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Exploring reflective learning during the extended consumption of life experiences



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explores the potential for personal transformation resulting from reflective learning that occurs during the extended consumption of life experiences. Extended consumption refers to activities that consist in re-experiencing a life experience, for instance sharing stories/photographs or blogging.

Methodology: Using a directed qualitative content analysis, Hubbs and Brand's (2010) framework is applied to analyze the content of 19 travel blogs and develop an understanding of different forms of consumer learning occurring during the extended consumption experience.

Findings: The analysis of the travel blogs provides evidence of three forms of reflective learning during extended consumption: emotional, critical and personal reflection learning. Although a high proportion of the blog narratives do not go beyond surface learning, most bloggers use a combination of the three forms of reflective learning, signifying different levels of reflection. Experiences that produce emotions of high valence and situations that point to differences between the bloggers' home culture and the destinations' characteristics appear to trigger reflective learning, in some instances providing evidence of personal transformation.

Originality/value: This research contributes to the experiential consumption literature, providing evidence of consumers' development and transformation during extended consumption, and showing how even negative experiences lead to self-learning.

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1. Introduction

Consumption experiences range from the mundane to the extraordinary. Besides satisfying utilitarian needs, they also provide consumers with opportunities for fantasy, feelings and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and personal growth (Arnould & Price, 1993). "Life experiences" (Cooper-Martin, 1992; Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015) and experiential purchases ("purchases made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience": Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003, p. 1194) have generated growing interest because evidence suggests that they contribute to greater well-being and happiness than material items (Gilovich et al., 2015; Zhang, Howell, & Capriarello, 2013). Furthermore, experiential purchases seem "to imply or at least prime an experience that lasts in memory and is significant for the individual for personal development and growth" (Schmitt et al., 2015, p. 167). Yet, the post-consumption stage of experiential purchases/life experiences is under researched, as scholars and practitioners privilege the managerial problem of how to design experiences which satisfy consumers and ensure their loyalty (Schmitt, Rogers, & Vrotsos, 2004; Smith & Wheeler, 2002).

Schmitt and Zarantonello (2013) note that while interest about how consumers use and remember the products they purchase has increased over the last two decades, literature on experiential purchases lags behind: it does not address how life experiences, which are closely connected to the self (Carter & Gilovich, 2012), may still produce self-developmental value during an "extended consumption" stage, after the main consumption event. As Alba and Williams (2013) observe, consumers are known to savor their memories of enjoyable and meaningful experiences. The retelling of holiday moments during a dinner with friends or the sharing of photographs, may add to someone's life story or enhance their identity. Recent models of consumption experience (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009) call for the consideration of outcomes such as customer learning, enjoyment, entertainment, skills, nostalgia, fantasizing and evangelizing as part of the post-experience stage. Such outcomes influence consumers' decisions, future actions and self-development (Caru & Cova, 2003; Cova & Dall'i, 2009), yet the focus on the pre-consumption stages, and, at the post-consumption stage, on the dominance of managerial concerns, sidelines them.

With experiential purchases, consumers are more likely to share stories with others, including through social media (Capriarello & Reis, 2013). In particular, blogs, and specifically consumption-oriented blogs, can act as introspective accounts of how the products or experiences relate to consumers' lives, allowing them to internalize the

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symbolic meanings embedded in these products (Zhao & Belk, 2007). Hence, they present an opportunity for researchers to understand experiential purchases or life experiences as a form of ‘unobtrusive research’. Blogs as naturally occurring data may allow the capture of their performative function, which is one of the benefits of retelling one’s stories to others. Empirical studies show how individuals use blogs to provide evidence of personal growth or enhanced identity from experiences (Davis, 2010; Huffaker, 2006). Blogs also enable consumers to “write down” the recollection of their experiences, hence facilitating self-reflection beyond what might happen otherwise. Insofar as they can be conducive to reflection, blogs can act as learning journals, providing the blogger with mechanisms to document their own understandings and behaviors as they develop (Hall & Davison, 2007).

An examination of blogs as narratives which can facilitate reflective learning contributes to literature by uncovering the value of experiential purchases or life experiences for personal transformation. Reflective learning captured in blogs constitutes an important outcome, as consumers’ ‘re-experience the experience’ in another form, hence extending the value of such experience.² This study explores the potential for personal transformation resulting from reflective learning that occurs during the extended consumption of life experiences. Travel blogs, which can provide rich consumption accounts of life experiences, serve to explore the link between narratives and learning.

2. Literature review

2.1. Life experiences and their extended consumption

Growing literature on experiential purchases provides evidence that these products contribute to greater well-being than material items (Zhang et al., 2013). Experiential purchases are those which enable life experiences (Gilovich et al., 2015). Compared to material purchases, experiential purchases: a. are physically closer to the self; b. more likely to be mentioned when people tell their life story; c. overlap more with people’s sense of who they are; and d. yield greater insight into people’s true selves (Carter & Gilovich, 2012): “Experiential purchases tend to provide more enduring satisfaction in that they more readily, more broadly, and more deeply connect us to others” (Gilovich et al., 2015, p. 155). Guevarra and Howell (2015) also stress the importance of experiential products and material possessions that afford new life experiences (e.g., running shoes) because they contribute more to well-being and happiness as well as memories, which are crucial for personal development (Schmitt et al., 2015).

Marketing research on experiences remains focused on the measurement and management of experience marketing, and decision making implications (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). Models of consumption experience (Payne et al., 2008; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009) and empirical evidence (Schmitt et al., 2015) suggest that experience outcomes include customer learning, meaning, self-realization, happiness, enjoyment, entertainment, skills, nostalgia, fantasizing and evangelizing.

This research raises the key question of what happens after the consumption of a life experience and specifically how consumers might draw more value from ‘extending’ the consumption experience. During the remembered consumption and nostalgia experience, photographs and stories may prompt a ‘re-experience’ of the experience with friends, leading to the classification of memories (Arnould, Price, & Zinkhan, 2002), or triggering a redefinition of the self. Hence, this research focuses on ‘extended consumption’, which entails activities that happen subsequent to the main consumption event and are focused on a form of re-experience of the main consumption event, leading to the production of value and identity development. This would include sharing stories (written or oral); videos and photographs of experiences

with friends (online and offline), which occur immediately after the main consumption event or in everyday lives as conversation pieces.

With the advent of social media, extended consumption becomes more significant for researchers who seek to understand the value of life experiences. Stories of life experiences are more likely to be shared with others (Caprariello & Reis, 2013). Blogs, which consist of recollections of experience, may also facilitate self-reflection beyond what happened, providing consumers with opportunities for deeper learning and, in some instances, an implicit or explicit expression of change themselves or personal growth. Hence, alongside their performative function, blogs, similarly to learning journals (Hall & Davison, 2007), provide insights on consumer learning during the extended consumption of experiential purchases or life experiences.

2.2. Extended consumption and consumer learning

Marketing scholars define consumer learning as the process by which individuals acquire the purchase and consumption knowledge and experience that they can apply to future behavior (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). Research mostly focuses on consumers learning about the object of their consumption (e.g., Gregan-Paxton & John, 1997; Iyengar, Ansari, & Gupta, 2007; Poynor & Wood, 2010); it rarely considers the outcomes of learning for consumers’ self-development and empowerment (Jayanti & Singh, 2010).

Several models of consumption experience suggest consumer learning as an outcome of experiences, but do not investigate it empirically. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) suggest that the consumption of experience could entail such consequences as fun, enjoyment, feelings of pleasure; and learning can arise from the stream of associations (imagery, daydreams and emotions) that occur during consumption. Payne et al. (2008) contend that customer learning involves proportioning (a learning which involves customers taking one step backward to reflect on their own processes and how they engage with a supplier) and reflecting on how the value proposition relates to their lives and aspirations. Tynan and McKechnie (2009) include learning as one of several outcomes of experience. These works suggest that consumer learning can be one form of value that consumers take away from their experience during its extended consumption and can consist of both ‘object-directed’ and ‘self-directed’ learning. Yet, extant experiential consumption literature has not explored consumer learning and self-development as possible significant long-term benefits, alongside happiness, satisfaction and well-being. Consequently, the research draws from management learning and education literature to consider the potential for reflectively learning from experiences.

In line with the central tenet of experiential learning, according to which experience is the trigger for learning through a transformation of understanding (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001), consumer learning can signify a change in the self and can have a lasting, transformational impact when it affects consumers’ self-concept. Travel experiences are good examples of experiential consumption where consumer learning comes in the form of newly acquired practical skills, knowledge, practical wisdom and self-consciousness that contribute to self-development (Chen, Bao, & Huang, 2014; Falk, Ballantyne, Packer, & Benckendorff, 2012). Experiences such as these advance social connection as they prompt more conversation and storytelling (Schmitt et al., 2015). Therefore, such story-telling instances constitute opportunities to explore consumer learning occurring during extended consumption.

Story telling uses autobiographical reasoning skills to understand the self; and retrospective reflection and other markers of the mature self-authorship are fundamental instruments in identifying self-development (McAdams, 2013). Different events produce different opportunities for the development of self-understanding and personal growth (McLean, 2008). “Experiences that challenge one’s sense of self (Pals, 2006), that are emotionally disruptive (Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot, & Boca, 1991) or that are self-defining (Singer & Salovey,

² We are grateful to a reviewer for having encouraged us to develop this idea.

1993) create the starting ingredients for story to be produced” (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007, p. 271). Experiences can have positive as well as negative outcomes, but as Cziksenthmihalyi (1993) argues, what is important is the challenge of one's limits, which is significant for an evolving self. Disruptive or unresolved experiences are more likely to be storied and make a memorable story (McLean & Thorne, 2006) and may contribute to self-development, although people also use more positive experiences for entertaining and connecting with audiences (McLean et al., 2007).

Travel blogs as consumers' narratives (Schau & Gilly, 2003) constitute a valuable activity during extended consumption, enabling consumers to produce tangible evidence of their experience-focused learning and their own self-development, for several reasons. First, these narratives convey deeper meaning of a consumption experience such as identity formation and self-development (Caru & Cova, 2003); second, like situated stories, travel blogs can help develop and maintain the self (McLean et al., 2007); and third, sharing stories, enables people to open themselves up to social shaping as social reinforcement (McLean et al., 2007). Consumer research is yet to take full account of consumer self-learning and of the potential of consumption experience narratives in providing a deeper understanding of what individuals take away from their experiences and how they integrate them to their life stories during extended consumption. This research aims to start addressing this gap.

2.3. Reflective learning in narratives

Although learning is difficult to observe or quantify (Marsick & Watkins, 1990), consumer-generated content, in particular consumption-oriented blogs, may contain stories of consumption experiences in which reflective learning is embedded. Management learning and higher education literature shows that there are varied terminologies to describe different levels of reflective learning such as descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection and critical reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995); subjective, personal and critical learning (Hedberg, 2009). Hubbs and Brand (2010) develop a model of reflective learning of most pertinence to the context of consumption experiences. The two dimensions of the model represent the context of the journal entry (focused inward – on the subject, or outward – on the process) and the level of reflection (superficial or analytical). In the resulting matrix (Fig. 1), Quadrant A is similar to surface learning where the learner simply memorizes (or narrates) new knowledge. It is superficial in content and has limited or no emotional tone. Quadrant B is similarly superficial but includes an emotional context. Quadrant C transcends superficial understanding and suggests a more complex comprehension

of content; it is similar to Hedberg's (2009) critical reflective learning level. This kind of learning challenges individuals to question assumptions, beliefs and commonly accepted wisdom, and encourages them to actively participate in what they learn (Hedberg, 2009). Quadrant D is a more complex, introspective process that merges self-awareness with insightful analysis. Personal reflection learning focuses on individuals' perspective or personal insights gained, where they reflect on how they can apply what they have learned and note its impact and relevance to their own lives (Hedberg, 2009). It happens at the intersection between who they are (what they think, feel and know) and what they discover about a subject (the place, people and culture) (Palmer, 1983).

Hubbs and Brand's (2010) framework is deemed most appropriate to use in understanding consumption narratives for several reasons: a. it permits the categorization of the vast, diverse and idiosyncratic consumption-oriented blogs based on the focus of content and the level of reflection; b. consistent with Boud, Keogh and Walker's (1985) description of reflection as an affective response to personal experiences that can facilitate the revision or creation of new understanding, it recognizes the use of emotions as markers and mediators of experiences, hence aligning with the experiential perspective (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999); c. the dimension that represents the context of the narrative (inward vs. outward-focused) should enable the capture of both self- and object-directed learning instances; and d. three of the categories (emotional learning, critical reflective learning and personal reflective learning) carry the potential for personal transformation. Further, Huber (1991) and Gibb (1995) argue that learning does not necessarily have to result in changes in behavior; rather it is the *potential* to behave differently that characterizes this process (Cope & Watts, 2000).

3. Methodology

To explore consumer learning during the extended consumption experience, the study analyzes travel blogs, which are online narratives of travel experiences. Travel blogs are from members of www.travelblog.org, one of the biggest and most popular blog websites used by tourists. A sample of 19 blogs written by British bloggers comes from a group of 1214 bloggers who took part in a survey on travel blogging, as part of a wider study. 285 of those bloggers gave consent to use their blogs for the study. Purposive sampling follows several criteria to select the sample. First, sampling targets British bloggers to capture bloggers from the same cultural background and geographical origin. Second, blogs cover trips of over three weeks and to different places outside of the UK to focus on longer travel experiences. Third, the bloggers must have produced between 25 and 50 blog entries to indicate blogging experience. Fourth, the blogs contain rich narratives (i.e., more text than pictures) for consistency of interpretation. Word documents containing a full download from the website, served for data analysis in NVivo. The data set totals 674,000 words (approximately 1348 pages). Table 1 provides the profile of the bloggers and their blogs. Bloggers have covered many long-haul destinations. Word count varies greatly, reflecting different writing styles. Blog authorship is single except for George & Emily and Noel & Susan who have joint ownership. For this study, minimum cloak concealment (Kozinets, 2010) protects bloggers from harm, by replacing their online screen names with pseudonyms.

Hubbs and Brand's (2010) framework (see Fig. 1) serves to analyze the content of the blogs and develop an understanding of the different forms of consumer learning occurring during the extended consumption of experiential purchases. A directed qualitative content analysis enables the selection and categorization of learning events from the blog with codes derived from theory or relevant research findings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The coding of the blogs takes place in three phases. The first phase aims to extract all learning events from the travel blogs. Learning events consist of events or situations involving people, places and culture that become starting ingredients for the production

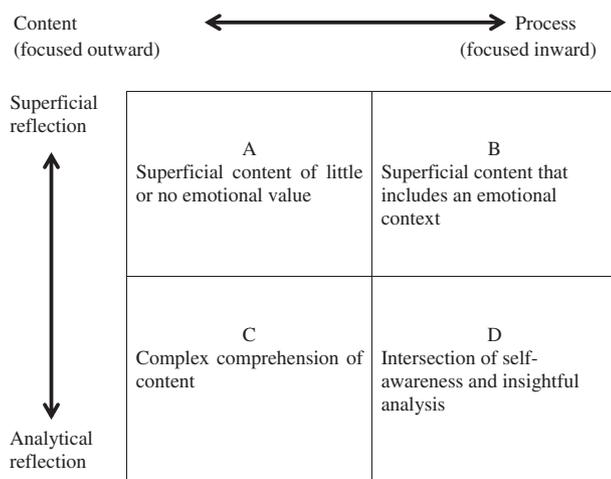


Fig. 1. Hubbs and Brand's (2010) matrix for categorizing reflective journals. Source: Hubbs & Brand (2010, p. 65).

Table 1
Profile of bloggers and their blogs.

Pseudonym	Gender	Countries blogged about	Blogs' word count
Amy	F	Laos, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand	9344
Bryan	M	Chile, Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia	54,988
Cristina	F	Chile, Peru, Bolivia Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador	71,713
Corina	F	Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia	56,029
Damon	M	Thailand, Vietnam, Fiji, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand	60,967
Deidre	F	Around Argentina	5689
Demetri	M	USA, France, Italy, Croatia, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia	60,363
Dennis	M	Spain, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Tokyo, Thailand	51,568
Gary	M	India, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Indonesia, Cambodia	31,200
George & Emily	M/F	Hong Kong, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, China	38,149
Gilbert	M	USA (multiple cities)	25,656
Leslie	F	Indonesia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina	9686
Lawrence	M	Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina Uruguay, USA	22,420
Maria	F	Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia	10,831
Mitchell	M	Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Philippines, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam	56,064
Nickie	F	Singapore, Australia, New Zealand	16,539
Noel & Susan	M/F	India, Nepal	9271
Sandy	F	South Africa, Tanzania, Botswana, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya	24,396
Ted	M	Thailand, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Tibet	59,135

of stories in their blogs (McLean et al., 2007), and the communication of newly acquired knowledge (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). These events may also trigger a state of doubt, perplexity and mental difficulty, or issue of concern (Boyd & Fales, 1983). This phase results in 229 learning events totaling 126 pages out of the initial 1,348 pages. The second phase consists of coding the 229 learning events into four types of learning accounts, using Hubbs and Brand's (2010) framework, as follows: surface learning (Quadrant A), emotional learning (Quadrant B), critical reflection learning (Quadrant C), and personal reflection learning (Quadrant D); each type of account represents a distinct level of reflection. Table 2 provides the descriptions of each type of learning account, and exemplar verbatims.

During the third phase, analysis takes place within each learning account category, to identify patterns in terms of the learning events triggering the learning accounts and the narrative strategies of the learning accounts. This phase also employs thematic analysis because it can show important themes that emerge in the blogs (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997), for example, how bloggers enjoy the value of their experience as extended consumption. Discussion and agreement of codes, codes definition and coding rules happened throughout the three phases.

4. Findings

4.1. Learning accounts and bloggers' learning styles

Coding and categorization led to the identification of 229 learning events, representing 126 pages (9.3% of the entire data set). Seventy-two percent of the 229 learning accounts are descriptive accounts of places, people and cultures of long-haul destinations that are diverse and different from the bloggers' home culture. People are natural storytellers and, in every culture, tell or perform stories (McAdams & McLean, 2013); indeed the bloggers tell stories of their new experience of place and its culture; even without referring to themselves. These narratives are surface learning accounts, which merely relate new ideas (Moon, 1999); they do not suggest reflective learning. Learning accounts that are reflective, in the sense that they consist of cognitive and/or affective responses that revise or create new understandings (Boud et al., 1985), come in various types: emotional (13%); critical reflection (10%) and personal reflection (5%). All bloggers except two (whose style of narrating is predominantly descriptive) produce different types of learning accounts from their experiences. Eleven bloggers use two types, combining surface learning with one of the three types of

reflective learning; three bloggers use surface and emotional learning in combination with either critical or personal reflection learning; and three bloggers use all types.

The analysis reveals that there is no evolution in learning account types over the whole trip (i.e., they do not progress from surface learning to personal reflection learning): bloggers shift from one type of learning account to another based on what triggers the learning event and their response to it. These findings in the consumption sphere are consistent with Hubbs and Brand's (2010) in higher education, who note that student journal entries vary in depth of reflection from entry to entry and from student to student.

4.2. Reflective learning accounts, triggers and narrative strategies

4.2.1. Emotional learning accounts

Emotional learning accounts are narratives of events that have evoked negative or positive emotions from the bloggers, in which emotions not only serve as markers of how certain experiences have touched the bloggers (Bagozzi et al., 1999) but also assist them in reconstructing these experiences for their readers. During extended consumption, an emotionally disruptive experience (Rimé et al., 1991) is often the starting ingredient for the production of a memorable story (McLean et al., 2007) that consumers can tell many times and insert in everyday conversations. The extract below, from Cristina's detailed account on her visit to the Potosi mines, is typical of emotional learning accounts.

The conditions the miners work under are appalling and going into the mine just gives a brief glimpse into what the life of a miner is like. It was great to give the fellas working there some prezzies and the fact that the tourism with the mines directly benefits the men working in them in some small way is good, however by no means goes anyway toward making their lives more 'comfortable'. It is a hard reality to accept that this is just a way of life here. A visit to the mine is physically quite hard, mentally/emotionally quite hard — but a must do if you are in the area!

This experience opens Cristina's eyes to the plight of the Potosi miners and the level of her affective response has the potential to facilitate personal transformation, as Fiol and Lyles (1985, p. 808) assert: "experiences that produce 'shocks', 'jolts', or 'crises' are necessary for unlearning and new, higher-level learning and re-adaptation to take place". There is an implication of unlearning preconceived notions on the lives of miners in general and an acceptance and

Table 2
Learning accounts, definitions and examples.

Learning account type	Definition	Example
Surface learning account	Narrative that is a descriptive account of learning events	"In the midst of the midday heat, we walked the 2 km to Vittala temple, a World Heritage Monument built in the 1500s, where we afforded ourselves a guide who demonstrated the musical stone pillars and showed us the Kama Sutra stone carvings that Indians used for sex education, apparently they came to the temple and just copied the drawings – most enlightening!" (Noel & Susan)
Emotional learning account	Narrative that may be a descriptive account of learning events but has emotional context	"I was amazed to see so many people bathing in the waters, and there was me trying to refrain from getting the tiniest of splashes. I lit a candle in memory of Dada and also to the happiness and health of all my friends and family which I left afloat on the holy waters. I was saddened to witness several cremations as well as a babies' body being thrown directly in the river. Such intimate rituals of life and death take place in public which is a shock to me but merely the crossing between the physical and spiritual world in the Hindu culture." (Maria)
Critical reflection learning account	Narrative that shows complex comprehension of the subject and contains critical analysis of the learning event	"It might seem strange that Bolivia is so poor given it receives huge amounts of international aid and it also possesses the second largest reserves of natural gas in South America. Political instability has played a part: Bolivia has had 29 changes of government since the early 1950s. Political incompetence also plays a role. One story goes that Bolivia refuses to sell gas to Chile (mainly as they don't get on – it all goes back to the War of the Pacific when Bolivia lost its coastline) so instead sells it to Argentina, who in turn sell it to Chile at a much inflated price. With politicians like these, no wonder the people of Bolivia have to take matters into their own hands!" (Bryan)
Personal reflection learning account	Narrative that shows intersection of self-awareness and insightful analysis of the learning event	"We met 2 Swedes that have been and they tell us that men walk into the volcano twice a day and collect a big bag of sulfur and get paid only 600 Rupiah per bag! To put that into context, 16,000 Rupiah = 1 pound so they are getting about 10 pence for risking their lives! Makes you think about when we moan about our jobs. Most hotel workers out here earn 20,000 RP a day working 6 am til 11 ish that's not even a quid 50! anyway now I've made you all appreciate England I'm off." (Leslie)

re-adaptation to the new knowledge she learned from this experience. Such new knowledge accumulates towards general knowledge about miners which she can draw upon later, and therefore extends the value of this specific experience. Her simple gifts to the miners may be equivalent to the act of searching for some answer or resolution to her perplexity; it is symbolic of last stage of reflective learning as described by Boyd and Fales (1983). Further, the experience as re-told shows her as helping miners, however "small" her gifts are. Hence, during extended consumption, Cristina accrues additional value from her experience, contributing to her self-identity, self-knowledge and general knowledge.

The narrative styles of the bloggers help communicate the depth of emotions and shows bloggers' ability to connect several experiences and explain how those experiences touch them. Below is an example of extract from George & Emily's visit to the Khmer regime places.

... the Tuol Sleng ... where around 12,000 "political prisoners" were taken during the regime.. was converted from a school into a prison to hold these dissidents ... it ended up as a place of torture from which only 7 were said to have eventually survived ... it was a very harrowing place and we visited a lot of the different cells, some of which still had blood on the floor. The most disturbing part of the museum was on one of the floors which had been dedicated to showing all of the pictures the Khmer Rouge had taken of the prisoners upon detainment. ... It was completely uncensored in its depictions of the regime and there were display cabinets holding the bludgeoned or shot skulls from some of the prisoners. Leaving the place, we both felt pretty depressed. The following day was our visit to The Killing Fields, which was a place of execution and mass burial for the Khmer Rouge. The prisoners from Tuol Sleng were taken here after about 4 months imprisonment to be shot and thrown in mass graves. Although thousands of people had lost their lives here, it didn't have as strong an impact as the prison. Maybe it was just the initial shock in regards to the extent of the genocide that made the prison worse, but I think it was more to do with the endless pictures of victims. Despite that, we still felt very deflated upon leaving the fields.

The detailed story, use of numbers and descriptive words for emphasis when retelling the historical event and what they see in their visit, not only allow the bloggers to convey the reason for the intensity of feelings but also reflect an effort to share knowledge about the Khmer regime with their readers. The different intensities of emotions felt in two places trigger a reflection about the self, questioning why they reacted less to the killing fields despite the greater number of lives

lost; in the last line they understand that "the initial shock" has made that difference. This extract shows the importance of self-awareness in reflective learning and how the retelling of intense emotions helps facilitate a reflection that makes the bloggers learn about themselves as well as the object of their experience (Hedberg, 2009).

Generally, emotions of high valence, especially negative ones, can present learning opportunities when told or re-experienced during extended consumption. Reflective learning can occur when bloggers recall their emotions from life experiences and let these emotions facilitate their storytelling while they concurrently make sense of how they feel and what they learn—combining affective and cognitive responses (Boyd & Fales, 1983). In this case, emotions which result from exposure to a difficult situation provoke self-learning and self-awareness (Hedberg, 2009). Hence, much positive value in the form of self-learning can accrue from negatively-charged emotions.

4.2.2. Critical reflection learning accounts

Many of the critical reflection learning accounts are stories highlighting the significant difference between the bloggers' home country and the destinations visited. However, unlike surface learning accounts, bloggers aim for a more complex comprehension of the object of their interest (Hubbs & Brand, 2010). Among the common forms of critical learning are stories questioning taken-for-granted beliefs and values of the locals which, for the bloggers, are unquestioned common sense. For example, Ted has this to say about the king of an Asian country,

"The way the media writes about the king here is similar to the way countries under a dictator write about their leaders – it's an almost scary kind of worship that somehow feels quite false as if done through fear. There's no denying that many millions of locals do really love their king, but I'm really not too sure why – other than that they are constantly told how great he is".

Critical reflection is "a process of making evaluations, often moral ones, and not simply exercising judgments of a practical, technical nature" (Reynolds, 1998, p. 189). Below is an extract from Corina's narrative on sex tourism in an island:

[Shangrila] (not real name of the place) is heavily populated by white western men who date [its local] women. Here this phenomena has gone one step further than in [name of city removed], as many were carrying, playing with or pushing baby strollers their combined off spring. The family scene was nice and endearing to witness and the affection

between the couples looked genuine and loving, but there were serious sex tourists lurking about. Many older men that looked like a cross were publically slapping bottoms and holding hands with very nubile girls, at times it looked too odd for words. I found out that a lot of girls are for sale, there really is a mail order industry here images of Little Britain's Ting Tong often came to mind, the sex industry is massive all over this country, but the biggest customers are Asians themselves ... the bar owners hire the girls out for 'a short time' (1 hour around 300 [local currency] £4.00) or 'long time' which is up to all night around 2-3000 [local currency]. They can be an escort for the whole holiday but this will cost the punter a small fortune with many hidden extras. I wondered how these relationships worked for a longer time than one night or two weeks.

Corina's extract illustrates reflective learning wherein an individual examines and explores an issue of concern (Boyd & Fales, 1983) (in this case, sex tourism) triggered by an experience. Attention to power relations which characterize critical reflection (Reynolds, 1998) is evident here as Corina distinguishes Western from Asian men, describes how the women are treated by both ethnicities and questions the relationships between tourists and the women of the country.

As another form of critical reflection learning account, some narratives provide evidence of Reynolds' (1998) claim that critical reflection is concerned with emancipation; i.e., "critical reflection is part of ideology; a set of beliefs as to how a just society might be created through reasoning which entails a historical and contextual perspective" (p. 190). Ted's extract on Cambodia below is an example:

Today Cambodia is a small country, it's landmass is around the same as the UK without Scotland. It's poor & in the whole scheme of things it's pretty insignificant. Hard to believe then, that around a thousand years ago, the city of Angkor was home to one million people – this being at a time when London was home to just 50,000 ... At times it stretched well into modern day Vietnam & Thailand, it's influence spreading further still into Laos & Burma. It was a time of self styled 'God-Kings' with each one wanting to outdo the previous, with their Hindu & later Buddhist influenced cities. Their golden era lasted over 600 years, from 802–1432 ... It's suspected that the city of Angkor fell when they had used up all of the resources available. Their building techniques would be hard to match today; their irrigation methods were way ahead of their time. Yet they over used what they had. Perhaps a few parallels we could learn from today?

This narrative is not merely about Cambodia; Ted points out a parallelism which "we could learn from". Citing the greatness of the Cambodian empire, then probable causes for its downfall, his account suggests a more complex comprehension of what happened to the empire (Hubbs & Brand, 2010). Ted uses pertinent knowledge of both countries and seeks an understanding of how the UK may also follow the path of Cambodia despite its greatness (Peltier, Hay, & Drago, 2005). Also, the line "Perhaps a few parallels we could learn from today?" signals an effort to share his insights with others, provoking them to think. Here, Ted displays a greater social awareness where questions of perspective and orientation are relevant, typical of critical learning (Hedberg, 2009).

During the extended consumption, when bloggers step away from their experience and reconstruct it for their readers, they show their ability to integrate that experience with what they know. Their narratives question and evaluate situations, giving bloggers a changed perspective about a destination, rather than about themselves. Although these learning accounts are object-oriented rather than self-oriented, they also contribute to enhancing self-identity and consequently to a developed self (i.e., a more knowledgeable self).

4.2.3. Personal reflection learning accounts

In the extracts categorized as personal reflection learning accounts, the bloggers 'push' their reflection to the point where they make explicit the new perspectives or personal insights gained, reflecting on how they can apply what they have learned (Hedberg, 2009). These extracts

show a better understanding of the self which may create more self-awareness (Hubbs & Brand, 2010). Triggers for this type of learning account are newly acquired knowledge and skills and the differences between the bloggers and the locals which they encountered in their travels. Below are extracts from Maria and Deidre.

Maria: India, a truly multidimensional metropolis that is overrun with eager touts and crush of mechanical and human traffic, considered one of the world largest yet poorest countries. With intensions to acclimatise to the poverty ridden, hectic way of life was an eye opening experience. The high birth rate, a low literacy rate and an erratic electricity supply was the common theme throughout the places we visited. It was a week of my life that has made me realise that what we have is not all bad!?

Deidre: Giving Something Back ... I remember that on my way to the hostel from the aeroparque that there were a number of shanty towns particularly in the Retiro area. It is clear that there are social issues still need to be addressed. I feel I would like to contribute in making a difference even if it is a little. So I have decided, during my career break next year, to volunteer in BA [Buenos Aires] at one of the organizations that are proactively addressing the issues and helping the deprived.

When Maria says how India was an eye opening experience, she signals that it resulted in an appreciation of the life in UK which may potentially lead to a change in how she values material things or copes with difficulties. The long list of hardships and her stated intention to acclimatize may show readers her ability to adapt in such situation. According to Cziksenthmihalyi (1993) what matters in an experience is the challenge of one's limits that is significant for an evolving self. Indeed, accounts of challenges they conquered or accommodated, suggest that consumers draw additional value over and above the actual experience during extended consumption. Deidre's account, on the other hand, provides a glimpse of a future self: her experience in Buenos Aires inspired her to decide to volunteer in an organization addressing social issues such as poverty. This self-reflection allows Deidre to discuss what she wants to do with what she learned. During extended consumption, personal reflection comes alive when it happens at the intersection between who they are and what they discover about the subject (Palmer, 1983).

Finally, the extract below from Corina shows a comparison between herself and where she comes from, and others in third world countries.

Why is it that us in the rich west are not happy and those in the poorer third world are? We in the west look up too much to those with more money, bigger houses, flasher cars, fame hungry people bigger in ego than ourselves, this makes us want more and so therefore we are never happy with what we have. Those in the 3rd world countries look across to those poorer than themselves and give of their earnings to say thanks for what they have and to obtain positive karma merits.

With this comparison between "rich west" and "poorer third world", Corina highlights how a different perspective on life or different priorities can address unhappiness. The extract shows how such social encounters aid individuals gain a sense of self through opposition (Jasinki, 2001). The extract shows how what Corina observed among the locals is relevant to her; and creates self-understanding and self-awareness (Hedberg, 2009). Extended consumption permits a reflection on matters that have impact and relevance to people, and facilitates the realization of additional value in the form of self-learning. Personal reflection accounts may suggest behavior changes as in the case of Deidre, or show evolving personal perspective as in the case of Maria and Corina. It is the potential to behave differently which characterizes learning (Gibb, 1995; Huber, 1991), hence personal reflection accounts carry transformational potential.

Table 3 summarizes the different learning accounts found in the travel blogs and common learning events, narrative strategies and value/outcomes enjoyed during extended consumption.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of travel blogs provides evidence of different forms of consumer self-learning taking place during extended consumption: 17 out of the 19 blogs analyzed contain different types of reflective learning accounts: emotional, critical and personal reflective. Further, the events that triggered emotional learning accounts tend to be of high emotional valence (both positive and negative: e.g., awe, shock, anger), echoing McLean's (2008) contention that difficult experiences and those, more positive, that can be shared and reveal aspects of the self, carry much potential for identity construction and self-development. Hence, emotions, which as suggested by several authors (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Laros & Steenkamp, 2005) play a significant role in consumption experiences, facilitate learning and self-development especially, it seems, when they have high valence. However, consumers reconstruct these experiences with a positive light during extended consumption, evaluating them as enhancing identity, positively contributing to self-awareness and self-development.

The situations which trigger critical learning accounts typically entail a realization of significant differences between the bloggers' home environment and the destinations. Such situations appear conducive to producing states of perplexity, cognitive dissonance and doubt, which as suggested by Dewey (1933), are components of reflective learning, which allow consumers to question, criticize and give opinion on what they have learned and in turn, may lead to changed perspectives. In personal reflection learning accounts, the potential for personal transformation is stronger, as the bloggers talk about how certain learning events affect them and, in some instances, prompt them to consider future actions. These accounts show that bloggers derive increased self-awareness during the extended consumption as they reconstruct the way they feel, think or may act about what they have experienced.

The study offers theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretically, the results show that consumer learning occurring during extended consumption extends beyond knowledge about the actual object of consumption, and involves self-development. Further research could establish how consumers use learning which arises from consumption experiences. This research shows that value also arises from negative emotions when they produce new meaning. While several researchers (Gilovich et al., 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2001) argue that finding meaning in experiences contributes to happiness, the experiential consumption literature predominantly studies hedonic value and positive emotions as the main aims in designing experiences.

Managerially, marketers can assist their customers in achieving reflective learning from their experiences. Since consumer learning often arises from high-valence emotions, managers should aim to design experiences that evoke such strong (positive or negative) emotions. As per the study, another trigger for learning was exposure to perplexing situations which differ from known ones; marketers would want to design experiences that present consumers with situations which disturb their current conceptions.

To evoke and facilitate extended consumption, managers can provide consumers with a physical space and a conducive environment for reflection within their sites. Jansson (2007) notes how travelers frequently use internet cafés for blogging and emailing, and how these cafes also function as meeting spaces with other bloggers, facilitating the sharing of experiences and potentially the accrual of further value during the post-consumption stage. Experience marketing organizations can also encourage their consumers to write about their experience (e.g., competitions for the best written blog would reward reflective blogging).

This study has a number of limitations. First, the findings emanate from only one type of consumption-oriented blogs and hence may not extend to other consumption. Second, blogs served to research consumer learning, but their primary purpose (sharing information, recording of travel experience and providing updates of whereabouts, etc.) is different. Therefore, blogs do not necessarily reflect consumer learning accurately, since not all bloggers are ready to disclose information, thoughts and feelings, and they may not share all learning instances publicly, for fear of embarrassment, or because they are too personal. Blogs also have performative function which bloggers may use to produce more entertaining stories that may distort the reconstruction of the consumption experience. Further, blogs allow social interaction between the blogger and readers; however, this research does not explore this aspect. Third, the learning accounts often only show the potential for, rather than the evidence of, actual transformation; hence further research could consider whether the recording of learning in consumption-oriented blogs more readily leads to action than if consumers do not have an opportunity to reflect during the post-consumption stage. Finally, the research does not consider experiences that may produce negative outcomes (e.g., negative opinions of the self), since blog data is not appropriate for such a focus.

Exploring how learning emerges when, during extended consumption, consumers 're-experience' a life experience, this study surfaces the important role of strong emotions and perplexing situations in triggering different types of reflective learning. It makes several contributions. First, it contributes to the experiential consumption literature by providing evidence of the impact of experiential purchases and life experiences, on consumers' self-development, providing a deeper understanding of the forms of reflective learning taking place during that stage, and their triggers. Second, while experiential consumption

Table 3
Summary of learning accounts, learning events, narrative strategies and value enjoyed during the extended consumption.

	Surface learning	Emotional reflection learning	Critical reflection learning	Personal reflection learning
Learning events (triggers)	Events/situations that provided them with new knowledge about places, people and culture.	Events/situations that produced negative and positive experiences (as signaled by emotions evoked). Acquiring new skills.	Events/situations that highlighted the differences between home culture and environment and those of the developing countries.	Events/situations that highlighted differences between home culture and environment and those of the developing countries that urge them to relate it to their selves. Newly acquired knowledge that the blogger can use in the future.
Narrative strategies	Use of descriptive words; highlighting interesting information they found about the subject.	Use of words that depict emotions. Comparison of similar subjects to highlight differences. Use of contrast examples to emphasize the emotions felt.	Comparison with home country. Integrating previous knowledge with newly acquired knowledge. Criticism, i.e., highlighting what is wrong and explaining it.	Comparison to highlight difference. Stating observed improvement about self.
Extended consumption experience (all of these consequently contributes to self-development)	Records of object-directed learning.	Affective and cognitive responses can be integrated during reconstruction of experience; and in some instances raise self-awareness.	Object-directed learning which allow bloggers to question or criticize issues that matter to them and triggered reflection.	Self-awareness through comparison Can direct future actions Appreciation of life.

literature focuses on the role of positive emotions towards outcomes such as satisfaction and pleasure happiness, this study puts the spotlight on how negatively-charged emotions and perplexing situations can contribute to another form of happiness (meaning-based happiness: Schmitt, Joško, & Zarantonello, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2001) through reflective learning and self-development during reconsumption. Third, it brings to light the importance of extended consumption as an activity during which consumers can accrue further value in the form of self-learning. Fourth, it extends Hubbs and Brand (2010)'s categorization of learning journal entries to consumption-oriented blogs, and shows the value for consumer researchers of analyzing blogs to study consumers' reflective learning and personal transformation. The prospect of further developing our understanding of how different kinds of consumption experiences can contribute to consumer self-development is inspiring.

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