman, 1997; Schechner, 2006). The performance metaphor makes a distinction between the communication and operationalisation of a promotional story (a purely theatrical perspective of a performance), and a physical happening with actual action taking place in front of, and together with other participants (a theatrical and social perspective of a performance). This thesis brings these perspectives together through storytelling (figure 3). Figure 3 illustrates storytelling as a dynamic process where promotional stories are constructed, or staged, in order to influence tourist decision-making processes. Promotional storytelling extends into tourist activity through a tourist's previous interaction with promotional stories which influence their value expectations, and the guide performing stories based on promotional storytelling and aimed at tourist value fulfilment. The loop illustrates a learning process where guide performance and resource integration in the tourist activity contribute new knowledge that can be used in order to strengthen promotional stories.

The way stories are created and how they are linked to the teller and/or particular situations influences how they are performed (Boyce, 1996). The performance of a story is not a solo act; the story is an act of obligation, positioned in relation to someone or something, and can be rejected, accepted or even improved by other actors depending on their level of involvement (Deighton, 1992; Goffman, 1997; Moisisio & Arnould, 2005). The approach to storytelling in this thesis incorporates the performance concept through strategy and operationalisation, as suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999). This thesis also includes a value perspective: performance as a staged social

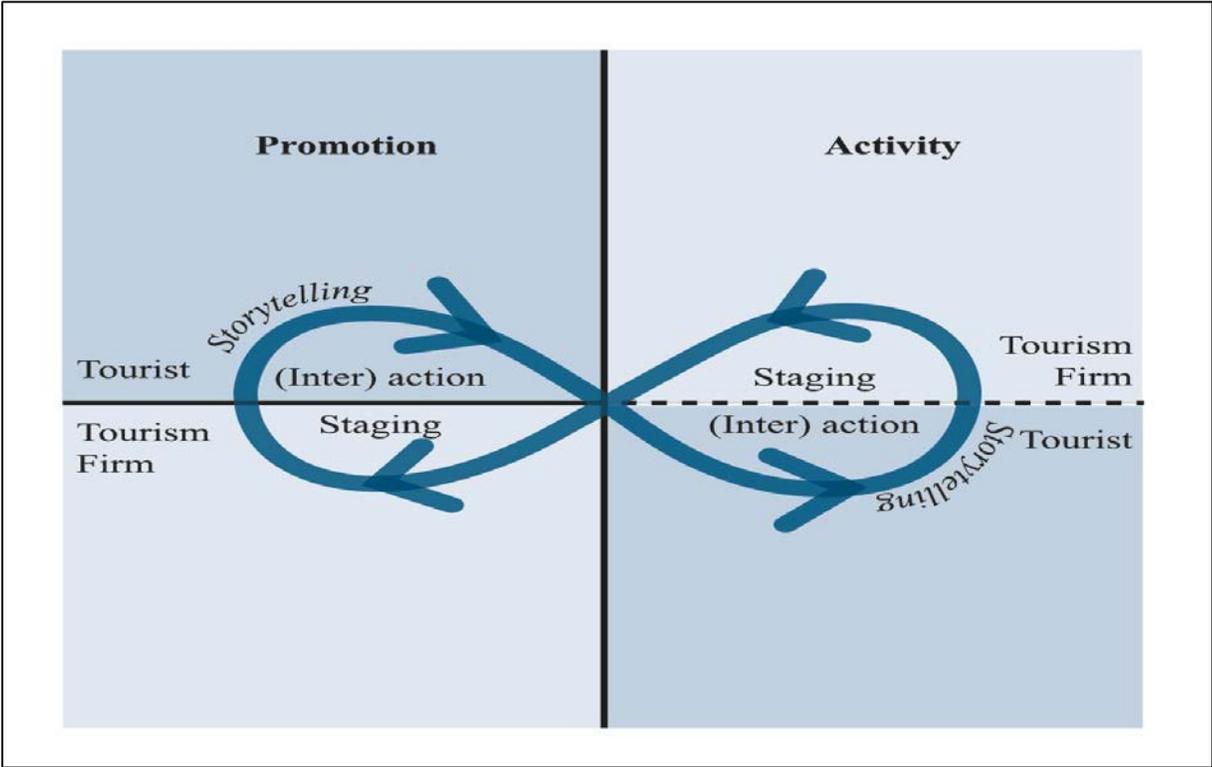
experience, enacted in order to communicate and attribute meaning that resonates with the core values of a destination, and the values of tourism firms and tourists, i.e. as a part of a broader social and cultural value system. This perspective positions the story, and the performance within a genre that connects it to the immediate tourist experience environment (on-site), and the familiar society of the participants (home). A tourist activity is not a static offer, therefore, waiting to be consumed, but is rather being constructed and reconstructed through various interactions, and between the tourism firm and the tourists in relation to particular roles and contexts (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, & Gruber, 2011). Instead, the performance perspective of tourist experiences moves it beyond the application of management marketing strategies as being purely a result of marketing efforts in terms of “staging for” (Carù & Cova, 2003; Pine & Gilmore, 1999), towards a perspective of socially co-created performance that is “staging with”. This is a more demanding perspective in terms of the resource use and integration of tourism firms, where skilful storytellers can uncover the specific roles and cues to be acted and communicated on site which inspire and predispose tourists to deploy their resources. To realise the co-creation potential of stories, tourism managers can adopt a learning perspective and reflect on performance elements relevant in education, such as (1) roles: who is the guide and how does the guide perceive of their role and the role of the participants, (2) what is the purpose: why are they participating, (3) action: what kind of action fits with the roles and purposes and (4) environment: where can these actions be placed (Elger, 2007). A performance metaphor illustrates the relationship between these social and aesthetic elements, the use of the senses, the social relations and desired level of participation (Elger, 2007; Schechner, 2006). As a social performance, the aim of the enacted activities is linked to a search for a (re) positioning or (re)confirmation of values into systems of shared or consensual meaning about the self and the destination with its people and its offers, i.e. promotion and on-site activities (Goffman, 1997; Schechner, 2006; Turner, 1988). Goffman (1959, 1997) in particular argues that social interactions are framed and goal-directed behaviours, taking part in any occasion in order to influence other participants and to confirm self-images (Goffman, 1997). Consequently, for tourism firms, the enactment of roles such as the guide role becomes a central strategic element: roles linked to self-image are more likely to create both personal and interactional resonance, and thus to influence involvement and the potential for a successful interaction. More importantly, viewing the tourist experience as a dynamic performance increases the awareness of tourism managers of the significance of personalising communication and the role of the guide. Guides

have to choose to whom they tell which stories, in which environments the stories are to be told, and which cues are to be used. The role as a guide is not fixed and static, but rather the result of a reciprocal process between the guide, the tourists, and the situation. Further, the situated interaction in the performance is structured and defined by role perception, and the integration and interplay between the available performance resources (Goffman, 1997).

Consequently, the story and performance perspective in this thesis stresses the importance related to storytelling and resource management regarding both the pre-visit and the (processual) qualities of the real activities as well as a vision of the desired outcome (Parasuraman, et al., 1988; Prebensen, Vittersø, et al., 2013). Management of company resources in order to enhance a firm's overall performance is well discussed in service research, where employee attributes related to knowledge, skills and behaviour are argued to influence consumer choices and behaviour (Bitner, 1992; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985; Parasuraman, et al., 1988).

Thus, from a managerial perspective, promotional stories can be viewed as important resources pertaining to the pre- and actual tourist visitation phases, as types of intentional performances intended to produce desired effects.

Figure 3: The extended use of storytelling (adapted from Schechner, 2003)





### **3. The research process**

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on the foundations of the research process in terms of philosophical and theoretical approach, the selection of research design and choice of methodology, methods and data collection. The chapter is organised as follows: the first section discusses the philosophical foundations for this thesis. The following sections focus on the research strategy and the applied research methods in relation to the different studies in this thesis.

#### **Philosophical foundations**

In general, the choice in a research project to combine a quantitative and a qualitative design implies a need to discuss the differing philosophical assumptions used in the methods and theoretical perspectives as these are related to questions of a researcher's beliefs about knowing, i.e. the nature of knowing, the reliability of knowledge and what can be known (D. L. Morgan, 2007). Identifying philosophical and theoretical issues is important for a clear understanding of the foundational perspectives guiding all research, increases the chances of a successful design and subsequently also strengthens the results (D. L. Morgan, 2007). It is believed that such issues are linked to a researcher's own worldview or paradigms about the nature of reality and knowledge (T. S. Kuhn, 2012). The world views of researchers are often a result of successful practice within their research field, thus different research fields represent different approaches to the nature of knowledge and knowing which influence the research premises within the particular research fields (T. S. Kuhn, 1990).

In marketing research, there has long been a debate over the merits of the perspective of realism versus the relativistic perspective in terms of the nature and knowing related to fields within marketing, one side often denigrating the position of the other (Deshpande, 1983; Peter, 1992; Zinkhan & Hirschheim, 1992). The proponents of realism in particular used to argue that the relativist view on reality as multiple and constructed was a major argument for using "mono"-methods (Peter, 1992). Even though this view is moderated today, combining strategies are still, by adherents loyal to particular paradigms, a much debated issue. Thus, researchers loyal to paradigms that approach knowledge guided by either quantitative or qualitative research strategies have competing and often contradicting views on the foundations of social reality (Greene &

Caracelli, 1997; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). The increased understanding that particular research problems require eclectic designs, has led to a strain of research discussing the benefits of mixing methods that “belong” to different, and by some, incommensurable, philosophical paradigms within the realist and relativist domain (N. A. Morgan, 2011; Stryker & Vryan, 2003). Even so, marketing research has been criticised for not recognising these benefits when studying complex phenomena (Davis, Golicic, & Boerstler, 2011; Deshpande, 1983; Harrison & Reilly, 2011; Stewart, 2009) and the advantage of including multi-method perspectives in marketing that is considered a strength for theory building and development (Zinkhan & Hirschheim, 1992). Within this perspective, it is suggested that three theoretical streams guide research within this domain, of which one, the inter-subjective orientation, includes the perspective of this thesis (Löbner, 2011). This approach emphasises the importance of interaction, relationships and communication in the co-construction of knowledge in relation to multiple realities. The nature of tourist experiences is complex, at once social and cultural, with several actors interacting in different contexts in order to create time and space bound “tourist realities” that benefit both tourists and the tourism firms. The interplay between tourists and destination stakeholders influences the understandings of multiple, particular and situational individual participants related to the tourist experience in terms of cultural, social and personal values. Thus, a multi method approach was considered appropriate in order to obtain an overall and broad understanding of the tourist experience, and in particular what type of communication is used by tourism firms, and how they use communication to encourage co-creation. A multi-method approach acknowledges the unstable nature of tourist realities, i.e. from a tourism firm’s perspective they are established as a result of the successful accumulation of knowledge viewed as useful in order to develop attractive tourism offers (Peter, 1992). Hence, in a marketing context, the creation of a knowledge of consumption processes focuses on the development of useful solutions linked to planning, doing and evaluating the intersubjective and processual elements of the consumption experiences that constitute particular consumption realities. This is particularly relevant for tourism consumption, where this research is positioned, thus a combination of methods enables a more holistic view, as well as attention to an understanding of the experience on an intersubjective level (Creswell, 2011; D. L. Morgan, 2007; Morse, 2003; Pernecky, 2012). The combination of methods in this thesis is further grounded in the premise that the research purpose and problems provide a point of departure for the determination of a research strategy (Morse,

2003). By combining methods this thesis shows that research strategies belonging to “competing” paradigms are not viewed as dichotomies, but as positions along a continuum, where different positions can be accepted and adopted to accommodate multiple methods in a research processes (Charmaz, 2008). The choice in this thesis to use a multi-method approach contributes to the growing support in marketing of accepting epistemological and ontological positions that acknowledge combining methods in order to improve the research results (Harrison & Reilly, 2011; D. L. Morgan, 2007; Zinkhan & Hirschheim, 1992).

Based on the above, this thesis adopts a philosophy of meaning and enquiry known as pragmatism. This is an approach favoured by several researchers from the field of multiple or mixed methodologies (D. L. Morgan, 2007; Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, & Collins, 2009). Thus, pragmatism as a relevant philosophical perspective guiding this thesis will be discussed in the next section.

Table 1: Comparison of philosophical approaches and their relation to knowledge and truth

<b>Realism</b>	Objective	Assumption that a reality exists separate from people’s perceptions and that knowledge links the two.
<b>Pragmatism</b>	Intersubjective	Assumption that knowledge emerges in interaction processes between individuals. The focus on knowledge is in relation to action, practice and usefulness.
<b>Relativism</b>	Subjective	Assumption that an absolute reality does not exist, instead reality is subjectively perceived.

*Pragmatism*

Pragmatism is an interpretative philosophical movement linked to Charles S. Peirce, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead (Crotty, 1998), was developed in opposition to the reigning rationalist philosophy and is an interpretative philosophical approach to scientific knowing, truth and meaning (Denzin, Flick, Von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004; Rorty, Putnam, Conant, & Helfrich, 2004). Pragmatists emphasise humans as relational agents, and knowledge as a result of human interactions focused on discovery, realisation and the usefulness of possibilities in experiences, moderated by communication (D. L. Morgan, 2007). They have a dialogical conception of the self

(identity) and believe that humans depend on cooperation and communication with society for coming into being through action and reflection, in other words, participants can purposefully change the course of events via interaction (Uslucan, 2004). As tourism firms purposefully seek to influence tourist values in interaction processes, this is an interesting and relevant research position as it implies that tourist perspectives, e.g. in relation to values, can be influenced during interaction with tourism firms through communication. For tourism firms, the tourist experience is a point of departure for knowledge creation, and the interaction process is of particular interest as it provides understanding of the participants through observed relations and communications. The importance of the interaction process is linked to the creation of meaning as a human endeavour. During interaction, ideas are developed into knowledge through practice and emotional experiences. Hence, pragmatism acknowledges that emergent knowledge is based on historical knowledge and constructed and understood in terms of meaning in the time and space of the present, with implications for the future.

The construction of meaningful and useful knowledge in the tourist experience is further linked to the researcher and the operational and contextual consequences of the researcher's behaviour and interaction with participants and in particular contexts. This behaviour and interaction is influenced by the researcher's values, interest and knowledge related to the research problems. Pragmatism as a useful philosophical underpinning is further discussed through symbolic interactionism, a theoretical approach with roots in pragmatism developed in order to study interactions.

### *Symbolic interactionism*

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical framework for the social sciences developed by Herbert Blumer in response to the structural functionalism dominating in American sociology in the 1903s-1960s. In terms of knowledge production within the field of tourism, this framework emphasises the study of the tourist experience, as stakeholders in a tourist experience inform tourism research through, for example, tourism firms and tourists meanings, interpretation, activities and interactions rooted in the tourist experience (Swan & Bowers, 1998). Three central premises for symbolic interactionism are: (1) human actions are grounded in meaning, (2) meaning emerges in interaction processes, and (3) meaning depends on interpretation (see Stryker & Vryan, 2003). The emphasis on understanding communication and storytelling through exploring the participant's

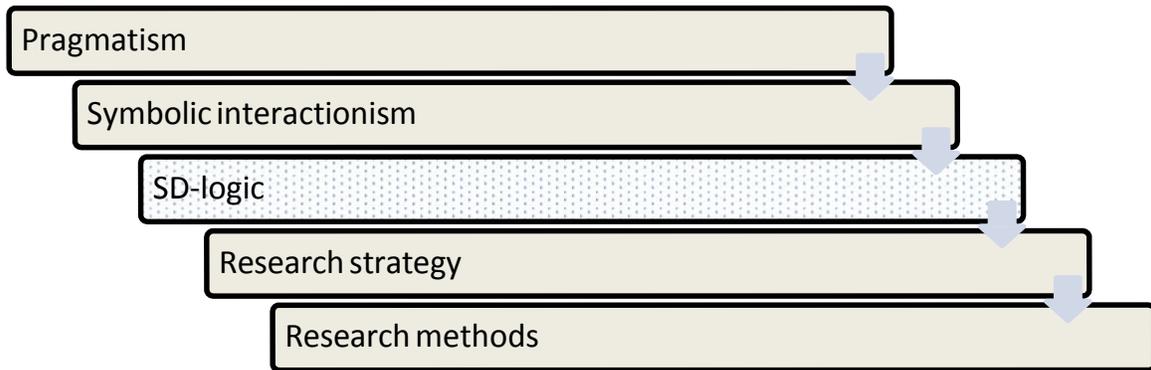
worlds during interaction processes calls for attention to the intersubjective nature and the liminal reality of the tourist experience, as well as how participants can influence each other through attaching meaning to situations or objects (Swan & Bowers, 1998). The focus of attention in this thesis is managerial, and thus on different ways that tourism firms can use communication, i.e. storytelling, in order to influence the potential for value co-creation with tourists. Guides are viewed as active in the construction of meaning(s) in terms of how they communicate, i.e. how they create, tell, and perform stories during a tourist activity. Using personal interviews, participant observations and field diaries, this thesis investigated the interaction process through exploration of action, evidence and attitudes (Charmaz, 2002, 2006, 2011). Although symbolic interactionism is considered an interpretive approach, one direction of symbolic interactionism argues that an individual's behaviour and actions can also be viewed as a result of stable attitudes influenced by social roles and structures, and thus introduces the theoretical framework to quantitative methods such as quasi-experiments, statistical analysis and tests (Charon, 2001; Stryker & Vryan, 2003). A consensus on meanings defines situations as objective, which gives societies a stable structure over certain periods. Thus, symbolic interactionism is a perspective that embraces the co-creation of value, and views both guides and tourists as active and reflexive participants, who select, interpret and communicate stimuli in order to create meanings in their contexts of interaction. The term co-creation implies that this understanding is shaped by how others respond to actions undertaken, and that actions that have a desired result increase their objectivity (Löbler, 2011) Tourists operate in multiple contexts, of which the tourist context is one. These contexts are shared on an intersubjective level, through the cognitive, emotional and imaginative capacities of the participants in interaction processes (M. H. Kuhn, 1964; Snow, 2001; Stryker & Vryan, 2003). This implies that the participants in tourist experiences, and particularly the guides, have to attend to the other participant's understanding of other realities that they relate to, in order to understand why they participate in the tourist activity. The intersubjectivity encountered in interaction processes has implications for the research process, as the researcher is seen as an active participant with the power to shape the creation of meanings.

The symbolic integrationist's perspective on symbolic communication as facilitating the creation meaning in terms of the self, and of the self in relation to a society, provides a particularly relevant theme for analysing interaction processes in tourist experiences (Stryker & Vryan, 2003; Swan & Bowers, 1998). Symbolic communication in tourist experiences can be linked to

promotion (images), role behaviour, and interpretation as influential in the creation of meaning (Goffman, 1997; Liges & Cotte, 1999). Promotion and role behaviour has implications for resource development and use (technical, social and cultural) in tourism firms. Symbolic interactionism thus provides a framework to investigate and reflect on the production of the tourist experience in terms of communication (storytelling) and performance (role behaviour) (Charon, 2001). The inclusion of structure, such as a chosen tourist activity environment and other tourism firms (service systems), makes it a suitable framework for analysing interaction at different levels (Stryker & Vryan, 2003). In this regard, symbolic interactionism shares common ground with the marketing perspective of service dominant logic central to this thesis. In particular, it supports the emphasis of SD-Logic on the subjectively lived experiences of individuals, and the notion of meaning-laden values as symbolically and subjectively perceived, shaped and (re)shaped through resource use and integration (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). For tourism firms, this emphasises the role of communication by influencing how they reflect on what they experience, their guide and the environment. The meanings co-created in interaction processes in tourist activities are not separable from tourist's pre-constructions, i.e. values and attitudes, as they influence processual and final evaluations of value (Arnould, et al., 2006). Thus, there is an overlap between SD-Logic and symbolic interactionism in their emphasis on the individual's subjectively lived experiences and the notion of meaning-laden values as subjectively perceived, but that can be influenced by co-creation in (pre-, actual and post-) interaction processes (Flint, 2006).

Based on the above, the philosophical and theoretical rationale for this thesis provides useful guidelines for the researcher to study "tourism realities" from SD-Logic managerial perspectives. Symbolic interactionism supports the thoughts of SD-Logic and can guide researchers in the development of strategies to study co-creation of value in terms of how it is produced, shared and evaluated. The research strategies applied in this thesis are viewed as strategies that, used in combination, satisfy the perspective of tourism firm communication and their knowledge use and needs that this thesis seeks to investigate (Creswell, 2011; Greene & Hall, 2010; D. L. Morgan, 2007). The next section discusses the research strategies used in this thesis.

Figure 4: Philosophy and theoretical perspectives



## Research strategy

Delineated from the research purpose and problems, this thesis use multiple methods, grounded in the philosophy of pragmatism and the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism.

The use of multiple methods is often referred to as a multi-method approach, mixed method approach, or triangulation (Denzin, 2012; Harrison & Reilly, 2011; D. L. Morgan, 2007; Morse, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). While Morse (2010) clearly distinguishes between multi-method and mixed method design, other researchers within the mixed method domain view multiple methods as a weak type of mixed method design because the methods are not integrated, but triangulated in quasi multistrand research (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Nastasi, Hitchcock, & Brown, 2010). Both multi-method and quasi multistrand research consist of more than two studies combining different methods where each study is publishable in itself, while mixed methods design combines methods within the same study (Morse, 2010; Nastasi, et al., 2010). The usefulness of combining methods is that it adds breadth and depth to research studies or research projects investigating particular phenomena (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

This study is based on four separate sub-studies, where one study is a theoretical study. The studies use three different sources of empirical data: survey, semi structured interviews and (participant) observations, in order to investigate communication. The studies had a particular focus

on tourism firm storytelling in interaction processes. The approach to the multiple method strategy used in this thesis sees the different methods as answering the particular research problems linked to storytelling separately, however, the results are combined in order to give a holistic perspective of storytelling, which increases the tourism firms' knowledge of the different ways of telling, or using, storytelling. Moreover, the results show how storytelling can be an integrative operant resource for tourism firms, guiding their co-creation efforts during their various interaction processes with the tourist (Morse, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). The choice of methods regarding the individual studies is discussed in the next section.

### **Elaboration on choice of methods**

The research process of this thesis consists of three different empirical studies and one theoretical study. The overall aim of this thesis is to conceptualise storytelling as a managerial resource in a tourism context and to explore three ways that storytelling can enhance the co-creation of value in tourist activities. The tourism settings included in this thesis were thus chosen based on the type of activities (both winter and summer activities), their relevance to tourists (often included in the same itinerary and thus encountered by many of tourists visiting the destination), and their communication form (story-relevant elements). The methods used in this thesis were adopted as together they provide integrative perspectives on storytelling as an operant co-creation resource for tourism firms. The quantitative research approach provides knowledge about storytelling as a promotional activity. The thought behind using a quantitative approach and with a quasi-experiment was that it would make it possible to estimate a likely causal effect of the intervention, i.e. the promotional event story, and the respondents, i.e. the potential tourists. Exploring whether there could be a causal effect between storytelling and attitudes was considered important as the result would give an indication of the study's relevance for storytelling as an important operant resource for tourism managers, and thus provide them with a foundation for making an informed decision about the use of stories. The choice of testing an attitude response is based on the position of attitudes in psychology and consumer behaviour research, as being an important construct related to consumer decision making and behaviour (Ajzen, 2001; Brown & Stayman, 1992; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; Tang, Jang, & Morrison, 2012).

The main difference between experiments and quasi-experiments is in terms of a controlled environment and a randomized population. Whereas an experiment is controlled, with a more randomized population, a quasi-experiment often takes place in a more natural environment, and the population is not randomized (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Quasi-experiments are therefore often considered a weaker form of experimentation (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Lynn & Lynn, 2003). In particular, the risk of the findings being a result of variables other than those measured has to be addressed (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Reducing the risk of the findings being influenced by other variables is managed by integrating the pre-test, intervention (story) and post-test within one survey and one sample with a short pre-test/post-test interval, which reduces the possibility of biases related to other variables such as history and maturation (Cook & Campbell, 1979). In addition, as the sample was created from visitors to the web pages of the promotional event story, the sample selection is also assumed to influence the generalisation of the result (Cook & Campbell, 1979). However using a web based quasi-experimental method offers advantages in terms of flexibility and the possibility of larger sample sizes. Larger sample sizes are linked to higher statistical power and can improve validity (Lynn & Lynn, 2003).

The sample in this study was created from random visitors to [www.finnmarkslopet.no](http://www.finnmarkslopet.no), the same sample respondents answered the pre- and post- questions, and in total 857 respondents chose to answer the survey. 857 respondents is considered an adequate sample size with an error margin of 5% and a confidence level of 95% (Israel, 1992; Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Using web based surveys is acknowledged as being as reliable as paper based surveys (Ballard & Prine, 2002; Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004), but with several advantages such as convenience (Mossberg, et al., 2010). Web surveys may be more convenient for the respondent, as they can answer the questions in their home environment. The respondents are thus not forced to answer the survey, an issue that is linked to more sincere participant motivation and responsiveness (Birnbau, 2004; Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004). One major weakness of web based surveys is sample selection and individual internet availability (Mossberg, et al., 2010). The survey sample showed a slight over-representativeness of higher income and more highly educated individuals, with a slight majority being male (53, 1%), which is not uncommon in research, but has implications for generalisation (Gosling, et al., 2004).

The qualitative research design was inspired by constructivist grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory is a methodological approach with roots in symbolic interaction, developed from the original grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (Charmaz, 2000). Constructivist grounded theory supports a more flexible, reflexive and heuristic approach to the process of data collection, sampling, analysis and evaluation which makes the strategy useful for researchers in various research fields (Charmaz, 2005, 2006). The appeal and fitness of the strategy in relation to this thesis is particularly linked to the strategy's flexibility and its approach to data collection. The qualitative research data collection was carried out over a period of two years. The choice of method for the qualitative studies were semi-structured interviews and participant observations of tourism firms and guides working in different contexts in the north of Norway. In total, ten guides and two managers were interviewed. In addition, six guides were observed while interacting with tourists. The preliminary choice of participants were purposive, while the follow-up interviews were inspired by the principle of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, the initial recruitment of the participants for the first interview processes was done directly via the management level, with the focus on choosing participants with knowledge and experience of communication in tourist interactions. A purposive sample was used because the chosen participants were viewed as well suited to generating deep levels of understanding linked to the use of storytelling. A tentative analysis of the data from this initial sample resulted in a new data collection, where participants were chosen based on their knowledge of storytelling seen as linked to the existing core category. The emphasis on participants with an extensive knowledge of communication in tourist experiences resulted in access to valuable and relevant information pertinent to storytelling in interaction processes.

The interviews were conducted with the help of a written interview guide. The guide was loosely defined in order to encourage the participants to tell their own story. Telling their own story involves the desire of a well-balanced and reflective result that serves to encourage the participants to depart with knowledge that is not perceived as guided by the researcher or the interview guide. However, the role of the researcher is still subjective, i.e. the research purpose and the researcher's own knowledge, interests and thoughts influence the whole research process. As a participant in a tourist activity, the researcher also has certain experiences that are linked to the temporal tourist experience, and shared with the other participants, i.e. being on the same bus, being in the same environment, listening to the same guide and spotting the same northern lights. The interpretation

and construction of meaning of this “sameness” is individual and depends on the level of activity of the participants, their previous experience and knowledge, their ability to reflect on what they are experiencing and their emotions related to the experience. In order to gain deeper insight into storytelling as a resource for value co-creation, and how the environment and a natural phenomenon were represented, the researcher participated in a tourist activity. As a participant, the researcher experiences first-hand how guides communicate, i.e. by storytelling, in order to interpret the experience, and can observe the reactions and actions of the other participants. However, the understanding linked to the research problem has to be viewed as representations, or stories, grounded in their situated interaction processes (Charmaz, 2006; Stryker & Vryan, 2003). As such, the stories can be representative in order to understand how particular tourism firms can influence interaction processes through, for example, their guides. This representativeness is linked to personal resources, i.e. storytelling knowledge, skills, and personality, which enhance the co-creation of values in interaction processes. The results from qualitative research are viewed as micro research, therefore one should be careful not to generalise the findings to a population as the results are often viewed as lacking reliability and validity (Ryen, 2006). Hence, epistemologically it is difficult for qualitative studies to compete with the principles of quantitative research, but the results can be judged on their trustworthiness and quality, and have transfer value to similar situations (Gobo, 2007; Kim & Richardson, 2003). Instead of focusing on the issue of generalisation, the explorative and qualitative investigations in this thesis have focused on capturing the individual’s point of view with its exploration of a particular phenomenon in a particular reality (Charmaz, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Thus, the quality pertaining to Studies 3 and 4 has been elaborated on in terms of the tellers of stories and their constraints and possibilities for action in interaction processes. The elaboration criteria put forward by constructivist grounded theory, the criteria of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness, has inspired the evaluation of the qualitative research process and results in this thesis (Charmaz, 2006). First, in terms of credibility and originality, the results give a good illustration of how storytelling can be used by guides to enhance the co-creation of value, providing new insights and evidence that can contribute to future independent assessments of the use and development of storytelling. The results resonate with the concepts studied and the summarised interviews also made sense to the participants. Finally, the results offer interpretations that can be used by tourism managers and guides when interacting with tourists. The multiple methods used in the studies have therefore resulted in more

valid and reliable results (Kim & Richardson, 2003), and link the concept of storytelling to different interaction processes which gives an understanding of storytelling as an integrative operant resource with a particular focus on tourism firms. The findings of the studies will be discussed in the next section.

Table 2: Overview of the studies: Study 1

Study 1	
Aim	To illustrate and theorise about storytelling and its influence on host-guest interactions in tourist experiences.
Material	Literature review
Time frame	2009/2010

Table 3: Overview of the studies: Study 2

Study 2	
Aims	To explore the influence of a promotional storytelling event on potential tourists attitudes
Research setting	Uncontrolled (via the Internet) O1_____x_____O2
Participants	Based on voluntary recruitment via internet N=857
Material	Questionnaire including a promotional film
Analysis	Quasi experiment (without a control group)
Time frame	2010

Table 4: Overview of the studies: Study 3

Study 3	
Aims	To explore storytelling through the role of the guide (as a representative of the tourism firm)
Research setting	Various (depending on the participant's desires)
Participants	Initial purposive sampling: museum guides Additional theoretical sampling: nature guides N=10
Material	Interview guide, audiotape
Analysis	Qualitative categorisation (constructivist grounded theory inspired)
Time frame	2010/ 2011

Table 5: Overview of the studies: Study 4

Study 4	
Aims	To explore storytelling in terms of staging natural environments
Research setting	Various (depending on the participants desires). Natural environments
Participants	Purposive and theoretical sampling N=4
Material	Interview guide, field book, audiotape
Analysis	Qualitative categorisation (constructivist grounded theory inspired)
Time frame	2011/ 2013

## **Ethical considerations**

Quantitative and qualitative research may generate different issues of ethical concern (Alver & Øyen, 2007). Two of the most important ethical issues addressed in this thesis are that of anonymity, and voluntary information and consent. Voluntary information is linked to participants being able to act autonomously in the sense that they can reflect on their actions in terms of their own values (Rhodes, 2005) and is also considered critical to fulfil the terms of human dignity and respect (Roberts, 2002). Hence, voluntarism is considered an important principle which is believed to strengthen the basis and quality of the collected data, as diminished voluntarism leads to more inauthentic and compromised results (Roberts, 2002). In research practice, this principle is often interpreted in terms of assuming that adults are competent enough to decide whether to participate in a research process, that is, it is assumed that they are capable of evaluating the risks and benefits of participation (Sin, 2005). This means that they are not considered to belong to a vulnerable group (those who are not capable of making such a decision). The participants contributing information to this thesis were competent seasonal or full time employees, and were all informed about the project and their anonymity before making a decision to participate. The principle of voluntariness may be questioned in the survey, however, as an inducement was used to attract participants. The survey used offered an item of low economic value as an inducement, which was unlikely to have a strong effect on voluntariness.

Asymmetry of power is another issue that lies within the domain of ethical concerns and which may influence the reproduction of the stories told by the participants in the research report. The researcher controls how the information is disseminated and this can influence the result. In order to try to maintain a certain power symmetry, the researcher in this project chose to return a detailed summary to the participants. They were encouraged to read it through and forward their comments to the researcher. However, such empowerment is not viewed as problem-free, as the participants may not know how to deal with the information in the summary. In this thesis, the issues discussed in the interviews were well within the participant level of understanding, thus the researcher viewed this reengagement as valuable because it would strengthen the trustworthiness of the research (Karniele-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009). The ethical issues are not only linked to the data collection process, they are an issue of concern that the researcher has to reflect on, both in terms of data storage and report/article writing. Participant entitlement to anonymity means that

the researcher has to act on, report and store research information in such a way that it will not harm the participants (Alver, 01.12.2009). The research context pertaining to the qualitative part of this thesis could raise anonymity concerns. Thus, the researcher had to reflect on how to maintain confidentiality, for example by changing identity and contextual issues, without influencing the quality of the results.



## **4. Findings and implications related to the individual studies**

This section points out the key findings and issues related to the single studies in this thesis. The section will be followed by a summary of the findings and discussion of implications for research and tourism management.

### **Key issues in Study 1**

Study 1 is a conceptual article, where the concept of storytelling is traced in the relevant literature. The purpose of this article was to elaborate on storytelling as a communication tool within marketing research, in particular in relation to SD-Logic and co-creation of value. The research effort and interest in storytelling within the field of marketing has increased during recent years, from being primarily used in advertising and branding, to being used in order to develop the actual offer, i.e. including both physical and psychological elements of the offer and the actual encounter (Chronis, 2012a; Mossberg & Johansen, 2006). Regardless of this, the research activity regarding the use and effect of using storytelling beyond advertising and as an element of the servicescape, and also relation to Service Dominant Logic, has been fairly low. There seems to be a need, therefore, for a framework including storytelling as a marketing communication tool that can improve the consumer experience, and tourist offerings in particular. This study approaches these challenges by pondering on the potential for storytelling as a communicative resource for tourism firms.

Delving into research literature theory concerning the constituents of storytelling provided the necessary knowledge of the concept of storytelling. The elements of interest were the foundational elements of storytelling, the connection of these elements and the effect of the combination of the elements that makes a story worth telling. The literature review was concentrated on the literature that concerned storytelling in a relevant context, i.e. advertising, branding, marketing, tourism, theatre and communications.

This study offers new views on storytelling in marketing research by suggesting a framework founded on previous research into storytelling in various fields, including marketing and tourism.

## **Key findings in Study 2**

Study 2 presents an internet-based quasi experiment in the domain of tourism marketing. This study serves the purpose of exploring the influence of a promotional story of an event. The findings of the study show that spectator perceptions of an event, before and after exposure to the promotion film dramatizing that event, were significantly different in the two situations measured for attributes linked to enjoyment, value, and stimulation. The study also suggests that (1) storytelling influences potential tourist attitudes, and (2) the effects of events in destination image building should be acknowledged to a greater extent. Using storytelling to dramatize an event has an effect on the image spectators have of the event and the destination. Specifically, the results suggest that the event story succeeded in the communication of (1) dog sledding as a joyful, valuable and stimulating activity, (2) the destination culture, destination accommodation, its genuineness and weather, and (3) the meaning-laden value-related attributes of freedom, magic, and “like a fairytale”, as well as unique natural phenomena. The findings indicate that storytelling is appropriate for communicating attributes that present both functional and intangible qualities. Spectator perceptions of the destination as more genuine after exposure to the film indicate that a dramatized event may form expectations regarding the authenticity of a destination.

## **Study 3 and 4**

The perspectives of Studies 3 and 4 are linked to storytelling as communication tool in interaction processes, which together can contribute towards a framework for resource creation and development linked to storytelling, interaction and co-creation. Studies 3 and 4 are discussed further in the next sections.

### *Key findings in Study 3*

Study 3 presents a qualitative exploration of the guide role and the co-creation strategies adopted by various guides when interacting with tourists. To illustrate potential contextual restrictions of the use of co-creation strategies, two different experiences are discussed: a guided tour at a rock art site and a guided nature-based tour in a northern landscape.

The findings reveal that a context of experience encourages or restrains the guides' uses of different co-creation strategies, particularly in terms of storytelling. Storytelling was found to be an important resource, linked to education, entertainment and serendipity. The findings indicate that guides have different perceptions of their role, which influence their view and use of the available co-creation resources.

#### *Key findings in Study 4*

Study 4 explores the role of the natural environment in the communication of tourist experiences through a qualitative research design. To illustrate the potential staging strategies for tourism firms related to natural environments, two cases in north Norway are discussed: a dog sled race and a northern lights hunt.

The findings illustrates that the multidimensionality of natural environments provides potential for tourism managers in terms of communicatively staging the tourist activity using storytelling. In particular, the study emphasises the dimensions of exploration, play, and education as useful staging dimensions that can guide storytelling. The usefulness of these dimensions is linked to their potential in enhancing tourist experience value through increased emotional, mental, and physical engagement. The study indicates that the dimensions of exploration, play and education are interrelated, which means that staging the natural environment by acknowledging the interplay among those dimensions can improve the perceived value of the tourist activity.

The results are believed to offer tourism firms and guides deeper insights into how different stories and their telling of can enhance value co-creation in tourist activities, thus resonating with tourism firms and guides. Finally, the interpretations offered in this thesis are believed to be useful for tourism firms seeking to develop interactive tourist activities.

## **5. Summary of the findings**

This thesis has explored different ways of using storytelling as a communicative resource for tourism managers seeking to enhance value co-creation potential with tourists: A dramatized and filmed promotional event story influences spectator attitudes pre-visit, while performing stories during actual host-tourist interactions can enhance co-creation of value with tourists during interaction when tourists actively participate, psychologically or physically, in the activity. The

findings emphasise the role of the tourism firm as a key resource integrator in the interaction process, in particular in terms of communication, and storytelling as an integrative practice. To sum up, the findings indicate that storytelling has a potential that is underused today, as tourism firms may not acknowledge that (1) storytelling as an integrative resource demands investment in knowledge and skills that enable or facilitate for performing different types of stories, (2) that employee role perceptions influence their ability and willingness to engage in storytelling and perform stories, or to actively try to involve tourists, and (3) that natural environments can play an important role in story performance through staging. Based on the studies in this thesis, storytelling is proposed as an operant resource that is:

Performance keyed: In accordance with theoretical research in performance theory, this thesis suggests that storytelling is performed in the sense that stories are purposively communicated and/or used to structure and enhance tourist activities (in the pre- and actual visitation phases).

Role influenced: The thesis understands individual role perceptions and behaviours as a foundation for successful storytelling. The guides role perception, and their perception of the tourists role play, influences type of stories told, and why and how they are performed. Thus, this thesis move beyond the central position of a guide in a pure instrumental meaning and towards the guide as also gaining from interacting with tourists through sharing.

Context dependent: Storytelling is situated in destination environments framing multiple tourist activities, which means that the environmental dimensions used in order to stage stories, are linked to both the promotional story and the actual experience, i.e. the staging of the story. In particular, staging the scenic qualities of natural environments is important.

Extended: Elements, or cues, framed in promotional stories, are extended into new stories that are performed with tourists during their actual visits.

## **6. Implications for research and practice**

This thesis explores different ways that tourism firms can communicate through storytelling. The promotional effect of stories in pre-visit interaction, and the use of storytelling during interaction at a destination, has implications for research. The communication practice of tourism firms is explored in light of SD-Logic, and in particular concerning the co-creation of value, with the subsequent use and integration of resources. Through an interactional orientation, the separate studies illustrate how storytelling can be a useful operant resource for tourism firms seeking to enhance the co-creation of value. The thesis particularly contributes with insights into how storytelling as an integrative practice can influence the level of participant activity, i.e. psychological and physical activity during the pre-visit and visitation phases. The position of this work within a marketing research tradition has implications for knowledge production and use. The marketing research tradition seeks to bring forth knowledge primarily linked to actors in a market, i.e. stakeholders, context, processes and outcomes that influence behaviour. The position of this work within the SD-Logic framework places the results in a dynamic market perspective, where the market is continuously shaped through interaction and resource integration by personal, social, cultural and institutional/organisational factors. Conceptual literature in marketing research linked to SD-logic suggests that, as a core principle, the concept of co-creation implies a potential to create value for all those who participate in an interaction process, yet empirical articles addressing co-creation of value are still limited (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2008). The managerial exploration of the concept of co-creation in this thesis illustrates that the creation of value is not solely an individual cognitive effort, but depends on the tourism firms sharing practices and the degree of resource integration between all those who participate in interaction processes. Thus, this thesis contributes additional theoretical understanding of the concept of co-creation in (tourist) consumption experiences, and of value as interactional and linked to shared individual, cultural and social resources. The thesis thus adds to, and strengthens, the increasing understanding of SD-Logic as a useful framework for research in the marketing tradition, and in particular in tourism marketing. It further stresses the importance of tourism firms' management of their operant resources, in particular in terms of the perception guides have of their role, and communication competencies, i.e. storytelling performance skills. In addition, the emphasis in this thesis on value co-creation indicates that knowledge is linked to both local constituents, such as the guide, and to

tourist cultures and their social networks, as these influence participant values and perceptions of how much effort they undertake when participating in co-creation. This theoretical contribution may also have value for, and be assessed in relation to, the marketing issues highlighted by the Marketing Science Institute for 2012-2014,” The design of consumer experiences that are remembered, interesting, repeated and valued”.

This thesis also contributes to the literature on destination image and change by showing that a promotional event story influences potential tourists` attitudes towards a region. This adds to the existing event and destination marketing literature of stakeholder cooperation and co-branding in destination marketing. The findings have implications for the role that can be played by various destination stakeholders in the processes of co-creating destination marketing value through storytelling, i.e. the stakeholders contribute to develop promotional stories communicating a destinations core values.

Methodologically, the exploration in this thesis of the meaning creating processes of tourist activities with each study`s own aim of exploration, illustrates that a multi-method approach can be suitable when the research problem(s) are complex and dynamic, and where understanding and knowledge is linked to exploration of concepts. The multiple method approach used in this thesis is particularly suitable for doing research within the SD-Logic mindset, with the possibility of combining micro and macro levels of analysis. SD-Logic is supportive of the market being a starting point for research. The market is viewed as networks of co-created activities where resources that are developed and specialised at micro levels shape macro structures, and where macro structures work back on micro levels (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). Multiple methods can address the tourist experience on both levels: in Study 2, a quasi-experiment was used when exploring the relationship between storytelling and attitudes. Studies 2 and 3 partly followed a constructivist grounded theory approach, which allowed for flexibility in moving between participants and data, and emphasised the dynamic, situational and relational perspective of social encounters. This approach resulted in the identification of key codes that were constructed to relevant categories. While the quasi experiment operates on a more abstract analytical level, the qualitative constructivist grounded theory approach seeks to develop a framework based on the actions of the participants. Therefore, the findings are viewed as grounded in the stories of the participants, but co-constructed by the researcher. The multi-method approach seeks to connect the levels of

analysis through the concept of co-creation. Thus, the research design contributes to the methodological options within SD-Logic as the (inter)action based foundations of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism can serve to support the dynamic and interactional perspective in SD-Logic.

This thesis' exploration of tourism firms' promotional communication and guide-tourist interaction processes, contributes with knowledge related to the less explored area of storytelling as an operant resource in value co-creation processes. Storytelling is a way for tourism firms to influence actively the interaction process and the tourists partaking in tourist activities. The integrative perspective of storytelling illustrates the complexity and multidimensionality that links the tourism firm stories, tourist activity context (the natural environment) and destination promotional activities, such as event promotion. The importance and benefits of storytelling are linked to the role and content of co-creation: how do tourism firms use storytelling when interacting with tourists and how can they use storytelling when they seek to enhance value co-creation? The thesis provides empirical insights into tourism firm roles and management of interaction processes through exploring storytelling as a resource linked to the co-creation process: a story can be a basic resource in terms of its content, but can be a more valuable higher level resource that provides tourism firms with special and particular knowledge and skills. Further, as a higher level resource, storytelling can enable tourism firms to offer unique value propositions with a potential for enhanced value co-creation. From a resource perspective, value is co-created during the interaction process through the integration of all the participant resources. These processes are initiated by tourism firms in terms of their offers and storytelling resource combination, where the resource combination of the tourism firms is central in order to perform a story. Thus, in addition to the emphasis on a combination of resources, this thesis suggests that tourism firms and their employees, such as the guides, can be considered the most influential actors adding value in a "host-guest" interaction process. The reason for this is that tourism firms, and guides in particular, act as "stage directors" when performing during a tourist activity. Thus, they can have more control over the interaction process than the tourists do, i.e. they are in a position to control, and possess unique knowledge about the destination, the activity and the environment.

In terms of managerial impacts, the particular form of resources in this thesis is linked to storytelling and this thesis position is that the firm can develop the appropriate knowledge, skills

and stories that enable them to use and perform stories strategically. Hence, this thesis suggests that tourism managers should: (1) explore regional and local storytelling resources in order to develop unique storytelling repositories, (2) integrate resources with other destination stakeholders in order to create promotional stories linked to these local resources, (3) assess and acknowledge the role played in interaction processes, particularly in terms of the guide as the guide role is often underestimated by tourism and business firm managers, and by the guides themselves, i.e. they do not perceive of themselves as professional “guides”, and (4) actively stage and perform natural environments in order to strengthen the core of their storytelling activities.

## **7. Limitations**

There are several limitations of this thesis. First, using multiple methods offers a broad approach; however, this can result in less depth. In addition, each study has its own limitations: Study 1 offers a perspective on storytelling limited by the concept of co-creation and targeted to destination and tourism managers. It is limited to storytelling as a tourism firm resource. Study 2 was limited by its focus on one event only. The duration of the film may have implications for attitude impact, as a shorter or longer film may have influenced attitudes differently. Another limitation in a quasi-experiential web based study such as this is the lack of control regarding confounding variables and the restricted population. Hence, a time series design for true experiments, or quasi experiments could be undertaken with a control group to enhance the validity of the study result (Shadish et al., 2002).

Study 3 is limited by its small sample size and more research with larger samples will strengthen the arguments for the generalisation of the results. The study is limited to the guides' point of view, which may not be shared by tourists. Nevertheless, the study can offer valuable theoretical insights into how perspectives of their own roles influence the resource use of guides, particularly in relation to value co-creation. Study 4 shares some of the limitations of Study 3, with a small sample and having a managerial perspective. In spite of its limitations, the study offers insights regarding the use of the natural environment and its role in the creation of tourist performances that can benefit tourism firms seeking to enhance value co-creation with tourists buying their activities.

In summary, all participants in this thesis represent individual meanings that can be linked to particular contexts and perspectives. The participants in the qualitative research process are few, which has implications for the applicability of the results. Thus, the illustrated meanings are subjective, intersubjective and limited to particular tourist experiences, and as such, may not be representative of a wider context with different participants. In addition, the understanding of storytelling in this thesis is limited to a knowledge/understanding view, as a management tool, while the perspective on performance is limited to a tourism context and the performance of a story.

However, for tourism managers, the studies can offer valuable insight into, and knowledge about, the ways storytelling can be used in order to increase the potential for value co-creation by integrating the various elements in a tourist offer linked to the spheres of pre-visit and visitation.



## 8. Future research

This thesis has explored storytelling in three of the different interaction processes encountered by a tourist, in order to establish storytelling as an operant resource that can benefit tourism managers who aim to create engaging tourist activities with the potential to enhance value co-creation. Co-creation is one of the core premises of SD-Logic, and the scarcity of empirical studies testing SD-Logic means that future studies within this domain are a welcomed contribution to the existing knowledge. Storytelling is a devalued value-enhancing resource, in particular for tourism managers and more research related to the use of storytelling in tourist experiences is needed in order to find further empirical support for its use as a communication tool. Future research could thus test other promotional stories for similar and other types of events to enhance reliability. Future studies need to address whether differences exist between respondents with prior knowledge of events and respondents without knowledge. Longitudinal studies should be performed to test the long-term effects of storied events as promotional destination material and in order to find out whether the spectators maintain their images of the event and destination over time. The structure of stories is seen as important in terms of psychological and physical impact, and in order to increase this understanding future research can focus on which elements of the story are particularly influential in terms of promotional aims.

Future research could consider which stories are suitable in the sense that they bring forth propositions which can be used in order to manage and enhance co-creation processes with tourists from different cultures and backgrounds, and to test these stories in different cultural and social contexts. Additional knowledge about the dimensions of storytelling would provide researchers and practitioners with valuable knowledge about staging tourist performances that could complement a wide range of desired tourist experiences. This will strengthen storytelling as an operational resource and may provide researchers and practitioners with valuable knowledge about how interactions are managed and staged in order to offer propositions that have a potential for resource integration.

Another avenue for future research is linked to the host-guest interaction processes and the perspective of the other participants in this interaction process in terms of value co-creation, as this could strengthen the argument for generalising the result. This includes studies that investigate the performance aspects of the tourist experience.



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## Articles (1-4)



# Paper 1



Paper 2



## Paper 3



Paper 4



## Appendices

### Interview guide 1

Regulatory framework

Chat

Information

How will the interview be used?

Confidentiality and anonymity: Safeguarding

Inform about the recording of the interview

Explain the interview process

### The interview

Personal data

Gender, age, occupation, education

If necessary, other

Can you tell us about what you do? (Transition question)

How do you proceed during the activity and how do you communicate and work with tourists?

Can you tell me about a typical trip?

Can you tell me about a trip you remember well?

Why do you remember this trip?

Prompting if necessary

How do you perceive your role/meaning?

What do you know about the guest (values: emotional/cognitive, cultural, social)

Tell me about activities and values: planning and development of a trip/tour

Describe and tell about how you communicate with tourists

Name and describe the interaction activities - type interaction and how it is initiated,  
the type of response

Tell me about the activity (what happens, how and when, or obstruction)

Importance of setting

What does the experience mean to you: What does the guide “bring back home”

### Summary

Summarise findings

Common understanding

Ask if there is anything to be added

Possible contact for follow-up

## Interview guide 2

Framework

Chat

Information:

How will the interview be used?

Confidentiality and anonymity: Safeguarding of privacy

Inform about the recording of the interview

Explain the interview process

## The interview

Personal data

Gender, age, occupation, education

Optional: other

Can you tell me about what you do (transition question)

What are the core activities of your business and how do you work with them? (Transition question)

Can you tell me about how you communicate with visitors and how you work with the organisation and communication of the race?

Prompting:

Tell me about the activities and values –

planning and development

marketing, storytelling

Tell me about key skills and values

Tell me about important partners type of cooperation and why

Tell me about any planned development? Key elements and why

Future Challenges

## Summary

Summarise findings

Common understanding

Other

Follow up

## Vinterturisme i Finnmark/Winter tourism in Finnmark(6)

Svar på spørreskjemaet og bli med i trekningen om effekter fra Finnmarksløpet! I forbindelse med et doktorgradsprosjekt ved Høgskolen i Finnmark/Universitetet i Tromsø vil vi gjerne vite hva du tenker om Finnmark som reisemål og hundekjøring som vinteraktivitet. Spørreskjemaet er todelt; først noen kommer noen spørsmål, deretter en kort film om Finnmarksløpet og avslutningsvis de samme spørsmålene. Grunnen til dette er at vi ønsker å finne ut om filmen påvirker dine tanker om Finnmark som destinasjon og hundekjøring som vinteraktivitet.

Answer this questionnaire and you have the chance to win prizes from Finnmarksløpet! As part of a Phd project at Finnmark University College/University of Tromsø, we would like to know your thoughts about Finnmark as a destination and Finnmarksløpet (dog sledging) as a winter activity. This questionnaire is in in two parts; first you will find questions about Finnmark and dog sledging, then we ask you to watch a short film about Finnmarksløpet, and finally you will answer a few more questions similar to the first questions. The reason for this is that we would like to know whether the film affects your perception of Finnmark as a destination and dog sledging as a winter activity.

Hide my identity

[Read about hidden identity.](#) (Opens in a new window)

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**1) \* Sex**

- 1) Male
  - 2) Female
- 

**2) \* Age**

- 1) <20
  - 2) 21-35
  - 3) 36-50
  - 4) 51-65
  - 5) >66
- 

**3) Marital status**

- 1) Single
- 2) Married
- 3) Separated
- 4) Divorced
- 5) Living with partner
- 6) Other

---

**4) \* Education**

- 1) Primary and secondary school
  - 2) High school
  - 3) University college
  - 4) University
- 

**5) \* In which income segment do you belong?**

- 1) <45 000 Euro
  - 2) 45 001-65 000 Euro
  - 3) 65 001-85 000 Euro
  - 4) >85 001 Euro
- 

**6) Where do you live?**

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**7) \* Have you visited Finnmark before?**

- 1) Yes
- 2) No

---

8) \* Please consider your perceptions regarding the following statements:

	Disagree			Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
I have a good knowledge of Finnmark.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I know a lot about dog sledging.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I have a good knowledge of Finnmarksløpet	<input type="checkbox"/>				

---

9) NRK is showing a teaser about Finnmarksløpet these days. Have you seen it?

Yes

No

---

10) Are you a part of Finnmarksløpet? If so, please indicate your role:

Have no part in Finnmarksløpet

Volunteer

Sponsor

Employee

● Other

---

11) \* Listed below are a number of statements regarding Finnmark as a destination. Read each statement and decide whether you agree or disagree.

	Disagree				Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
Finnmark is a place of cultural interest.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark has beautiful scenery.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark has suitable accomodation.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark has good opportunities for winter sports activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark is exotic.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark feels genuine.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
There is often bad weather in Finnmark.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

---

12) \* Listed below are a number of statements about dog sledging. Read each statement and decide whether you agree or disagree.

	Disagree				Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
Dog sledging is a meaningful activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is an inspiring activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is an unadventurous activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is a joyful activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is a valuable activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is a stimulating activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is excellent.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

---

13) Please consider your perceptions with regards to the following statements:

	Disagree				Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
Finnmark is magical.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark is like a fairytale destination.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**Finnmark has unique natural phenomenon.**

**Dog sledging in Finnmark would make me feel free.**

---

**14) How likely is it that you will travel to Finnmark, watch Finnmarksløpet and/or participate in dog sledging in the next 2 years?**

	Unlikely			Likely	
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>How likely is it that you will travel to Finnmark in the next two years?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>How likely is it that you will try dog sledging during the next two years?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

---

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU WATCH THIS SHORT CLIP ABOUT FINNMARKSLØPET BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH THE QUESTIONS:

[CLICK HERE FOR THE CLIP FINNMARKSLOPET](#)

**15) Please click on the link to the short film about Finnmarkløpet above:**

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16) \* Listed below are a number of statements about Finnmark as a destination. Read each statement and decide whether you agree or disagree.

	Disagree			Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
Finnmark has beautiful scenery.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark is a place of cultural interest.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark has suitable accomodation.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark has good opportunities for winter sports activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark is exotic.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark feels genuine.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
There is often bad weather in Finnmark.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

---

17) \* Listed below are again a number of statements regarding dog sledging. Read each statement and decide whether you agree or disagree.

	Disagree			Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
Dog sledging is a valuable activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is a meaningful activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is an inspiring activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is an unadventurous activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is a joyful activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is a stimulating activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Dog sledging is excellent.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

---

18) Please consider your perceptions with regards to the following statements:

	Disagree			Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
Finnmark is magical.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Finnmark is like a fairytale destination.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**Finnmark has unique natural phenomenon.**

**Dog sledging in Finnmark would make me feel free.**

---

**19) How likely is it that you will travel to Finnmark, watch Finnmarksløpet and/or participate in dog sledging in the next 2 years?**

**Unlikely** **Likely**  
**1 2 3 4 5**

**How likely is it that you will travel to Finnmark in the next two years?**

**How likely is it that you will try dog sledging during the next two years?**

---

**20) I want to participate in the competition and have the chance to win items from Finnmarksløpet.**

Yes

No

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We would appreciate it if we could contact you in order to elaborate on some of the questions from the questionnaire. The contact would be via e-mail/chat on the internet.

**21) Can you be contacted for a short follow up e-mail interview?**

Yes

No