

Consumption narratives: contributions, methods, findings and agenda for future research

Narrativas de consumo: contribuciones, métodos, resultados y agenda para futuras investigaciones

消费叙事:贡献、方法、发现及未来 研究方向

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Abstract

Purpose – Considering the central role of narratives in the articulation of the self, processing experiences and conveying meaning, many scholars in marketing and consumer behaviours have tried to study the subject. This pool of multi-disciplinary studies has yielded fragmented literature resulting in ambiguity. Therefore there is a need for an article, which studies the extant literature comprehensively. Hence, this paper aims to pursue two objectives, to summarize prominent research studies in consumption narratives and to suggest directions for future research.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reviews 25 key studies on consumption narratives and highlights their most important contributions, methods and findings.

Findings – As in consumer narrative research, the concept almost always has been borrowed from different domains, the findings suggest a concise definition to fill this gap. Also, to enrich the findings, three-level of consumption narratives are discussed.

Originality/value – This paper serves as a basis to comprehend the essence of consumption narratives in the consumption context, to understand the research gaps and provides directions for future research.

Keywords Narrative analysis, Consumption narratives, Systematic literature review, Consumer behaviour, Consumer communication

Paper type Research paper



Resumen

Propósito – Considerando el papel central de las narrativas en la formulación de uno mismo, el procesamiento de las experiencias y la transmisión de significados, muchos académicos en marketing y comportamiento del consumidor han tratado de estudiar este tópico. Este conjunto de estudios de carácter multidisciplinar ha dado lugar a una literatura muy fragmentada y ambigua. Por tanto, se hace necesario un trabajo de investigación que estudie de manera exhaustiva la extensa literatura existente. En definitiva, este artículo persigue dos objetivos, resumir las investigaciones más destacadas sobre narrativas de consumo existentes en la literatura y sugerir orientaciones para futuras investigaciones.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Este artículo revisa 25 estudios clave sobre narrativas de consumo y resalta sus contribuciones, métodos y hallazgos más relevantes.

Resultados – Teniendo en cuenta que en la investigación sobre narrativas de consumo el concepto ha sido casi siempre tomado de diferentes ámbitos, los hallazgos sugieren una delimitación conceptual más concisa para cubrir este vacío. Asimismo, para enriquecer los resultados se analizan tres niveles de narrativas de consumo.

Originalidad – Este artículo sirve de base para comprender la esencia de las narrativas de consumo en el contexto del consumo, entender las brechas de investigación que aún existen en este ámbito y proporcionar guías para futuras investigaciones.

Palabras clave – Análisis narrativo, Narrativas de consumo, Revisión sistemática de la literatura, Comportamiento del consumidor, Comunicación

Tipo de artículo – Trabajo de investigación

摘要

目的 – 考虑到叙事在自我表达、处理体验感受和传达意义方面的中心作用, 许多营销学者和消费者行为学者都试图对这一主题进行研究。由于研究成果横跨多个学科, 而导致文献支离破碎, 造成了歧义。因此, 有必要对现存文献进行综合研究。因此, 本文的研究目标有二, 一是总结当前消费叙事研究的主要成果, 二是为今后的研究指明方向。

设计/方法/方法 – 本文回顾了关于消费叙事的25个主要研究, 并强调了它们最重要的贡献、方法和发现。

研究结果 – 由于之前的消费者叙事研究中, 消费者叙事的概念几乎总是从不同的领域借用, 研究结果提出了一个简明的定义来填补这一空白。此外, 为了丰富研究结果, 本文还讨论了三个层次的消费叙事。

本文独创性 – 本文作为理解消费语境中消费叙事本质的基础, 来理解研究的差距, 为今后的研究指明方向。

关键词 – 叙事分析、消费叙事、系统文献综述、消费者行为、消费者交流

文章类型: 研究型论文

1. Introduction

In the post-modern era where consumer behaviour is a continuous motion, more comprehensive and innovative research methods are needed (Naspetti and Zanoli, 2014). To this end, new qualitative methods have been developed. To capture the dynamic nature of modern consumption, analysing how individuals perceive products and brands in relation to themselves (Bortoff, 2001) and produce subsequent meaning, might be of significant help. This implies that a more holistic and non-reductionist approach to consumer study is needed (Marsden and Littler, 1999). This means that consumption is not a simple satisfactory function but a meaning-based function as consumption becomes a symbolic resource for the construction of customers' identity and self (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

As Thompson (1997) argues, developing a hermeneutic interpretation of consumer experience can be used to identify changes in consumer behaviour and research. Hence, the interpretation of consumption stories or narratives is gaining more popularity within the consumer research domain. Narratives are the most important means by which a person gives meaning to his or her experiences and help us to shape our experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988).

As Fisher asserts, narratives have been central to human experiences, as the dawn of time and the relics of narratives have survived as myths, sagas and stories (Fisher, 1985).

Narrative is a vehicle for the articulation of the self and the articulation of an experiment, the narrative also is a form of social action which is constructed between individuals (Smith and Weed, 2007). There is not a widely accepted account of narratives. Some scholars find narratives as just stories (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998) and while others consider narrative both stories and accounts (Callahan and Elliott, 1996). Some scholars such as Barry and Elmes (1997) are more leaned towards the communicative definition of narratives. However, important to our view of narratives, recently, narratives are viewed as a vehicle to understand human experiences (Smith and Weed, 2007). This notion of narrative is in line with that of Lawler (2002) which considers narrative transformation and action in the form of a plot. We do not merely reduce the narrative to some sort of communication rather it is a means to make sense of experiences (Callahan and Elliott, 1996; Padgett and Allen, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988; Wiles *et al.*, 2005; Woodruffe, 1997).

McAdams suggests that narratives are a basic mode of thought for the way we make sense of the world and ourselves (McAdams, 1993). Nothing has meaning until the objects, actions and behaviours are interpreted (Shankar and Goulding, 2001). Consumers, as human beings, are not excluded from this process. They attain meaning from objects, actions and behaviours through interpretations. This interpretation implies that our reality is socially constructed (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

The application of narrative is not limited to self and self-identification. Narratives also provide a substantial method for connecting human actions at an individual level to events and concepts to understand them. It implies that the narrative has the capacity to address the relation between interdependent entities (Smith and Anderson, 2004). For example, Geiger and Finch (2016) used narratives and narrative analysis to shape public policy. Consumers, like all individuals, live in a narrative world in which stories are told and retold and they are able to form their stories through consumption. In that sense, consumption itself is an act of narrative that is highlighted in several prominent studies (Hopkinson and Hogarth-Scott, 2007; Shankar *et al.*, 2001; Shankar and Goulding, 2001).

The key role of narratives for understanding personal experience, construction of collective identities and meanings is now greatly acknowledged (Heinen and Sommer, 2009). Furthermore, considering the pervasiveness of narratives at different levels of our lives, manifested as consumption, it is not surprising to see this concept in less traditional strings of research in humanities. Consumer research is also attracted, though limited, to the potential contribution of narratives.

Consumption narratives studies have generated a large body of literature and findings in different areas which is useful across varied disciplines. As a result of this interdisciplinarity, ambiguity in the conceptualization of the phenomenon was inevitable. This paper addresses this gap and adds to the existing body by summarizing how previous studies have studied this phenomenon. In doing so, 25 studies are revisited and it is discussed how previous studies have conceptualized consumption narratives and how they have approached the subject. Also, a set of directions and suggestions for future research in consumption narratives are suggested. To this end, this paper reviews 25 influential studies in consumption narratives in different areas that collectively have provided theoretical and empirical ground.

2. Background

The contribution of the narrative study to the domain of consumer study has been considered by many scholars (Grayson, 1997; Shankar *et al.*, 2001; Shankar and Goulding, 2001). Its infancy was in the mid-1980s which was used to analyse themes in marketing and

consumer behaviour (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992). For example, special possession (Myers, 1985), impulsive purchase (Rook, 1987), Compulsive purchase (O'Guinn and Faber, 1989), daily consumption (Thompson *et al.*, 1990), addictive consumption (Hirschman, 1992) and consumer responses towards advertisement (Mick and Buhl, 1992), identity, ethnicity and gender in the retail encounter (Friend and Thompson, 2003), tourism service quality (Obenour *et al.*, 2006), packaging (Kniazeva and Belk, 2007), possession and the self (Wong *et al.*, 2012), retail environment (Gilliam and Zablah, 2013), banking (Gilliam *et al.*, 2014), energy and climate change (Moezzi *et al.*, 2017) are among those consumer behaviour research studies which have studied consumption narrative to interpret the process of consumption and to better understand the consumer behaviour (Shankar *et al.*, 2001).

Almost four decades have passed, as the initiation of narratives in consumer research and consumer narratives have reached their maturity and yet, there is not review examining the theory, methods and contexts. Existing literature is highly fragmented, narrowly focused and specifically contextual with a lack of generalizability. A lack of synthesized and integrated review has led to a fragmented understanding of the concept. This gap in conceptualizing consumer narratives is a fruitful opportunity for a systematic review to summarize all these fragmented articles.

Despite the notable research studies, consumption narrative literature is fragmented and dispersed. Many authors have studied different aspects of the phenomenon but they lack coherence about the key concepts (Van Laer *et al.*, 2014). Several influential journals are shaping the pioneer research studies in consumption narratives. *Journal of consumer research*, *Journal of Business Research* and *Consumption Markets and Culture* (Baumgartner, 2002; Phillips and McQuarrie, 2010; Van Laer *et al.*, 2014, 2019a, 2019b; Ardelet *et al.*, 2015; Hamby *et al.*, 2015; Airoldi, 2019; Chronis *et al.*, 2012). These studies theorized the consumption narratives on different domains, developed the theoretical concept and research methods. Journals with two and more studies selected to be reviewed in this paper are available in Table 1.

3. Methodology

Following the search methods for findings article in review papers (Kitchenham, 2004; Paul *et al.*, 2017; Canabal and White, 2008) relevant literature in online databases was searched. Literature in the span of two decades (2000–2020) was aimed for. The advantage of including different databases, even grey databases such as Google Scholars, is to ensure that all related papers are included. As consumption is a highly interdisciplinary and fragmented subject, high impact and quality journals in several publications and databases such as Jstore, Science Direct, Emerald, T&F, Wiley, Springer and Sage were selected. Several keywords were used to search the articles which are available in the research protocol presented in Appendix. Following Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019), considering the vast

Journal	#	References
<i>Journal of consumer research</i>	5	Baumgartner (2002), Phillips and McQuarrie (2010) and Van Laer <i>et al.</i> (2014, 2019a, 2019b)
<i>Consumption markets and culture</i>	3	Airoldi (2019), Chronis <i>et al.</i> (2012) and Grafton Small (2006)
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	3	Ardelet <i>et al.</i> (2015) and Hamby <i>et al.</i> (2015)
<i>Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal</i>	3	Pace (2008), Guthrie and Anderson (2010) and Helkkula and Pihlström (2010)
<i>Psychology and Marketing</i>	2	Cooper <i>et al.</i> (2010) and Schembri <i>et al.</i> (2010)

Table 1.
List of journals with two or more selected papers on consumption narratives

body of literature available, journals with 1.0 impact factor and above were also included in this review. The final selection of journals is presented in [Table 1](#). This scoping process helps to ensure the quality of the findings ([Siddaway et al., 2019](#)) and inclusion/exclusion criteria help to balance sensitivity (finding more resources) and specificity (being related to the topic). The following figure depicts the number of retrieved articles in the first step ([Figure 1](#)).

This process produced about 26,146 resources in consumer research and non-consumer research domains. Following the conventional literature review approach, the article pool was manually refined at two phases. In phase one, two steps were taken. Firstly, articles were skimmed and scanned for non-consumer research articles (following [Palmatier et al., 2018](#)). Secondly, the pool was refined based on the scope of the research (following [Paul and Benito, 2018](#)). Finally, the initial pool for the review was selected. In the second phase of refinement, the first articles were narrowed down after skimming keywords. In the next step, abstracts were thoroughly investigated to select the most related articles. Finally, to select the final pool and reducing the effect of the bias of the researcher, to evaluate the quality of the articles, a systematic approach was selected. There are several methods in evaluating articles such as PRISMA [[1](#)] or CASP [[2](#)]. Due to the functionality and objectivity of the CASP method, in this paper, this method was used. CASP method consists of 10 questions to researchers evaluate the concept and quality of qualitative research studies. In CASP 50 points are assigned to each article which above 30 is acceptable. Finally, 25 articles are included in the review. The selection process is available in the [Appendix](#). Finally, to have a better understanding of the fundamental idea and process of this paper, the main idea and procedures are illustrated in [Figure 2](#).

4. Visual representation of the data

A visual representation based on the 6,825 consumer-related selected articles would indicate the conceptual connection between the fields of study in consumption narratives. A term map generated by a bibliometric software, VOSviewer, indicates clusters in the terms. Minimum number of occurrences of a term was set to 15 which resulted in 375 terms out of 24,889 terms. The resulting map reveals an overview of important topics related to consumption narratives. Four clusters were spotted which are illustrated in [Figure 3](#). Three clusters are main clusters. First cluster or consumer narratives cluster 1 which is coloured in red (hereafter CNC1), focuses on the methodological side of the concept, the second cluster, CNC2 and green in colour, is the consumer cluster, the third cluster, CNC3 and blue, is consumption cluster. A fourth distinct cluster, but not a major cluster, revolves around data.

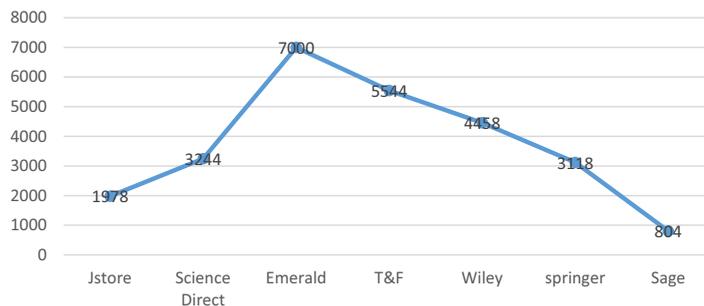
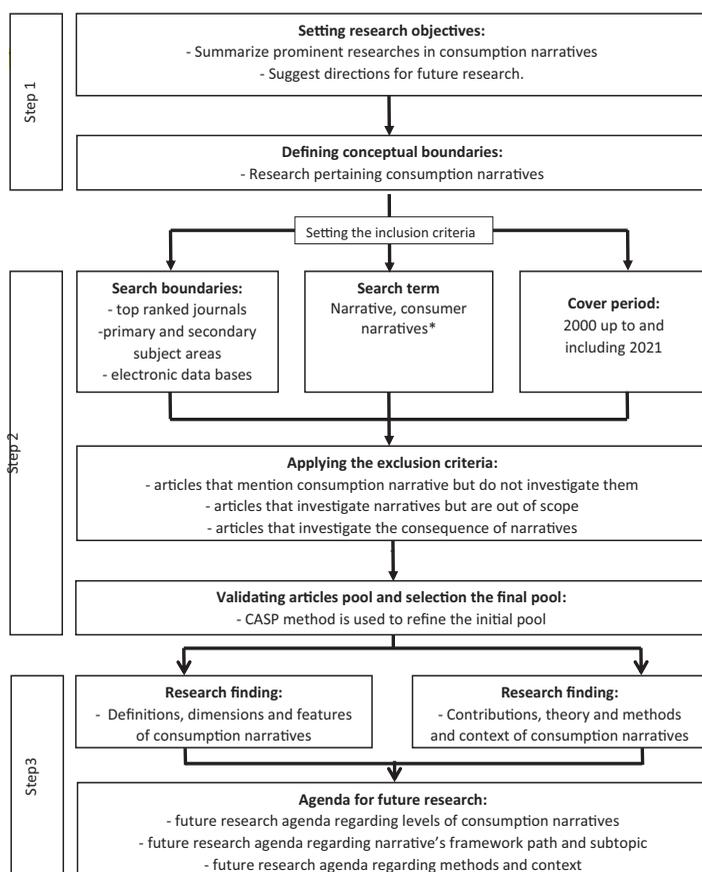


Figure 1.
Retrieved articles
based on keywords



Note: *Search protocol is available in the appendix

Figure 2.
Steps in the
systematic literature
review

The methodology cluster denotes that still, a major part of the consumption narratives articles are about to establish the instrumental role of narratives in consumer research and study. In particular, the terms article, development, society, organization and problem occur in the centre of the cluster. Therefore, considering the size and occurrences and associations of the cluster, an in-depth reading of the literature reveals a common concern to establish the consumption narrative as a methodological tool for consumer research studies. This cluster is not totally coherent and as is visible in [Figure 3](#) and can be divided into two sections which are located in distance from each other. This means that these terms tend to co-occur together in the literature. This suggests that these two sections are unrelated in extant literature. One section revolves around the terms challenge, society, practitioners and effort and learning which indicates that consumption narratives literature is facing challenges in society. The other section, emphasizes the developmental role of the consumption narratives, as it is strongly tied to consumption and consumer cluster.

5. Findings

Other than narratology, realistic definitions of narrative in other disciplines of research still need further endeavours (Margolin, 2007; Heinen and Sommer, 2009). Narrative can be a spectrum from an ontological end (Shankar *et al.*, 2001) to a specific end, which every specific part of an act of consumer behaviour might be understood (Pace, 2008). Narratives are also a methodological tool as well. In the process of consumption, consumers produce narratives which can be a significant resource of information for researchers which might be examined by researchers to understand the emotion and experiences of consumers (Caru and Cova, 2006). Consumer narratives provide a deeper understanding and richer data for researchers. In this sense, consumers provide an introspective account of their consumption experiences and feelings (Stern *et al.*, 1998; Patterson and Brown, 2005; Caru and Cova, 2006; Hackley, 2007). We can summarize the relation between narrative and consumer research as presented in the following table: (Table 2).

Pace (2008) defines consumer narrative as the story written by consumers through consumption. Similarly, elaborating on McKee (1997), Helkkula and Pihlstrom define narrative as a plot told in a specific situation to a specific audience consisting of: “character (users, stakeholders), plot (task, sequence of events) and setting (environment, context)”. Consumers form narratives from events and stories that resonate with them and their existing ideals (Signorelli, 2014). These narratives contribute to the brand’s meaning via the co-creation of the brand value (Shao *et al.*, 2015). The narratives which consumers hold are complex, multifaceted, ever-changing “multi-stories” that have a deep socio-cultural base intermingled with the consumer’s self-identity (Diamond *et al.*, 2009). This section is arranged as follows: first theories of narratives in consumption context are discussed, next context and topics are examined and finally, methodologies are skimmed briefly. The overall findings of these three elements are presented in Table 3.

5.1 Theories of narratives

As consumption research is an interdisciplinary string of research, the different theoretical background is used. These theories are depicted in Table 3. Major theories are discussed here and then briefly, other theories are glanced at.

Key concept	References
Consumers receive information in the form of narrative and write introspective accounts of their own experiences and feelings	Pace (2008), Shankar <i>et al.</i> (2001), Baumgartner (2002), Cooper <i>et al.</i> (2010) and Tussyadiah <i>et al.</i> (2011)
Consumer communicate their tacit knowledge by metaphor through narratives	Helkkula and Pihlström (2010) and Phillips and McQuarrie (2010)
Consumers create meaning and express their experiences through narratives	Gilliam <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Consumer make sense of their surroundings and communicate it	Guthrie and Anderson (2010), Tussyadiah <i>et al.</i> (2011) and Chronis <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Narratives persuade through the depiction of characters in a setting and through inferences about cause-and-effect relationships that exist	Hamby <i>et al.</i> (2015) and Phillips and McQuarrie (2010)
Narratives help consumers to maintain their individual identities in a society of shared signs and objects, settlements and values	Grafton Small (2006)
Consumers change their behaviour by immersing themselves in a narrative world and reflecting the received narrative through a change in their behaviours	Van Laer <i>et al.</i> (2014, 2019a, 2019b)

Table 2.
Relation between
narrative and
consumer research

Element	2000–2009	2010–2020	Total
n	4	21	25
<i>Theory</i>			
Theater theory	1 (14%)		1 (3%)
Visual analysis	1 (14%)		1 (3%)
Videography	1 (14%)		1 (3%)
Mass media theory	1 (14%)		1 (3%)
Personality theory	1 (14%)		1 (3%)
Narrative theory	1 (14%)	9 (35%)	10 (30%)
Narrative identity theory	1 (14%)	4 (15%)	5 (15%)
Digital consumer data		1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Mental imagery theory		1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Consumer theory		2 (8%)	2 (6%)
Narrative transportation		6 (23%)	6 (18%)
Narrative persuasion		3 (12%)	3 (9%)
<i>Methodology</i>			
Analysis			
Narratology	1 (17%)	3 (12%)	4 (13%)
Narrative analysis	2 (34%)		2 (7%)
Structural analysis of narratives	1 (17%)		1 (3%)
Identity discourse	1 (17%)	1 (4%)	2 (7%)
Interpretive qualitative approach	1 (17%)	6 (25%)	7 (23%)
Narrative inquiry technique		1 (4%)	1 (3%)
A longitudinal empirical study		1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Critical incident technique		1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Path analysis		3 (12%)	3 (10%)
Meta-analysis		2 (8%)	2 (7%)
Automated text analysis of n-grams		1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Grounded theory		1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Structural equation modelling		2 (8%)	2 (7%)
Thematic analysis		1 (4%)	1 (3%)
CFA/EFA		1 (4%)	1 (3%)
Survey method			
In-depth interviews		9 (35%)	9 (35%)
Questionnaire		7 (27%)	7 (27%)
Consumer focus groups		3 (12%)	3 (12%)
Textual analysis		5 (19%)	5 (19%)
Projective techniques		1 (4%)	1 (4%)
Experiment design		1 (4%)	1 (4%)
<i>Context</i>			
Theoretical consumption	1		1 (5%)
New mediums of expression of consumer behaviour	1		1 (5%)
Personology of the consumer	1	1	2
Culture and subculture	1		1 (5%)
Banking and finance context		1	1 (5%)
Visitor narratives and destination experiences		3	3
Service development		1	1 (5%)
Self-identity construction and brands		2	2
Digital media		2	2
Fashion industries		1	1 (5%)
TV series and drama audience's purchase		1	1 (5%)
Organization C-level managers' decision-making		1	1 (5%)
Brand and consumption		2	2

Table 3.
Theory, methodology
and the context of
selected articles

As it is seen in [Table 3](#), in the first decade, the prominent theory is established theories borrowed from other strings of research studies and discussed the possible expansion of those theories into the domain. In this stage, consumption narratives were still developing based on other notions of narrative and related theories. For example, narrative theory and narrative identity theory are developed in psychology and literature. In this stage, researchers used these theories to show in greater detail that how consumers use narratives in their consumption. However, gradually, narrative transportation theory and narrative persuasion are developed to explain the role of narratives in consumption.

Methods of the research studies were also subject to change in the progress of the concept. Naturally, the initial methods were qualitative and based on the existing theory in other domains. These methods were aimed to capture and understand the phenomenon, thus interpretive methods were predominant. Afterwards, as the theory of the consumption narrative progressed, more quantitative methods were introduced. Second wave research studies try to examine the relationship between narratives and other aspects of consumption. In the second wave of research, survey methods such as questionnaires and interviews are used.

Context has been changed from the first wave to the second wave. From consumer-centric domains and general topics such as consumer psychology, the research studies shift towards more consumption and marketing-centric orientation. Digital media, banking and fashion are, for example, among the context in which the role and effects of narratives have been studied. This shift indicated that, once the theoretical aspect is established, the research could be narrowly downed to more practical contexts with empirical contribution rather than theoretical. These new applications of narratives in consumer research in different contexts show that the concept is mature enough to extract the tacit knowledge and experiences of consumers to conduct research studies in different areas.

5.1.1 Narrative theory. According to [Shankar et al. \(2001\)](#), narratives are stories. Bennet and Role also argue that a narrative is a set of events in a specific order with a beginning, a middle and an end. In this sense, narratives try to conceptualize rhetoric as a story told by consumers. [Gergen and Gergen \(1988\)](#) assert that narratives have five elements, namely: the establishment of a valued end point, selection of events relevant to the goal state, the ordering of events, establishing causal sequences and demarcation signs. Literature in narrative theory are three-fold: those that focus on the correspondence between language and reality ([Stern et al., 1998](#); [Brown and Reid, 1997](#)), those focusing on how language is used to create meaning ([Stern, 1995](#)) and those that try to understand how narratives function to create a sense of one's self or social processes. Narrative theorist in consumption argues that language as a mean of communication shapes ([O'Shaughnessy and Holbrook, 1988](#)) and a fundamental way in which language manifests itself and is structured is through narratives ([Shankar et al., 2001](#)). Therefore, [Shankar et al. \(2001\)](#) propose a narrative paradigm to understand consumer behaviour.

In this narrative perspective, as [Shankar et al. \(2001\)](#) summarize, reality, ontologically, is constructed individually through language but is modified by the socio-cultural milieu of the individual and has implications for conducting research in the consumer domain. In these paradigms, epistemologically the dyadic relationship between the knower and the known disappears ([Lincoln et al., 2011](#)) and possible multiple constructed realities are visible through consumption ([Shankar et al., 2001](#)). In this way, the substantial difference between ontology and epistemology is collapsed which is comprehensible through the methodology. In this paradigm, methodology heavily relies on hermeneutics and the nature of the reality and how it is accessed is the same ([Shankar et al., 2001](#)). Narratively speaking, this means

that individuals in pursuit of creating a meaningful story of their experiences represent the reality by the narratives that are created through consumption.

5.1.2 Narrative identity theory. Individuals commit some social acts such as consumption to communicate their selves to others (Goffman, 1959). This brings another domain of consumption narrative to attention, self-identity. Many anthropological research studies in various domains have argued about the incorporation of objects into self and self into objects (Belk, 1988). Similarly, several disciplines have confirmed the use of signs and symbol systems in everyday life to communicate the self (Schembri *et al.*, 2010).

Within the consumption research domain, increasing attention is being paid to the self-identity constructed through narratives (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2005; Thompson, 1997; Woodside *et al.*, 2008). This identity is created and communicated by the narratives of consumption which helps them to make sense of who they are and the world surrounding them. Consumers attach social and contextual meaning to products and brands and construct their identity through consumption and how they (Cooper *et al.*, 2010).

On the other hand, it is argued that one of the most important roles of consumption narrative is to maintain individuality and self-identity in an environment of excessive shared signs and objects (Douglas and Isherwood, 1980; Grafton Small, 2006). In this sense, narratives are the means to give meaning to our self, describing and determining our consumption (Harré, 2004). Grafton Small (2006) points out that good stories full of goods evoke a sense of order and belonging in individuals. These consumption narratives are about the self today. They are multiple, raptured, recursive and diffuse (Eagleton, 2004, p. 127) but the very us (Grafton Small, 2006).

5.1.3 Narrative persuasion. Narratives evoke a different type of mental process compared with argument-based processes (Green and Brock, 2000). These findings are reflected in different disciplines of research such as psychology (Green and Brock, 2000), communication (Hinyard and Kreuter, 2007) and marketing (Escalas, 2007). Van Laer *et al.* (2014) argue that before the 2000s, the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and heuristic-systematic model (Chaiken, 1987) were dominant but now different notions of narrative persuasion are gaining popularity. Van Laer *et al.* (2014) define narrative persuasion as attitudes and intentions developed from processing narrative messages that are not overtly persuasive. The most important difference between analytical persuasion and narrative persuasion is involvement. In analytical persuasion, involvement depends on the extent to which that message is relevant for the receiver's personal objectives (Van Laer *et al.*, 2014). Hence, the dual process does not account for narrative persuasion (Escalas, 2007; Green and Brock, 2000, 2002).

Some scholars have focused on this aspect of narrative persuasion and argue that this major difference is due to the story-like structure of the narrative, temporal dimensionality and the establishment of a relation between elements which enables casual interpretations which allows individuals to relate to the presented meaning (Graesser *et al.*, 1994).

5.1.4 Narrative transportation. This distinct route in narrative persuasion gained popularity under the term narrative transportation. Transportation is simply defined as being carried away by a story (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2010). According to Green and Brock (2000), the essential elements of narrative transportation or persuasion are a story providing the situation, entering into the story and changes resulting from the experience. In narrative persuasion, it is believed that these changes persuade people to behave in certain ways. When consumers immerse themselves in a story, their behaviour reflects the story (Green, 2008) and these reflections and change in the behaviour explains how narrative affects consumer behaviours.

Van Laer *et al.* (2019a) argue that narrative transportation is a form of experiential response to narratives and encompasses a journey to the narrative world. He argues that narrative transportation is similar to a concept such as a consumer engagement, absorption and media engagement but essentially different. While these mentioned concepts are general concepts (consumer engagement) which entails personality traits (absorption) and collective motivational experiences with a media product (media engagement) narrative transportation entails narratives and stories which are not for all types of engagement and engrosses temporary experiences and denotes engagement with a narrative rather than a media product or medium (Van Laer *et al.*, 2019a).

5.1.5 Other accounts of narrative theory. Other research studies are very content-specific. For example, Pace (2008) tries to extend consumption narratives into a new medium of expression, YouTube. In doing so, he used theatre theory, visual analysis, videography and mass media theory to understand the new consumption narrative discourse. In this attempt, he proposes that video uploaded to YouTube are narratives which researchers can investigate using different narratological approaches. Chronis *et al.* (2012) use mental imagery theory to explain how image processing facilitates visualizing and seeing collective narratives as a part of an experience with national significance.

5.2 Context and topic

Research in narrative consumption is diverse and fragmented. The crucial challenge is the contextuality of the topic. Consumer psychology is the most frequent topic among the selected articles. Next, consumption culture and theory is the second researched topic. As consumption is a context-specific and interdisciplinary topic and despite the increased attention to consumption narrative in the past two decades, this string of research needs more attention to the context. Diverse and novel contexts from digital media to banking have been studied and included in this paper.

Investigating the context of the selected article also reveals that most of the research studies are conducted in developed countries and consumers which brings up an excellent opportunity for future research that would be discussed in the future research directions (Table 4).

Topic	Context example	2000–2009	2010–2020	Total
Consumer psychology	Australia, Kia, Ford, Volvo, Jaguar and Aston Martin brands; Online reviews and self-identity	1 (25%)	8 (27%)	9 (33%)
Consumption theory	English language videos on YouTube	2 (50%)		2 (7%)
Hospitality and tourism	The USA and the UK		9 (30%)	2 (7%)
Digital media/Media	Undergraduates in marketing at a large university located in the southeastern USA and TV series	1 (25%)	4 (13%)	5 (22%)
Banking	The South Central USA		1 (3%)	1 (4%)
Service	Sweden, undisclosed global cosmetic company		1 (3%)	1 (4%)
	Finland, mobile service			
Brand management	France, Prais, Guerlain's shop on the Champs-Élysées and brands such as Chanel; celebrity endorsement, brand stories		5 (17%)	5 (22%)
B2B	C-level managers decision-making process		1 (3%)	1 (4%)
Fashion industry	North America, magazines such as Vogue, Vanity Fair, brands such as Jimmy Choo and Michael Kors		1 (3%)	1 (4%)

Table 4.
Frequently surveyed topics

5.3 Methodology

Most used methods are reported in Table 3. However, these methods range from path analysis (Hamby *et al.*, 2015) to interpretive qualitative approach (Phillips *et al.*, 2016). Also, unconventional methods such as event-based narrative inquiry technique (EBNIT) (Helkkula and Pihlström, 2010). The challenge ahead is to develop more mixed-methods approaches when studying consumption narratives. Recommendations are offered in future research directions.

5.3.1 Survey. The most used survey method is an interview, as it is able to capture the tacit individuals' knowledge in dialogue form (Czarniawska, 2004) and conveys deeper insight on consumption (Pace (2008). Different approaches to the interview are used in selected articles. Approaches such as traditional interviews (Helkkula and Pihlström, 2010), Individual thematic interview (Lundqvist, *et al.*, 2013) and straightforward nondirective approach (Phillips) to name a few. Questionnaire is the next most used method. Some (Tussyadiah, *et al.*, 2011; Hamby *et al.*, 2015) have developed a questionnaire based on the narrative structure items of Escalas's (2004a, 2004b). Focus group is also popular in this research domain in the area such as service development, branding and tourism and hospitality.

5.3.2 Analysis methods. Methods used in the selected paper are presented in Table 3. It is found that qualitative methods are dominant in articles. Narrative analysis (Gilliam *et al.*, 2017), Narratology (Hardey, 2014) and Interpretive qualitative approach (Pace, 2008; Schembri *et al.*, 2010). Some articles used quantitative methods such as Hamby *et al.*(2015) and Tussyadiah, *et al.* (2011). Mixed method is also used. For example, Ardelet *et al.* (2015) Used narrative coding was for the free association test and used binary logistic regression to indicate whether consumers' automatic narratives predicted preferences for the product in the store and after usage at home. Articles pertaining to the general articulation of consumption narratives use more qualitative methods while those focusing on the narrowed down domain such as prediction of preference or tourist destination tend to use a more quantitative approach.

6. Discussion

This research provides conceptual insight into how consumers use narratives to make sense of their surroundings. When it comes to narratives, the consumer creates and prefers their own narratives rather than those created by organizations but the literature have neglected to provide a consumer-centric definition. On the other hand, if the organizational narratives resonate with consumers made narratives, consumers might take it into account while creating their own narratives at different levels. This article tries to fill this conceptual gap.

It is found that though many articles share some similarities in defining consumption narratives, there is not a single encompassing and succinct definition. This is summarized in Table 5. Therefore, elaborating on the findings and suggestions of the prior studies discussed in this review, the following suggestions and theoretical propositions are put forward.

Many scholars admit the importance of this unique concept but they majorly borrow definitions from literature and narratology. Hence, the following proposition is suggested:

- (1) Proposition 1: Consumption narratives convey messages that hold values for their creators, resonates with their current system of beliefs, transfer information and persuade oneself and others to commit an action. Consumption narratives help consumers to make sense of their experiences to themselves and to others.

Author	Purpose	Definition of consumption narratives	Dimensions	Method	Findings
Gilliam <i>et al.</i> (2017)	How consumers' narratives of brands help them in rapidly changing marketplace	Consumption narrative is the same as brand meaning or brand image which consumers use through consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narrative is central to the creation of brand meaning by consumers - Narratives are formed by consumers with information that resonates with them and their existing ideals - Consumers co-create brand meaning through their narratives - These narratives are complex, multifaceted and ever-changing with a deep socio-cultural base interconnected to the self - Mental imaging lets consumers enter the world of narrative and create meaning 	Narrative analysis	The individual consumer narratives were used to create first a possible cultural narrative or bird's eye view and later archetypal narratives of groups of consumers for a ground-level view of the changing marketplace
Chronis <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Exploring the role of imagination in the consumption of collective narrative experiences	Narratives are (re)imagined storyscapes, which are focal to the object of consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narrative elements are symbolically deployed to mark taste boundaries can only be grasped through a close reading of consumer discourses 	Narratology	Workings of imagination in tourism sites are inextricably linked to the production of cultural imaginaries, that is, socially important narratives invested with collective values
Airoidi (2019)	This paper represents the first attempt to develop a comprehensive methodological framework for "augmenting" taste research through the analysis of digital traces	N/A	Essential elements of narratives are: the plot; the characters; the climax and	Narrative discourse analysis	Provides methods for mapping consumer digital traces of narratives
Van Laer <i>et al.</i> (2014)	To conceive the extended transportation-imagery model (ETIM)	Narratives are stories and are derived from a process of		Quantitative meta-analysis	Updates transportation-imagery model and

(continued)

Table 5.
Summary of the selected article

Author	Purpose	Definition of consumption narratives	Dimensions	Method	Findings
Van Laer <i>et al.</i> (2019a)	To examine digital narratives and narrative transportation in marketing in an evolving technological environment	attribution of meaning to and interpretation of a story	<p>the outcome and has two levels: At the individual level narratives; constitute a powerful device to frame an experience and at the market level, advertising, branding, communication and consumer research institutions can benefit using narratives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives affect consumer behaviour through narrative transportation 	Meta-analysis	<p>establishes several new paths in narrative transportations</p> <p>The research shows that the narrative transportation effect is stronger when the story falls in a commercial (vs noncommercial) domain, is a user (vs professional), generated and is received by one story-receiver at a time</p> <p>Narrative content and discourse strongly affect and shape consumer behaviour through narrative transportation and persuasion</p>
Van Laer <i>et al.</i> (2019b)	To establish a new theory of narrativity to link the narrative content and discourse of consumer reviews to consumer behaviour	Narrative is the transition of a character from an initial state of events to a later state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consumers empathize with the narrative characters - The narrative plot activates consumers' imagination, which leads to experience suspended reality during narrative reception - Narratives are inherent methods to link consumer actions and events to the interrelated aspects to gain an understanding of the consumption - By creating narratives, 	Automated text analysis of n-grams	<p>The research reveals three elements involved in the sense-making and sense giving process and sets out the three categories of visitor consumption characteristics</p>
Guthrie and Anderson (2010)	Using consumers' narrative of a tourist destination to facilitate understanding of how destination image changes with actual experience and what factors or attributes are important	Narrative is an information transfer system by which consumers make sense of their experiences to themselves and to the others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives are inherent methods to link consumer actions and events to the interrelated aspects to gain an understanding of the consumption - By creating narratives, 	Interpretive qualitative approach	<p>The research reveals three elements involved in the sense-making and sense giving process and sets out the three categories of visitor consumption characteristics</p>

(continued)

Author	Purpose	Definition of consumption narratives	Dimensions	Method	Findings
			consumers make sense of themselves and social situations – Narrative is the articulation of consumers' lived experiences – Narratives provide data – Consumer narratives are a new form of social media data – Consumer narrative, which Hardy refers to them as marketing narratives, enables companies to promote their brands	Narratology	Digital consumer data provide a unique opportunity and challenge for researchers and organizations that have to be carefully negotiated if the potentials of digital consumer data are to be harnessed
Hardey (2014)	To study digital consumers and digital marketing narratives, exploring digital data and digital marketing	The interaction between consumers and content in digital and social media is narrative. These narratives are a new dynamic within digital culture and are an active relationship between the users of the technology and the recording of their data Narrative is a way to convey the tacit knowledge of consumers' experiences	– Narratives consist of: "character (users, stakeholders), plot (task, sequence of events) and setting (environment, context)" – Using narratives helps overcome the limitations of understanding consumer behaviours – Narratives, ontologically, are the same as behaviour, including consumption behaviour – Meaning is created on daily basis in public discourse by narrative	Narrative inquiry technique and critical incident technique	Metaphors combined with lived critical and imaginary events help to generate creative new service ideas. Customer experiences may be used to interpret unspoken, tacit knowledge, which is beneficial when companies want to learn and create something new with the customer Some preliminary evidence is presented by discussing several YouTube videos. These indicate that YouTube content can be better understood as stories, rather than an example of other
Helkkula and Pihlström (2010)	How narrative and narrative inquiry technique might help to develop new ideas and evaluating current service in service development contexts	Narrative is a paradigm to understand consumption and a tool to analyse it		Interpretive qualitative approach	
Pace (2008)	Investigating consumer narrative in consumption of video products in websites such as YouTube				

(continued)

Table 5.

Author	Purpose	Definition of consumption narratives	Dimensions	Method	Findings
Cooper <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Studying brands and consumption narratives in a pop-culture based on James Bond movies	Narratives are social and contextual meaning that consumers attach to the brands and products and they construct a personal narrative via consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives manifest the inner emotion and experiences - Consumption narratives consist of three main archetypes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lover narrative: conveys a meaning of romance and sexual desire – Superhero narrative: conveys a meaning of sophistication and invincibility – Outlaw narrative: insinuates a meaning of danger and revolt - Consumption narratives creates three symbolic relations between consumer and brand, product and consumption - Narrative is a symbolic interrelationship means that the consumers use an object as a symbol of something else - Narrative is an iconic interrelationship means that the sign relates to the object by imitating or resembling the object through the act of 	Textual analysis	<p>approaches such as visual analysis, media studies, videography and others</p> <p>This article identifies three different and contrasting brand—self-narratives that reinforce a particular archetypal myth of a lover, hero or outlaw</p>
Schembri <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Aims investigate how consumers use brands to construct themselves through narrative	Consumption through narrative, a symbolic interrelationship, contributes to the construction of the self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consumption narratives creates three symbolic relations between consumer and brand, product and consumption - Narrative is a symbolic interrelationship means that the consumers use an object as a symbol of something else - Narrative is an iconic interrelationship means that the sign relates to the object by imitating or resembling the object through the act of 	Interpretive qualitative approach	<p>This article shows that how consumers use brands as a tool construct the self through narratives using three key interrelationships: symbolic, iconic and indexical</p>

(continued)

Author	Purpose	Definition of consumption narratives	Dimensions	Method	Findings
Shankar <i>et al.</i> (2001)	Investigating the theory and role of narratives in consumption methodology and its application	Narratives are a fruitful way to explore and understand how consumption experiences are made meaningful for consumers	<p>consumption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives is also an indexical interrelationship that builds on a factual relationship between the object and the sign which consumers create through consumption - Narrative has three main functions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ontological</i>: consumer's reality is individually and narratively constructed through language but is social and cultural world within which the individual is embedded <i>Epistemology</i>: consumption narratives are co-created by consumers <i>Methodology</i>: reality is created by the consumers' narratives - Narratives directly affect consumer behaviour - Consumer narratives of brand increase or decrease the willingness to pay for the brand - Consumer narratives are 	Interpretive qualitative approach	Develops a narrative paradigm and demonstrate how an understanding of narrative can underpin the three paradigmatic questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology in consumption
Lundqvist <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Study the effects of corporate-led narratives on consumers' brand experiences	Narratives convey a point that is valued (either positively or negatively) by consumers and include a message or action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives directly affect consumer behaviour - Consumer narratives of brand increase or decrease the willingness to pay for the brand - Consumer narratives are 	Interpretive qualitative approach	Consumers who were exposed to the narratives described the brand in much more positive terms and were willing to pay more for the product

(continued)

Table 5.

Author	Purpose	Definition of consumption narratives	Dimensions	Method	Findings
<i>Tussyaiah et al. (2011)</i>	Investigating how marketing practitioner might promote tourist destination using tourists' narratives	For consumers, consumption narratives are means to make sense of their decision and action and are is the most effective device to understand consumer experience	totally different entities that those of "corporates" - Consumer think, feel, act and make moral choices according to their narrative structures - Narratives are an organization of events into an intelligible whole such that consumer can always capture the "thought" of the story - Consumption narratives are central to creating the self - Self-brand connections are associated with consumption narratives	Path analysis	It is found that the increased knowledge of a destination through narratives will have a stronger effect on the intention to visit a destination if the audiences can identify themselves with the narratives Outlines a broader vision of what knowing the individual consumer might entail providing a personality that views individuals as dispositional, goal striving and narrative entities engaged in consumption in the broadest sense
<i>Baumgartner (2002)</i>	To in investigating the relationship between self and narratives in a consumption context	Narratives are a basic mode of thought through which people understand the world in general and themselves in particular. They also show how consumers use consumption for self-creation	- Self-referencing narratives affect product preference at the point of sale - Self-referencing narratives affect continued product preference - Narratives might be used to predict future consumer behaviour - Consumption narratives are processed differently from arguments - Narratives entail a temporal dimension in	Narratology	
<i>Ardelet et al. (2015)</i>	Aims to investigate the relationship between consumer narrative spontaneous association to luxury products and consequent behaviour	Narratives provide a natural way of thinking about products and by which consumers store, retrieve and index information		Longitudinal empirical study	This shows that consumers who spontaneously narrate personal narratives when testing products in the store are more likely to prefer products in the store and after usage at home
<i>Hamby et al. (2015)</i>	Tries to examine how story-based online consumer reviews influence attitudes towards the reviewed product through a framework of narrative persuasion	Consumption narratives are relationships among elements, which enables casual inference allowing consumers to mentally construct the meaning of consumption		Path analysis	Demonstrate that reviews with a more narrative-like format lead to higher levels of transportation into the review, which lead to higher levels of reflection on the message and

(continued)

Author	Purpose	Definition of consumption narratives	Dimensions	Method	Findings
Phillips and McQuarrie (2010)	Tries to understand how narrative transportation occurs in consumer as a response to an advertisement	Narratives, narrative transportation, are a new route to consumer persuasion	<p>which events unfold over time</p> <p>Narratives persuade by transporting consumers into a story world</p> <p>Narrative transportation is a distinctive route to persuasion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives are about ourselves and others - Narratives are too subtle to be consistent - Narratives are multiple, ruptured, recursive and diffuse - Narratives can become commodities too - Consumers engage with products narratively - Consumers cocreate the narratives based on their engagements - Narratives increase parasocial activities - Narratives convey strong emotion and motivations - Narratives foster narrative transportation - Transportation into a story influences an individual's beliefs and attitudes because 	Interpretive qualitative approach	<p>ultimately influence behavioural intent</p> <p>Aesthetic has potential positive or negative narrative transportation through imagery. Also, narrative transportation persuade consumers through elaboration likelihood model</p> <p>Using personal experiences of enculturation, these forms of narratives, are discussed against a backdrop of consumer ethnographies and our mutual dependence, upon the retail and the retold</p>
Grafton Small (2006)	Aims to investigate how sub-cultures and individuality helps individuals to maintain their individual identity through consumption narratives	<p>Narrative is created by consumers and is the way how they relate to each other.</p> <p>Narratives are also an enduring paradox: maintaining our individual identities in a society of shared signs and objects, settlements and values</p> <p>Narratives are stories created by TV dramas absorbing and involving consumers affecting their narratives leading to greater connection and ultimately, greater tendency to purchase from that connection</p> <p>Narratives are stories that consumers are immersed in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives affect C-level decisions at organizations by improving relationships - In B2B context, narratives create a personal connection between organizational actors 		
Vazquez <i>et al.</i> (2020)	To develop and test how narrative involvement leads to "parasocial interaction-impulse buying"	<p>Narratives are stories created by TV dramas absorbing and involving consumers affecting their narratives leading to greater connection and ultimately, greater tendency to purchase from that connection</p> <p>Narratives are stories that consumers are immersed in</p>	Structural equation modelling	Narrative involvement might lead to an impulsive purchase	
Anaza <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Investigates the impact of narrative and narrative transportation in advertising on decision-makers attitudinal responses in B2B context	<p>Narratives are stories created by TV dramas absorbing and involving consumers affecting their narratives leading to greater connection and ultimately, greater tendency to purchase from that connection</p> <p>Narratives are stories that consumers are immersed in</p>	Mixed method: Structural equation modelling and thematic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives affect C-level decisions at organizations by improving relationships - In B2B context, narratives create a personal connection between organizational actors 	

(continued)

Table 5.

Table 5.

Author	Purpose	Definition of consumption narratives	Dimensions	Method	Findings
Jain <i>et al.</i> (2020)	This paper focuses on developing an empirical and conceptual understanding of the evolving nature of self in the digital world, created through narratives, from non-Westerners	Narratives and narrative self are in the digital world as a form of open-ended self-expression Conveying a combination of experiences, aspirations and fantasies Co-created with peers and technology	humans typically reason in terms of narratives – Sensational life experiences metaphors into the narrative of the self – Narratives are rooted in the past, molded in the present and have implications for the future – Narratives may be contradictory and consumers strive to resolve the conflicts by delimiting, making compromises or by synthesizing the narratives – Narratives and narrative self includes posts, comments, likes, tagging, others' digital activities and other self-related activities online – A consumer can have multiple narrative selves; for instance, the self, expressed through the professional platform, LinkedIn will vary from that on Instagram – Persona narratives are about the celebrity's professional and personal lives from the celebrity's brand in consumers' perceptions between a	grounded theory	– Several narratives of the self are established – Each narrative addresses different segments of personal audiences, enabling new modes of self-expression to overcome the challenges of digital expressions
Eng and Jarvis (2020)	The research investigates the differential role of narratives about celebrities' personal vs professional lives in creating attachment and identifies and tests moderating effects of	Narratives are the consumption of a celebrity brand's story through which the story receiver interprets it in a causal story-like structure		Mediation analysis and multiple ANOVAs	The results suggest relationship norms that are more altruistic in nature fully mediate the relationship between narrative type and brand attachment.

(continued)

Author	Purpose	Definition of consumption narratives	Dimensions	Method	Findings
	<p>narrative characteristics including the perceived source of fame, valence and authenticity</p>	<p>consumer and a celebrity can be viewed more accurately as a relationship between the consumer and the celebrity's brand</p>			<p>Additionally, personal narratives produce stronger attachment than professional narratives; the celebrity's source of fame moderates narrative type and attachment; and on-brand narratives elicit higher attachment than off-brand narratives, even when these narratives are negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consumers perceive brand narratives as authentic irrespective of how factual they are - Only when one or more authenticity disruptors are present do consumers begin to question the authenticity of the brand narrative - Disruption occurs when the focal brand is perceived to be nakedly copying a competitor or when there is a gross mismatch between the brand narrative and reality - In the presence of one or both of these disruptors, consumers judge brands to be less authentic, report lower identification, lower assessments of brand quality and social responsibility and are less likely to join the brand's community
Johnson <i>et al.</i> (2015)	<p>To investigate if consumer position is to accept a brand's narrative when explicitly reminded that it is manufactured by firms with an underlying profit motive</p>	<p>Narratives are stories developed by brands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explicitly labelled as true, brand narratives might trigger "overthinking" on the part of consumers 	<p>Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis/ MANOVA</p>	

Table 5.

Another attempt to organize the fragmented notion of consumption narratives might be classifying the different dimensions. To use narrative as a tool to investigate consumer behaviour, this concept needs methodological conceptualization and classification. In doing so, we burrow from narratology and the milestone work of [Mishler \(1995\)](#) and try to mount the suggested classification of dimension on this work. The first category entails the dimension in regard to creating meaning by individuals. In this category, the core concept is the relation between individually constructed reality and the self which is defined through consumption and is told and retold through narrative. By focusing on these dimensions, we might have a more in-depth understanding of consumer behaviour. Second category pertains to the social and cultural role of narratives. Final category considers narrative a method of investigation by which researchers might investigate the consumption behaviour related to brands and products. These propositions and categorization could be used as hypotheses for testing in future research ([Table 6](#)).

- (2) Proposition 2: Intrapersonal: intrapersonal narratives are lived experiences of consumers by which they store and process information. Narratives are a self-made way of thinking about consumption in relation to the self and identity.
- Interpersonal: at this level, narratives are a substantial tool to create and disseminate meaning. Narratives transfer experience and knowledge to co-create a shared identity to associate with a whole. In that sense, narratives are a socio-cultural construct, which gives meaning to other things through signs and symbols and helps individuals to make sense of their society.
 - Person-consumption: at this level, narratives are the interaction between consumers and brands and products. These narratives provide a paradigm to understand and analyse consumption and consumer behaviour. Usually, these consumer-made narratives are completely different than those made by the formal organization and sometimes but sometimes they may overlap.

This review of literature on consumption narrative reveals opportunities for conceptualization and future research as practical implications for academicians and researchers.

7. Conclusion and implications

This paper summarizes the discussion and theorization of the most prolific authors and prominent outlets of consumption narratives in a diverse area of research. More specifically, two theoretical gaps are identified: lack of a comprehensive, consumption-specific definition and a classification. Consequently, after a detailed review of the selected article, this paper proposes a definition of consumption narrative and identifies three levels of consumption narratives and classified its dimensions based on two decades of top-level studies. Future research might refer to these definitions and levels as a basis for investigating a different aspect of consumer behaviour or testing hypotheses. The majority of the research studies were qualitative studies in developed countries. Quantitative or mixed methods would combine the generalizations and deep insights needed in future research and would contribute towards the development of new theories and serve to strengthen existing knowledge of consumption narratives.

By developing a comprehensive and concise definition of consumption narratives, one of the main limitations of the subject was addressed, the definitions and notions borrowed

Mishler's approach (1995)	Focuses on	Narrative level	Dimensions	References
Narrativization of experience	This approach focuses on the succession of happening and assumes a correspondence between language and reality through reference and temporal order	Intrapersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narrative is a way of thinking, storing and indexing and retrieving data by individuals - Narrative is the articulation of consumers' lived experiences - Narratives are central to create meaning and the self - Narratives are formed by consumers with information that resonates with them and their existing ideals - Narratives create and transfer experiences - Narratives provide data - Methodologically, realities are made by individuals' narratives - Consumers use the narrative and narrative of the elf to create several identities in social media 	Hardey (2014); Helkkula and Pihlström (2010); Guthrie and Anderson (2010), Shankar <i>et al.</i> (2001); Gilliam <i>et al.</i> (2017) and Jain <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Coherence and structure	How language and communication is used to create meaning through narrative devices	Interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meaning is created on daily basis in public discourse by narrative - By creating narratives, consumers make sense of themselves and social situations - Epistemologically, consumption narratives are co-created by consumers 	Pace (2008), Shankar <i>et al.</i> (2001); Schembri <i>et al.</i> (2010) and Guthrie and Anderson (2010)
Narrativization of communications	Now narratives function to create a self and identity in relation to social processes, institutions or representations of sociocultural constructs	Person-consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives, ontologically, are the same as behaviour, including consumption behaviour - Narratives can be created through celebrities persona - Narratives are new socially constructed data. -Narrative creates a sense of parasocial connection to products and brands 	Gilliam <i>et al.</i> (2017), Guthrie and Anderson (2010); Ardelet <i>et al.</i> (2015), Shankar <i>et al.</i> (2001); Guthrie and Anderson (2010), Pace (2008), Schembri <i>et al.</i> (2010), Van Laer <i>et al.</i> (2014); Van Laer <i>et al.</i> (2019a); Van Laer <i>et al.</i> (2019b); Vazquez <i>et al.</i> (2020), Anaza <i>et al.</i> (2020); Eng and Jarvis (2020) and Johnson <i>et al.</i> (2015)

(continued)

Table 6.
The classification of consumption narrative

Table 6.

Mishler's approach (1995)	Narrative level	Dimensions	References
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives are inherent methods to link consumer actions and events to the interrelated aspects to gain an understanding of the consumption - Consumption narratives creates three symbolic relations between consumer and brand, product and consumption and society at large: symbolic interrelationship, iconic interrelationship, indexical interrelationship - Ontologically consumes' reality is created through narratives but - Narrative transportation encapsulates the journey into the narrative world; retrospective reflection captures customers' changed re-emergence into the real world - Narratives, through narrative transportation, affect the decision-making process at organizational level leading to create a more personal connection with suppliers 	

from other domains, mostly from literature narratology. This systematic literature review summarized knowledge in the field of consumption narratives. This subject presents a promising ground for future research opportunities which are discussed in two parts. It is hoped that these suggestions and inspirations are a flickering light to a more insightful future of consumption narratives.

This article denotes the importance of narratives in information collection, as consumers think and express themselves narratively. Marketing managers and academicians must bear that in mind while investigating consumer behaviour. Marketing practitioners might benefit from the narratives, as it is an area, which has not been considered by many practitioners. Narratives and information gathered through narrative might be more useful in tailoring marketing efforts and communications to a certain group. Also, academicians might benefit from the narrative, as it provides a new type of data, which highlights that consumers interpret the same phenomenon in different ways yielding a more encompassing insight to the research topic.

Another important domain, which narrative might be of great assistance is branding. Brand managers must work to align their brand narrative with their target groups' narratives to resonate with their message. This would lead to a strong brand identity forged through the narratives of consumers. Consumers, as individuals, use brands to construct their selves. Therefore communicating their experiential meaning through brand create a better market, a market in which consumers feel an affinity with the brand.

Surprisingly, a practical implication for consumption narrative is a new product and service development. Consumption narratives provide an in-depth understanding of the target segment. Analyzing and interpreting data gathered through narratives reveals dimensions of consumer behaviour which even they might not be aware of. Narratives would diminish the barriers between individuals' minds and researchers, as their responses indicate extremely intricate experiential processes. What might be hard to be verbalized by individuals could be transported through elaborate stories and accounts of reality. Therefore, marketers and researchers, without manipulating consumers' minds could reach into their experiences.

8. Limitations direction for future research

One of the main limitations is due to the qualitative nature of the paper. Nevertheless, using a systematic approach and methods such as visual representation were used to overcome this limitation. The approach used in this paper does not include all possible articles. The selected articles are derived from a systematic scoring system to minimize the effects and bias of the researcher. At best it outlines the articles with the highest scores. The audience must bear that in mind.

Future research is needed to further extend the findings of this paper. As [Kitchenham \(2004\)](#) suggests, the systematic review helps researchers to summarize an existing but fragmented body of literature and provides a succinct and concise understanding of the topic. However, another aspect of systematic review is to pave way for future research. One of the main outcomes of systematic review is to identify major gaps in the literature and to suggest certain areas for further research studies.

Although the potential of consumption narratives is clear for researchers, this topic yet needs more thorough investigation and elaboration. Hence, this section of the paper is presented in two parts: future research agenda regarding three levels of narratives and narratives.

8.1 Future research agenda regarding three levels of consumption narratives

A multidimensional and multifaceted concept like consumption narratives requires research studies that address its intricate complications and complexity. In previous research studies, different researchers adopted a narrative approach to understand consumer behaviour. For example, [Stern \(2005\)](#) used narratives to understand consumers' accounts on Thanksgiving. Also Stern used this approach to study consumers' views of marketing ([Stern et al., 1998](#)). [Pace \(2008\)](#) used narratives to understand online consumer behaviour in the consumption of digital products, here videos on YouTube. Brand management ([Lundqvist, et al., 2013](#)), luxury products ([Ardelet et al., 2015](#)) and the health industry ([Wang and Shen, 2019](#)), to name a few, are all among those areas investigated narratively. However, all these attempts fail to accomplish one major task, to define consumption narrative as an established mature concept. Many of these research studies have borrowed from literature narratology and used definitions, features and dimensions from that area. Although all of these research studies succeeded in investigating consumption behaviour based on narratives, they neglected to define consumption narrative itself.

Another factor is the interdisciplinarity of consumption narratives. Research about consumption narrative revolves around several disciplines and a string of research which is a noble source of information. Although bringing in from different disciplines has its own benefits, however, several threats are posed such as misinterpretations, bias and misfit of the subjects ([Oswick et al., 2011](#)). Therefore some adjustments to this borrowing are needed. As described before, several studies have used narratives as a tool to understand consumer behaviour. However, considering these three different levels might enrich the findings of future research. In previous research studies, focus on the narrative itself seemed to be dominant, and therefore a more structured, concise approach provides more structured findings and avoids the generality of current research leading to a bland ambiguity of the findings. However, these three levels and dimensions might help future researchers to remain meaningful while avoiding being too general or too contextual. It can be suggested that researchers use propositions and findings of this paper as a testable hypothesis in their future studies, as narrowing down the area of research, using a set of structures puts findings into a testable framework and makes the results more comparable.

8.2 Future research agenda regarding narratives

Firstly, it should be emphasized that consumption narrative research includes many fields of research and shares many similarities with other interpretive paradigms ([Shankar et al., 2001](#)). Theoretical narrative implications are evident in marketing ([Brown, 2005a, 2005b; Patterson and Brown, 2005](#)), advertising ([Stern, 1989, 1995; Escalas, 2007](#)), brands and branding ([Shankar et al., 2001; Twitchell, 2004](#)) and consumer research. However, eventually, the narrative paradigm in consumer research should be established as a separate paradigm. Future efforts should be aimed at this end.

Future researchers might try to define the consumption narrative paradigm and explore a new theoretical perspective to benefit the field. [Shankar et al. \(2001\)](#) could serve as a basis to elaborate the consumption narratives, as ontology, epistemology and methodology of narratives are discussed. Furthermore, several other theories have yet to be fully applied in consumption narratives. The new theories such as social media theories or theatrical theories might be fruitful since enables search to investigate how individuals create their narratives and identity.

The narrative approach could be used to understand human action and behaviour. Narratives provide insight into consumption more accurately and effectively than other forms of research ([Brown, 2005a](#)). Narrative and plot in advertising and communication are

commonly used. This is the persuasive role of the narrative mentioned by Wang and Shen (2019). This form of the narrative manifests as a journey taken by the hero or a problem solved by the hero and this hero could be a product or brand. This aspect of the narrative, used primarily in marketing, could also be attributed to the self-referencing role of narrative (Ardelet *et al.*, 2015). This combination of self-referencing and persuasive role might be a promising domain for further research studies.

Branding is another field that benefits from narratives. Brand values are often built and transferred through marketing communications. Brands are actually a company-built narrative (Lundqvist *et al.*, 2013) expressed visually or verbally (Twitchell, 2004). Therefore, findings on consumption and consumer narratives could be applied to this domain. How consumers receive, process, store retrieve information narratively and how this sequence affects brand and branding effort is another domain to be further investigated.

The final theoretical aspect of consumption narratives is its use as a methodological tool. As stated before, consumers articulate their inner self and experiences through narratives and these introspective narratives can be studied by consumer research practitioners. As these narratives are subtle and inconsistent (Grafton Small, 2006), studying them is more effective than studying other forms of consumer information. This narrative-based approach to the interpretive perspective of consumer qualitative research might be another ground for further research. Researchers might carry out research studies on how consumers use narratives to explain their association with brands, attachment to products as augmented self, their purchase decisions and their consumption experiences as stories they tell other consumers.

From the literature review, it is observed that narrative consumption research studies are more focused on those narratives provided by individuals. Thus, to understand the role of the individuals in interpersonal and person-consumption levels such as in family or groups and in relation to brand and products, ethnographical methods are suggested. Studying individuals in their groups and society at large would definitely shed some light on some aspects of consumer behaviour that we know less about.

Subcultures and consumer tribes are a good opportunity for future research. Consumer tribes, consumer resistance and other consumer subcultures are a potential context for future research. Future researchers might take factors such as regional culture, religious rituals, deprived consumers and consumer stigmatization into account to study less fortunate consumers and communities to examine how these factors affect consumption narratives.

As probably noticed, most of the consumption narrative research studies are mainly focused on consumers in developed countries. Given the fact that the level of education, cultural capital and consumer maturity in these countries are significantly different, future research should look into other countries and societies as a source of data and information. These contexts are marked by characteristics such as lack of education, cultural voids and conspicuous consumption. Future research could capitalize on these characteristics for elaborating on context-specific research and comparative studies.

Most of the information gathered in consumption narrative research studies does not track the consumers over a period of time and is snap-shot-like data. As a result, we have a limited understanding of how consumer narratives evolve through time. Therefore, to understand how consumers create and develop their narratives, it is imperative to track them through time and different stages of consumption. Therefore a longitudinal narrative study of consumption is suggested for future research.

Following the approach of [Belanche et al. \(2020\)](#), potential research questions leading to a research agenda are presented in the next table. These questions extend the narrative into different strings of research which are noteworthy for researchers ([Table 7](#)).

Although complementary, the results of visualization can provide scholars and practitioners with a deeper insight into recent narrative studies and help predict future strings of research. Finally, it is worth mentioning that most of the consumption narrative research studies are qualitative. The majority of the research studies use qualitative methods such as grounded theory, theme analysis and phenomenology. Quantitative methods are rarely used, thus it is suggested for further researchers to follow this path. For example, [Escalas \(2004a, 2004b\)](#) developed a narratives structure item that might serve as a basis for other quantitative developments. [Tussyadiah et al. \(2011\)](#) elaborated on this scale to investigate the consumption narrative in tourism and hospitality. Also, mixed-method might be beneficial to consumption narratives research, as it serves both generalizations and deep insights needs in the field. Finally, innovative methods which are developed recently such as the EBNIIT ([Helkkula and Pihlström, 2010](#)); which combines principles from the narrative inquiry technique and critical incident technique (CIT), as well as the use of projective elements in the form of metaphors should be carefully examined for future research.

Framework path and subtopic	Research question
<i>Information distribution</i>	
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How social media are shaping consumer narratives? – How the flow of information on social media creates or harms brand narratives? – How can consumers use social media to create their consumption counter-narratives?
Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How the second screen affects consumption narratives?
<i>Consumer</i>	
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are young consumers more narrative-driven in their consumption than old consumers? – How lived experiences affect consumer narrative creation? – How major collective life incidents of an individual affect his or her narratives?
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How gender might affect narratives, their creation and interpretation? – How gender affects the consumption narrative for any given brand or product?
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How subcultures collide narratively?
Consumer traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How and to what extent personal traits affect individuals' consumption narratives?
Consumer segments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How consumer partisanship affect the narrative interpretation and narrative creation?
<i>Marketing and branding</i>	
branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How company with different brands should manage their brand portfolio to avoid ethical dilemmas regarding contradictions in different brand narratives? – How narrative association with celebrities, social media influencers and famous people, in general, affects the brand narrative? – How interpersonal and person-consumption level of the narrative is affected by parasocial relations created by modern branding methods such as celebrity branding and influencer branding?
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How different consumers interpret organizational brand narratives? – How organizational narratives and narrative transportation are affected by the selected advertising medium such as TV and the internet? – How product placement in movies and endorsement by actors affect consumer narratives? – How and to what extent, short term and long-term exposure to organizational narratives affect consumer narratives?

Table 7.
Suggested research questions for future research

Notes

1. Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses.
2. Critical appraisal skills programme.

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Keywords	Narrative, consumer narratives, consumption narratives, narratives in marketing, effects of narratives on the consumer, effects of narratives on consumption, narratives and consumption
Search hints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AND and OR in Boolean search operator • sing a truncation symbol (e.g. \$ or *) as in “narrative\$” to retrieve variations on the word narrative such as “narrative” and “narratives” • using a wildcard symbol (e.g. # or ? or \$) • Proximity search for one word within <i>n</i> number of words of another word (ADJn or NEAR/n, depending on the database). For example, “consumer ADJ3 narrative” will retrieve records where “consumer” and “narrative” appear within three words of each other
Synonyms	Story, consumer story, consumption story, consumer storytelling and storytelling
Year	2000 up to the present
Language	English
Research type	Books, articles, conference papers, summaries, book reviews, points of view and speeches
subject	Consumer narratives and consumption narratives
Scope	All topics related to consumer and consumption narratives in ant context and field

Table A1.
Research protocol

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