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## **From Campfires to Social Media**

An Analysis of Narrative Engagement in Destination Marketing: A

Study on Different Storytelling Styles

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# Acknowledgement

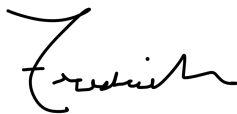
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# Abstract

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Storytelling has been around for millennia, and it has been suggested that narratives form a paradigm through which humanity makes sense of the world. Limited research has been conducted to observe how different storytelling styles impact the narrative engagement of an audience in destination marketing. In this study, a framework for determining and evaluating different storytelling styles has been developed. Using this framework, four videos were chosen as best fits for four distinct storytelling styles. The four chosen videos were shown to focus groups so that we could evaluate audience conversations to interpret the factors appearing to be responsible for fostering or destroying narrative engagement within an audience across the four storytelling styles. The evaluation was carried out by analysis of focus group conversations using key components of narrative engagement arising from Narrative Transportation Theory, including absorption, identification, involvement, and flow. Our analysis revealed four themes affecting narrative engagement that together highlight the importance of audiences' backgrounds, clarity and understanding, overused or undesirable content, and the role of emotional relatability. Additionally, our results emphasise the potential that UGC can have on value co-destruction and for serious storytelling to engage audiences through emotional resonance. This study provides an understanding of how different storytelling styles affect audience engagement and serves as a foundation for future research into this topic.

**Keywords:** *Storytelling, digital storytelling, storytelling styles, Narrative Paradigm Theory, Narrative Transportation Theory, social media, destination marketing, DMO (Destination Marketing Organization), UGC (user-generated-content), audience engagement, narrative engagement*

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# 1. Introduction

For ages, humanity has gathered around campfires, where tactics for hunting skills and other fundamental survival techniques were shared, often in the form of elaborate stories. Fisher (1984) proposes that humans are ‘homo narrans’, and through the usage of stories, a paradigm through which we can make sense of the world around us is formed. Storytelling, having been present in every era of history, is fundamental for humans to understand their surroundings and how everyday life is shaped (Nicoli et al., 2017; White, 1980; Fisher, 1984; Corvellec, 2015). The new campfires and sharing points in which stories are being told are now online, through social media platforms such as Instagram.

## 1.1. Background

Storytelling’s usefulness in engaging human emotions has made it a common technique in advertising and marketing (Youssef et al., 2018), particularly for touristic enterprises aiming to attract visitors to various destinations through place branding (Kang et al., 2020; Kumar & Panda, 2019; Jo et al., 2022). Effective storytelling can create meaningful engagement and emotional connections with the perception of a brand (De Oliveira Júnior et al., 2023), and it has been argued that the essence of a tourist destination comes down to providing a setting for unique stories. When stories connect emotions to a physical location, destination marketers can influence consumers’ behaviours and perceptions. Through creating a unique and authentic brand narrative, storytelling becomes important in allowing destinations to distinguish themselves from one another and gain competitive advantages in their marketing (Zhang & Ramayah, 2024; Li et al., 2024). Destination marketing must deal with the complexities of selling tangible and intangible products, ranging from products and services to experiences, all while dealing with multiple stakeholders. Storytelling, through its emotional and human characteristics, can help establish consumer trust in the wide array of products and services that destinations sell (Pachucki et al., 2021).

Recently, storytelling has shifted into the virtual realm (Van Laer et al., 2019), largely via social media in a concept known as digital storytelling, with media producers ranging from amateur to professional creating video content centred around a narrative (Jian & Chen, 2020; Green, 2008; Fulwiler & Middleton, 2012; Cao et al., 2021). When it comes to marketing

destinations, DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations) utilize storytelling as a powerful tool to brand and market tourist destinations. These organizations function as the primary nexus between destinations and their associated stakeholders involved in attracting tourists (Paul & Varghese, 2014; Lucarevschi, 2016; Jian & Chen, 2020). Storytelling's collaborative nature can act as a unifying force between DMOs and stakeholders to achieve their shared goal of attracting visitors through the usage of engaging narratives (Pachucki et al., 2021; Zhang & Ramayah, 2024).

A common strategy for DMOs is to use UGC (User-generated content) as this kind of content displays the destination through the perception of the tourists (Santos, 2021). Content created by social media platform users represents a common phenomenon in today's information-sharing ecosystem and constitutes a large amount of material on social media (Rajamma et al., 2019). The utilization of UGC by DMOs has become a popular strategy as it has been seen to integrate tourists more directly into the destination marketing process and is thought to potentially increase the authenticity and trustworthiness of a destination's image (Santos, 2021; Burgess, 2009). While UGC is thought to bring advantages, it has also been associated with a loss of control of DMOs' ability to construct a destination's image entirely on its own terms (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Lund et al., 2019; Egger et al., 2022; Huertas & Mariné-Roig, 2015).

By focusing on storytelling elements that create narrative engagement, DMOs can create emotional connections within an audience (Lin et al., 2021; Bernkopf & Nicon, 2018; Sarica, 2023). Narrative engagement can be observed within stories that elicit attentional and emotional responses, allowing for deeper connections between audiences and narratives (Zhang & Ramayah, 2024). Engagement of an audience has been understood as an important key towards influencing attitudes and future actions and is understood to be influenced by numerous factors that can either increase or decrease its effects (Broersma, 2019; Busselle & Bilandzić, 2009). Creating emotionally engaging advertising can promote a yearning for travel among consumers (Irimiás et al., 2021). As such, storytelling used in the digital era can be seen as a crucial tool to engage audiences and is especially aligned with the goals of destination marketing.

## 1.2. Problematization and Research Aim

Storytelling has been observed as an effective tool for marketing destinations (Lund et al., 2018; Zhang & Ramayah, 2024; Li et al., 2024). Despite this, several research gaps point to the need for a deeper understanding of how the usage of storytelling within destination marketing

can be optimized. Youssef et al. (2018) reveal a scarcity of research into the storytelling approaches of different types of destination branding practitioners, resulting in uncertainty as to how successful story-based destination branding can be assessed. Pachucki et al. (2021) emphasize a need for more investigation into the impact of narrative elements on audience responses. Furthermore, Zhang & Ramayah (2024) describe the current state of knowledge of storytelling in destination marketing as ‘fragmented,’ and call for more research into discovering how destinations can more effectively make use of storytelling to achieve desired outcomes. Lastly, there is limited research into how different storytelling styles could impact an audience’s level of engagement in the context of tourism destination marketing (Cao et al., 2021).

As Cao et al. (2021) reveal in their research into how short video narrative aspects can influence destination brand attitudes, tourism marketers can use short videos containing narrative elements to provide a sense of presence and engagement within their audiences. Not optimizing the usage of storytelling could result in DMOs and UGC inadvertently creating negative or undesirable perceptions of the destination’s image (Echeverri & Skálén, 2011; Lund et al., 2019). Additionally, Egger et al. (2022) call for more qualitative research into the understanding of tourists' and viewers' perceptions of destination branding on social media platforms such as Instagram.

Currently, DMOs face a challenge in forming an understanding of how narrative-based destination marketing can best be employed to engage wide audiences (Gürsoy & Kaurav, 2022; Fortezza & Pencarelli, 2018). By understanding the underlying thought processes of audiences’ reactions to a variety of storytelling styles, DMOs could have the potential to optimize their marketing strategies (Foriş et al., 2020). The lack of insight into this critical topic limits DMOs’ ability to fully exploit the potential of storytelling on social media to engage the audience within a narrative and inspire travel (Houghton, 2021; Ganassali & Matysiewicz, 2020; Thelander & Cassinger, 2017; Lin et al., 2021).

Our study, in response to the mentioned research gaps, suggests that adding insights from a qualitative angle focusing on analysing and evaluating the thought processes of audiences exposed to destination marketing posts on social media which utilize different storytelling styles could be beneficial in making better sense of what kind of destination advertising audiences find engaging (Cao et al., 2021; Egger et al., 2022; Zhang & Ramayah 2024; Youssef et al., 2018; Pachucki et al., 2021; Lund et al., 2019; Houghton, 2021; Ganassali & Matysiewicz, 2020; Thelander & Cassinger, 2017; Lin et al., 2021). This study aims to address the gap presented and to understand how different storytelling styles engage an audience and what critical



factors are impacting narrative engagement. To achieve this objective, we formulate the following research questions:

***RQ1:*** *How do the different storytelling styles impact the narrative engagement of an audience?*

***RQ2:*** *What factors are influencing the narrative engagement of an audience?*

***RQ3:*** *How can DMOs optimize their destination marketing strategies in relation to different storytelling styles?*

The research questions and aim provide a clear focus for this study. To explore the audience's thought process, we will analyse conversations arising from different storytelling styles that aim to market destinations. To narrow the scope, the focus will be on Swedish DMOs. By developing a framework for video style identification and selection, four videos from Swedish DMOs' Instagrams will be chosen, each representing a unique style. This qualitative study will present a mixed methods approach in which video analysis and focus groups are used to address the research question. Video analysis provides a foundation for defining and identifying different storytelling styles from an academic perspective. Focus groups will allow investigation of audience perceptions of the different storytelling styles, allowing for insight into their conversations to reveal what factors influence narrative engagement.

### 1.3. Outline

This research first discusses relevant literature. Following this, a framework for storytelling style identification and selection is laid out. Relevant theories are then addressed that serve as a foundation for the analysis of empirical data. The methodology provides a detailed description of the research design of the video and focus group analysis. The analysis section shows the summary of the video analysis, and the focus group analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the identified themes and factors appearing to influence narrative engagement within different storytelling styles. The discussion section summarizes and discusses our key findings from previous research and addresses our research questions. Finally, the conclusion addresses the limitations and implications for DMOs.

## 2. Relevant Literature and Theory

This chapter introduces a comprehensive literature review which serves as a foundation for topics addressed in this study and is used to develop the four styles of storytelling. The theories presented will be used as a foundation for focus group analysis.

### 2.1. Literature Review

#### 2.1.1. Audience Engagement

The concept of audience engagement has its origins in the twentieth-century news industry when media producers began gaining awareness of the importance of measuring the impacts of the content that they produced and published. In today's internet-dominated digital age, audience engagement has gained increased attention from industries such as media and advertising, particularly within the context of social media (Broersma, 2019). Audience engagement is characterized by an active and intentional orientation towards a given media and involves psychological experiences including captivated attention and thought formation. Furthermore, engagement is understood to create cognitive or emotional attachments between the audience and media and can be seen as a first step towards inspiring subsequent action related to the media's content (Broersma, 2019). Engagement for an audience can be fostered or hindered by numerous factors. When an audience identifies with and feels engrossed by the content they observe, engagement is understood to increase. On the contrary, difficulties in understanding the content of media can reduce the ease of cognitive access for an audience, thereby decreasing engagement (Buselle & Bilandzic, 2009). To increase audience engagement, particularly in online advertising, storytelling has become a popular means by which advertisers attempt to create personal connections between audiences and their products in a relatable and easily comprehensible way (Kemp et al., 2021).

#### 2.1.2. Storytelling

Storytelling has its roots in humanity's historical record (Fisher, 1984), and its impact can be observed in the collective psyche of what makes up the human experience. The collective associations that come to form narrative archetypes, which were popularised by the analytical psychologist Carl Jung, have their roots in a psychological understanding of how meaning is

formed through very basic, typical, and recurrent patterns that can be understood and observed across the literature of various cultures and periods (Roesler, 2023; Roesler, 2006). Furthermore, it has been suggested that these archetypal patterns featured within stories may have their source from something as innate as our genetic codes. The associations to these archetypes, it is suggested, are linked to human instincts that have been shaped through evolution and that can be explained by the behavioural biology of human beings (Roesler, 2023). It could be suggested that the power of storytelling lies in its ability to connect with some of the most fundamental aspects of the human experience. Storytelling can be seen as a basic way of making sense of our world. It shapes how human beings construct meaning (Nicoli et al., 2021). White (1980) argues that a narrative is crucial for making sense of human actions and events. By gathering stories, humans can convey and transport messages which contain knowledge and experiences. In a sense, a narrative can be seen to represent a collective reality.

Jan & Chen (2020) state that digital storytelling was originally introduced by the Centre of Digital Storytelling in California in the 1980s and was meant to be used by amateur media producers. Digital storytelling was used to introduce short, narrated films, lasting mostly between two and three minutes. Today it can be found in many fields such as healthcare, religion studies and business studies. Lucarevschi (2016) and Jian & Chen (2020) explain that storytelling is effective as a pedagogical tool. The effectiveness relies on stories being fun and engaging, making them memorable and thus, boosting the engagement of the learners.

### 2.1.3. The Four Elements of Storytelling

For this study, we argue that storytelling contains four basic elements: message, conflict, characters, and plot (Fog et al., 2010). The message, also known in the literature as a medium, contains the main idea and moral of the story. Characters are the individuals who are the 'living elements' of a story. Characters are not limited to only people, but can also include animals, or even in a more abstract sense, landscapes that have a progression over time. The plot structures the narrative and provides a framework that can be expressed through a series of visual elements such as colours and movements. The plot evokes emotions and conveys the message. Lastly, the conflict brings the challenge and the problem of the story. Generally, a conflict occurs between the archetypal hero and the villain. Still, an adversary can be represented in various forms ranging from physical to psychological, such as traversing a physical barrier such as a mountain or overcoming a sense of fear over a situation (Lugmayr et al., 2016; Fog et al., 2010). Conflict can broadly be divided into three categories. A character can either conflict with another

character, with an element within their environment, or with themselves (Ware & Young, 2010). Moreover, visual, and emotional conflicts in colours, moods, sounds and music can occur as an element of conflict (Fog et al., 2010; Johnston, 1998).

#### 2.1.4. Serious and Entertainment Storytelling

Lugmayr et al. (2016) distinguish between serious and entertaining storytelling elements. Serious storytelling has a purpose beyond entertainment. It emphasises serious real-life situations in which stories are used to engage users emotionally and create meaningful outcomes. Conversely, entertainment storytelling aims to amuse the user without a specific learning outcome. For example, in the field of healthcare, serious storytelling can create self-awareness in the audience and could help prevent health-related issues. Traditionally, serious storytelling follows patterns that are linear and in schemas, meaning that serious stories follow repeatable action sequences which are strongly connected with the next sequences and are all combined by a core message. Although the story's message is conveyed in a coherent and logical progression of events, this does not mean that every detail is presented in a precise linear way. Serious stories can be dynamic and complex in their narrative structure, still allowing multiple perspectives for parallel storylines and interactive engagement (Lugmayr et al., 2016).

Entertainment-focused storytelling can be described as less detail-oriented surrounding narrative events and overall, less concerned with factual accuracy. Moreover, in entertaining storytelling, there are generally more words that are connected to emotions. Moreover, how a story is told can also define the style. If it is told entertainingly or humorously, for example, it could more likely be regarded as entertainment storytelling (Dudukovic et al., 2004). Furthermore, some common themes that are often found within narratives focused on entertaining an audience include such things as focus on adventure, love stories, gossip, or imaginary worlds. Consequently, entertainment-centric storytelling also oftentimes features elements of fiction rather than non-fiction (Dubourg & Baumard, 2022).

### 2.1.5. The Influence of UGC in Destination Marketing

User-generated-content (UGC) can be defined as:

*[...] any kind of text, data or action performed by online digital users, published and disseminated by the same user through independent channels, that incur an expressive or communicative effect either in an individual manner or combined with other contributions from the same or other sources. (Santos, 2021, p. 95).*

UGC in a social media context has gained more attention in the last few years. Santos (2021) argues that UGC is a crucial topic for social media and has a great impact on it. UGC encourages users to interact more with social media platforms such as Instagram, as by contributing content, users feel a higher sense of connection and an increased feeling of community building. Moreover, UGC is often perceived as more authentic and trustworthy than content which is created professionally for marketing purposes (Santos, 2021). In the field of destination marketing, UGC can bring new perspectives, making the picture of a destination more diverse. Furthermore, recently UGC has become a popular way for consumers to connect with a destination's offerings (Santos, 2021; Burgess, 2009). One important factor in the distribution of UGC comes from Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) (Paul & Varghese, 2014; Elbe et al., 2008). The UNWTO (Glossary of Tourism Terms | UNWTO, 2023) describes DMOs as the leading organisations within tourism, operating in conjunction with other stakeholders and authorities. The most significant role of a DMO is to promote, brand and market the destination to attract visitors, as ultimately many destinations are dependent on tourism (Paul & Varghese, 2014).

Social media has become a popular medium for destination marketing for DMOs (Díaz-Pacheco et al., 2024). Social media allows DMOs to communicate with potential visitors directly and is seen as a powerful tool for addressing current challenges of place branding (Lin et al., 2021). DMOs are especially concerned with social media users' perspectives, which allow identification of the interests of potential visitors and opens the potential for destinations to target their audiences directly (Santos, 2021; Egger et al., 2022). Moreover, re-posted UGC by DMOs can represent a more authentic portrayal of a destination, adding an emotional layer to the destination's image which reflects personal experiences and stories. An extra emotional layer can be useful to connect deeper with an audience and can influence viewers' perception of a destination, creating a greater interest in it (Thelander & Cassinger, 2017; Lin et al., 2021; Bernkopf & Nikon, 2018).

UGC can be interpreted as a collaborative co-creation behaviour of tourists (Pera, 2014). Grönroos & Voima (2013) state that co-creation can contribute to value creation, which involves the interaction between the customer and the provider, where both parties interact with each other to achieve a positive outcome. On the other hand, Echeverri & Skålén (2011) found that this interaction between customer and provider can have negative outcomes too, so-called value co-destruction. Lund et al. (2019) suggest that UGC can unintentionally or intentionally harm (value co-destruct) the image of a destination. When users post their views on a destination, DMOs can lose control over their brand and narrative on social media. Overall, value creation and destruction coexist and DMOs must be aware of both potential outcomes. Furthermore, Lund et al. (2019) found that value diminution is another form of co-destruction often happening to destination branding on social media.

Both serious and entertaining storytelling can be observed within UGC and DMO-produced content (Kvítková and Petrů, 2021). Storytelling can foster an extra emotional layer in marketing content, creating understanding and empathy. Emotional connection through storytelling can create a safe space for viewers where dynamics such as self-reflection and self-awareness of emotions, emotional sharing and empathy can occur (Sarica, 2023). Ultimately, emotional engagement within storytelling can be viewed as a catalyst for effective destination marketing.

## 2.2. The Four Developed Storytelling Styles

In alignment with the research gap presented by the study of Cao et al. (2021), we propose a framework for identifying distinct storytelling video styles. Based on the literature background, we have identified four different styles of storytelling observed in social media in the context of tourism and destination marketing. We argue that there is a differentiation between UGC and DMO-produced storytelling posts. While DMO content typically is centred around a distinct destination branding strategy (Paul & Varghese, 2014), we argue that UGC is free from this constraint as it is produced by individuals, not directly associated with a DMO. Secondly, we suggest there is a differentiation between serious storytelling and entertainment storytelling. Lugmayer et al. (2016) describe elements that differentiate not only the characteristics but also the purpose of both styles. With this information a 3x3 matrix is formed (see Table 1), in which four different styles result. These four different styles represent common video styles found on DMO's Instagram pages that use storytelling and are used to market a destination. We use the terms video style and storytelling style interchangeably throughout this study.

Table 1: The Four Storytelling Styles

	<b>DMO produced</b>	<b>UGC</b>
<b>Entertainment storytelling</b>	<i>Style 1</i>	<i>Style 4</i>
<b>Serious storytelling</b>	<i>Style 3</i>	<i>Style 2</i>

To evaluate to what extent a video contains storytelling elements, the second table (table 2) describes and expands on key narrative elements of storytelling based on the theoretical background. We chose these four elements as they have been commonly mentioned in the literature and represent fundamental building blocks for a narrative (Fog et al., 2010; Lugmayr et al., 2016; Johnston, 1998; Ware & Young 2010).

Table 2: Four Key Elements

Character(s)	Living elements: such as animals and humans but also landscapes that progress over time. Characters going through a development.
Message	A main idea and a moral directed to the audience.
Plot	Provides the framework of the narrative. Conveys the message, evokes emotions, and can include visual elements (colours, movements).
Conflict	Problem of the story. Conflict (man vs self), (man vs man), (man vs environment) in emotions, or visual (colours), moods, music.

Another coding layer to clarify if a video is considered serious storytelling or an entertainment storytelling style has been developed out of the theoretical background (Lugmayr et al., 2015; Lugmayr et al., 2016; Dudukovic et al, 2004; Dubourg & Baumard, 2022). The following table provides a detailed description of what elements and features can be observed in the serious storytelling and entertainment storytelling styles.

*Table 3: Serious and Entertaining Storytelling*

Serious storytelling	Presents factual knowledge and/or wisdom, attempts to achieve certain serious goals, instructional content, intrinsic motivation, reflection, self-empowerment, serious pursuits, inspiring knowledge creation, collective memory, linear or non-linear narrative structure
Entertainment storytelling	Straight-forwarded narrative structure, less originality in events, less accuracy, less detailed events and narrative, more emotional words, emphasis on grabbing attention, presence of fictional elements, focus on adventures, conflicts, love stories, imaginary worlds, gossip

To distinguish between UGC and DMO-produced content we base our criteria on the provided background literature. UGC can be any content that is published by an individual user on a social media platform (Santos, 2021) for this study, Instagram. In addition, we argue that UGC posts must be tagged on a DMOs page to make it relevant for this study. DMO-produced content originates from a DMO with full control over the content being created and displayed (Paul & Varghese, 2014), but can be produced with the help of a professional organisation (for non-individual purposes).

By dividing videos into different storytelling styles, a basis by which an in-depth analysis can be carried out is created. This framework has been developed to address the gap in understanding different video styles for DMO marketing and to better understand the impact of narrative elements on audiences (Cao et al., 2021; Pachucki et al., 2021). We argue that the developed framework helps future researchers understand and evaluate the role and effects of storytelling in destination marketing strategies. The framework provides a clear categorization which can be replicated by future researchers.



## 2.3. Theories

### 2.3.1. Narrative Paradigm Theory

The Narrative Paradigm Theory emphasizes the all-pervasive nature of narratives. According to Fisher (1984), the narrative paradigm is a communication theory that argues that narrative is the basis of all human communications. Human life is a series of ongoing stories, each with unique plots, characters, messages, and conflicts. Fisher argues that the narrative paradigm is contrary to the rational world paradigm in which human behaviour is based on logical arguments and their logical conclusions, in which there is only a right and wrong which is based on facts. The narrative paradigm is about making sense of the world with the help of stories that we all share. This theory illuminates the notion that human interactions are not solely grounded in objective reality, but also in the significance of our subjective experiences. It enables us to recognize our values and beliefs, which in turn shape our choices and behaviours. The narrative paradigm argues that if we see the world as many stories, we can feel what is true and what makes sense to us (Fisher, 1984, Lim & Childs, 2020; Martinus & Chaniago, 2017).

### 2.3.2. Narrative Transportation Theory

The power of storytelling in marketing and branding strategies comes down in large part to the ability of a story to create narrative engagement by harnessing the audience's emotions (Ganassali & Matysiewicz, 2020). This phenomenon has given rise to Narrative Transportation Theory (NTT). NTT suggests that consumers can be immersed within, and thereby 'transported', by a story. As a result of this transportation, a story's audience is said to shift their mindsets away from rational and analytical processing in favour of narrative processing. This shift to narrative processing enhances storytelling's persuasive and engaging effects by decreasing the critical analysis of arguments, producing fewer negative thoughts, and producing more positive emotional reactions as compared to analytical processing (Ganassali & Matysiewicz, 2020). Visconti (2015) describes how stories can offer a unique pathway towards effective engagement. This is accomplished when a story can create empathetic connections, identification and relatability between the story's listeners or readers and the characters within it. By successfully transporting the audience of a story, storytelling produces a stronger and longer-lasting change in attitudes and intentions.

The four key storytelling elements, along with the overall structure of a typical story which features thematically and temporally related events that include a distinct beginning, middle and end, play important roles in creating conditions favourable for transporting an audience into the narrative mindset (Fog et al., 2010; Green, 2008). Already from a young age, people grow accustomed to the usage of stories in society, with most people having been exposed to a variety of stories since childhood. It is the point of view of some psychologists that human thought structures are largely narrative in their form, suggesting that storytelling creates a method of information delivery that is inherent to how people generally process information (Green, 2008). Additionally, neuroscience research suggests that compelling stories can stimulate the release of brain chemicals such as cortisol and oxytocin, resulting in sustained attention, empathy and behavioural responses that can make a brand or product associated with a compelling narrative more memorable (Woldarsky, 2019). The message and characters of stories also have an important role in shaping how individuals resonate with a narrative. Individuals can bring their perspectives and interpretations into account when encountering a story. This could allow for ways by which a large variety of people can be transported and engaged by a story depending on their own backgrounds and life situations (Green, 2008).

NTT highlights the importance and value that is provided by creating emotional connections between the storyteller and the audience. As Kang et al. (2020) identified in their research on the effectiveness of storytelling in advertising, the more that an audience member was transported by a narrative, by making them feel as if though they were participants in the scene of the story, the more likely they were to gain emotional connection and regard an advertisement as touching and meaningful. Similarly, audience members were also able to identify themselves with the main characters of such storytelling advertisements by being able to imagine finding themselves in situations like those of the main characters (Kang et al., 2020). The ability of stories to elicit emotional responses is also arguably a result stemming from an audience's desire to be entertained and to experience a sense of escapism from their everyday lives. Narrative transportation and engagement, it is thereby suggested, can generate emotional responses amongst an audience and is in part dependent upon how understandable and relatable the story is perceived to be (Van Laer et al., 2014).

In conclusion, NTT shows promising signs towards providing a blueprint for creating engaging tourism marketing by harnessing the power of storytelling within destination branding and marketing. By focusing on engagement, the usage of narrative by DMOs can provide a

useful edge in allowing for a destination and its associated brand to become more memorable amongst the audiences they are trying to reach (Woldarsky, 2019).

### 2.3.3. The Key Components of Narrative Transportation Theory

NTT, we suggest, can be broken down into four key components, each of which contributes to a narrative's ability to create engagement. These four closely related components form a basis by which a story can be evaluated for the presence of features that can engage an audience in a narrative through transportation. They are described as follows:

#### *Absorption:*

Absorption into a narrative occurs when an audience gains the ability to shift out of itself, allowing for a story to capture attention to the point of feeling that the narrative was playing out in real life. Absorption can be understood as a relocation of the audience into the story, in a sense bringing them into the story (Hamby et al., 2018). Several dimensions exist to evaluate if an audience is absorbed into a story, including attention capture and the creation of mental imagery. The formation of mental imagery implies an ability for the audience to generate vivid visual imagery in association with the story (Kuijpers, 2021). Attention capture is central to absorption, described as a sustained form of concentration resulting in an audience member experiencing such feelings as a loss of sense of time, or even a loss of awareness of themselves (Kuijpers, 2021). Furthermore, upon securing attention, it is purported that emotional shifts within the audience can more easily be produced, such as creating suspense and excitement. These types of emotional shifts can create greater opportunities for persuasive influences to be utilized on an audience (Nabi & Green, 2014). Emotional engagement amongst an audience provided by absorption can assist in the creation of empathy and sympathy for a narrative's characters. This allows for an audience to form a temporary suspension of disbelief and relate more fully to the emotional dimensions provided by the characters as well as the overall message of a story. Consequently, absorption can be seen as a pathway towards other components of narrative engagement such as identification and involvement and is also critical for flow to be achieved (Hamby et al., 2018; Kuijpers, 2021).

#### *Identification:*

As is the case with absorption, identification with a narrative also hinges largely on the development of emotional engagement amongst an audience. Identification refers more specifically to the ability of the audience to imagine themselves taking on the role of the character(s)

of a story (Hamby et al., 2018). Identification focuses on the relationship developed between the audience and character(s). The more an audience is invested emotionally and can identify themselves with a character, the more powerful the potential emotional engagement with the said character will be. This can also inspire further engagement with subsequent stories or episodes in which the connected character(s) are featured (Nabi & Green, 2014). Identification that develops an audience-character association has been shown to have the capacity to strongly influence thought processes and to have the ability to alter an audience's real-life beliefs, attitudes and opinions (van Krieken et al., 2017). If an audience shares factors such as life experiences, behavioural habits, attitudes, or personality traits with a particular character, they have a greater chance to signal that they identify with the said character. The more similar and relatable a character is, the more an audience member will be likely to identify with them (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016). Furthermore, an evidenced determinant of creating identification was the perceived likability of a character. A character that was considered "good" was more likely to promote identification with an audience, and upon altering the likability of a character, the level of identification could be shifted (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016).

*Involvement:*

Involvement correlates closely with the key concepts of absorption and identification, however, while identification is said to be more associated with narrative characters, involvement relates to an audience's ability to form an emotional connection with a story through finding personal significance in the message or theme of a story. Narratives that address themes or issues that are personally meaningful to individuals are more likely to evoke a sense of involvement and mental engagement. The degree of narrative involvement can be influenced by the perceived relevance of the narrative to individuals' own experiences, values, or interests (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016; Louwarse & Kuiken, 2004). Furthermore, research has shown that the more a narrative was seen as realistic, the more involved a viewer would be (Louwarse & Kuiken, 2004). Additional factors that could increase audience involvement include genre and character preferences and audience interest in the subject matter. In sum, these factors work towards creating a level of mental investment that allows an audience to feel involved with the content of a narrative (Louwarse & Kuiken, 2004).

### *Flow:*

The concept of flow introduces another element related to NTT that describes how audiences engage with the usage of effective narrative. Flow refers to a state of deep immersion and effortless involvement in an activity, where individuals are fully absorbed in the present moment and experience a sense of intense focus and enjoyment, leading flow to often be likened to being "in the zone." Flow can therefore be understood as providing an audience with an ease by which a story can be followed without interruptions in understanding or attention (Nabi & Green, 2014). Flow involves the audience becoming engrossed in a story to the point of experiencing a seamless and enjoyable interaction with the narrative content. Flow is thus, much like absorption, associated with and characterized by sensations of concentration and detachment from surroundings, however, we understand flow to more closely correlate with a sense of understanding and following a narrative rather than simply having one's attention captured or absorbed by it (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Buselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Nabi & Green, 2014). Flow is characterized by and often accompanied by positive emotional reactions (Nabi & Green, 2014). Much like the other key components that characterize NTT, the concept of flow adds weight to the importance of an audience's emotional experience. Flow can enhance the immersive and enjoyable experience of engaging with a narrative, making it persuasive and impactful on individuals' attitudes and behaviours (Buselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Nabi & Green, 2014).

#### 2.3.4. Engagement as a Central Theme

'Engagement' with a narrative, we argue, emerges as a core central theme within NTT through its intersection with the four key concepts of absorption, identification, involvement, and flow. We argue that the presence of engagement within an audience can therefore be evaluated qualitatively by observing if the key components of NTT are present within the said audience when exposed to a narrative.

Engagement is central to absorption as it drives the audience's sustained focus and attention on the narrative, resulting in a deep cognitive and emotional connection with the story (Hamby et al., 2018; Kuijpers, 2021; Nabi & Green, 2014). Engagement is pivotal to identification as it explains the audience's emotional investment in the characters and their experiences, leading to a stronger connection with the narrative (Hamby et al., 2018; Nabi & Green, 2014; van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016). Engagement is central to involvement as it influences the audience's emotional connection to the narrative by making the story personally meaningful

and compelling (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016; Louwerson & Kuiken, 2004). Finally, engagement is also inherent to flow as it drives the audience's seamless and enjoyable interaction with the narrative content, making a story easier to follow from beginning to end, and leading to a sense of intense focus and enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Buselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Nabi & Green, 2014).

### 2.3.5. Summary of Theories

The narrative paradigm theory (NPT) suggests that stories serve as a foundation for human communication. Narrative transportation theory (NTT) highlights the central theme of engagement and how interaction with a narrative is characterized by absorption, identification, involvement, and flow. Together, these insights reveal how powerful storytelling is in conveying information, triggering emotional responses, and influencing audiences' behaviours. These theories serve as a foundation, along with the background literature, to analyse narrative engagement within the different storytelling styles put forth in our developed framework.

## 3. Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed description of how the methods of this study were carried out and how they align with the aims of this study.

### 3.1. Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative approach which aims to gain deep insights into the audience's implicit perceptions of narrative engagement. In alignment with our interpretivism perspective, two qualitative methods have been chosen to best approach the research objectives; they include video analysis and focus groups. Our study's perspective is informed by an interpretivism paradigm (Tracy, 2019). The realities and interpretations of the focus group participants' implicit perceptions represent a socially constructed ontology. Our study's perspective views reality as multifaceted and subjective to each individual. The goal is not to reveal hidden truths, but rather to understand the varied perspectives of participants. By using this standpoint, we acknowledge that reality is a social construct and relies on contextual, cultural, and individual perspectives. Epistemologically, this study adopts that knowledge is constructed through interactions and subjective interpretations. The focus groups allow participants to construct and share their opinions based on their knowledge contexts. This also implies that interpretations of focus groups' perceptions are subjective, co-created and reliant on our view of the world and cultural frameworks (Tracy, 2019).

A video analysis has been conducted to analyse and pre-select the videos to be shown to the focus groups. This method is particularly relevant as it provides a systematic examination of content from DMOs and UGC posts. By analysing different video styles, we were able to lay a foundation for understanding their impact on audience engagement (Baxter et al., 1985). Additionally, video analysis was chosen because we can focus on digital content and thus, explore the dynamics and nature of storytelling styles which is central to our research question. This method has been used since it allows for transparent coding and enables an easy replication for following studies. This method brings a higher flexibility, as the information available in videos is unstructured and the DMOs and UGC creators do not need to actively participate. The usage of this analysis allowed for the four styles to be researched without making the main topic about each video itself (Bryman, 2016).

Focus groups were chosen to provide a robust and comprehensive set of data that encompassed the audiences' conversations as the basis for our qualitative research. We argue that focus groups are a valid method to gain deeper insights into participants' understandings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Focus group research is often used in qualitative research to explore knowledge about a phenomenon (Redman-MacLaren et al., 2014). Thus, focus groups served as a useful method for extracting implicit indicators of narrative engagement by examining for the presence or lack of the key components of NTT. The focus groups provided us with participants who engaged in conversations and thus shared their subjective interpretations, which individual interviews or surveys would not give us. Focus groups enable a collaborative environment in which participants can expand on each other's ideas, giving a more in-depth understanding of and complexity of the gathered empirical material (Krueger, 2014).

Both methods are relevant to our research aim and questions. Video analysis allowed us to understand the characteristics of digital narrative, while focus groups allowed us to gain insights into the complexity of audiences' subjective interpretations. Together, both methods offer a comprehensive approach to investigate narrative engagement in alignment with our interpretivism perspective and answer the call for more qualitative research into the topic of understanding audience perceptions of destination branding on social media (Egger et al., 2022).

## 3.2. Video analysis

### 3.2.1. Video Sampling and Analysis

For the video analysis, primary data sources have been used since the Instagram pages of the DMOs and the tagged UGC posts are official and visible to everyone with internet access. To select one video for each of the four previously identified video styles ([table 1](#)), we visited the official website of Sweden's main DMO (VisitSweden - Find a local Partner for Tourism in Sweden, 2024) to explore all DMOs listed in Sweden. On this page, a link was provided to a PDF file that included the DMO websites for 22 major regions and cities in Sweden. These websites provided links to the DMOs' Instagram pages which we browsed through to begin filtering out a selection of videos that could be analysed further. Over a period of one week, video content from the 22 DMO Instagram pages was reviewed. The Instagram pages were narrowed down based on the perceived relevance of the video material they featured to potentially match our framework for storytelling style identification. 3 DMO Instagram pages were



selected as they contained a large quantity of narrative-based video content and UGC: Visit Sweden, Swedish Lapland, and Visit Stockholm. We reviewed all storytelling video content from these three Instagram pages, searching in the ‘reels’ and ‘tagged’ sections until 20 videos for each style were found, providing us with a narrowed-down selection. The ‘tagged’ section is where UGC was found that had been allowed onto a DMO’s Instagram page. All 20 videos were independently reviewed by us, and each of us provided the videos with a ranking from 1 to 20 within each style. This ranking was based on how well the videos fit the criteria of the framework established for the determination of the styles. After comparing rankings, the highest aggregate ranked videos for each style were chosen, resulting in one video for each of the four styles.

The video analysis started with the transcription of all four videos ([see Appendix A](#)). Two videos featured spoken Swedish but included subtitles in English. Transcriptions were done in English and for the two videos with spoken Swedish, the provided subtitles were used in the transcriptions. Microsoft Word was exclusively used to transcribe the video content. The video analysis was carried out to validate the videos to ensure they were proper representatives of each style. Moreover, the video analysis ensured that we had a proper understanding of the content and nature of these videos. The three coding dimensions of our developed framework worked as a filter to narrow down an identifiable video style. The first coding layer was used to determine if a video featured the four key elements ([table 2](#)) of a narrative. The second coding was used to determine if a video would be defined as ‘serious storytelling’ or ‘entertainment storytelling’ ([table 3](#)). The final coding was used to categorize the videos into either ‘DMO produced’ or ‘UGC produced’. To analyse the four selected videos the same framework has been used. For each video, we provided a detailed description of the four key elements of Storytelling ([Appendix A](#)), by the parameters defining the elements. Next, a detailed description was provided explaining how the parameters for serious or entertainment storytelling were met. Lastly, based on the provided information if the videos are UGC or DMO produced, the videos were sorted into their final four storytelling styles.

## 3.3. Focus Groups

### 3.3.1. Design

The design of the focus groups included that we acted as moderators with minimal involvement, limited to follow-up questions based on the direction the focus group conversation had taken (Bryman, 2016). At the beginning of each focus group, all participants were provided with a consent form and an information sheet. The consent form ensured that focus group participants were aware of the nature of their involvement in the study and how their personal data would be handled ([Appendix D](#)). The information sheet provided a general overview of the study, including the aims, methodology and ethical considerations relating to the study ([Appendix C](#)). The conversations have been recorded with a recording device, and all GDPR requirements according to Lund University have been fulfilled.

We began by explaining the study, playing the videos, and showing the questions, but limited our involvement to the role of observers so that the participants' conversations could be studied. An exception was to provide follow-up questions based on the conversation. Each group watched one out of the four pre-selected videos, ensuring enough time to answer all the questions and foster an in-depth conversation about the selected video. The questions (see 3.3.3.) were revealed after at least one time watching the video to avoid premeditation of answers. We reminded the focus group that they could rewatch the video together if they wished.

A fifth focus group was also gathered featuring one member of each of the past four groups. This fifth focus group was shown all four videos and was given a different set of questions (see discussion guide) from the previous four groups. These questions were aimed to allow for the fifth group to be used to conduct a comparative analysis, comparing the implicit indicators of narrative engagement across different video styles and to identify common patterns or themes in engagement indicators across different videos. Overall, the fifth group functioned as an expert group and allowed for the validation of findings from individual focus groups and ensured the robustness of the data analysis.

### 3.3.2. Sample Size and Group

For this work, the aim was to have five focus groups, each with five participants. The study by Cortini et al. (2019) argues that a mini-group, comprised of four to seven participants allows

for an increased potential in the expressions of opinions and thoughts by participants. As our study focused on the constructed meaning of the participants, these mini-groups allowed us to best ensure that all participants had sufficient opportunity to express themselves.

The recruitment strategy for the first four groups relied on our personal networks within Lund University. Various groups of students in these networks were solicited for participation. After participants confirmed their interest in participating, four groups were established with the intent to create groups with pre-existing social connections. Since pre-existing group dynamics can be an advantage (Bryman, 2016) this strategy was chosen to promote an open and fluid discussion. All groups were held in-person and for every group, a classroom at Campus Helsingborg was booked in which only we and the focus group participants were present.

### 3.3.3. Discussion Guide

A “middle-of-the-road” approach to developing questions was used (Bryman, 2016, p. 511). Questions neither too narrow nor too broad in scope allowed for flexibility in the questioning. All questions were open-ended to give the participants the freedom to expand on answers. These questions aimed to facilitate meaningful and open discussion and reveal implicit indicators of narrative engagement by addressing the key components of Narrative Transportation Theory (NTT). The following questions were chosen out of a list of potential questions ([Appendix B](#)):

- What are your thoughts on this video, and did you enjoy it? (General)
- Does this video capture your attention or make you feel in a certain way? (Absorption)
- What are your thoughts on the characters, is there anything interesting about them? (Identification)
- What is the message of the video if there is one? (Involvement)
- Was it easy for you to follow and understand what was happening in the video? (Flow)

The first question aims to start with small talk within the framework of our topic and to warm up the participants since an icebreaker can benefit the group conversation and eliminate barriers to connecting with each other (Chlup & Collins, 2010). The next four questions each represent one of the identified four key components of NTT. The participants discussed the questions for approximately 60 minutes, and time was kept by us. During these discussions, we

took notes and listened actively. After each focus group, once participants had left, we discussed our perspectives on the conversations (Morrison-Beedy et al., 2001).

### 3.3.4. Focus Group Analysis

Throughout the reviewing and transcribing of the focus groups, we became familiarized with the collected empirical data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). 12 initial codes were identified out of the empirical data that represented crucial features across the data set. The codes emerged through a data-driven approach and were initially collected through brainstorming on a whiteboard. While searching for common themes among these 12 codes, four main themes were developed and named the following: Audience Background, Clarity and Understanding, Digital Trash, and Relatability. In this process, we reviewed the themes, some codes were merged, and the result was 10 subthemes reflected in our analysis section (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the first theme of Audience Background was broken down into two subthemes that related to the significance of characters and misunderstandings between focus groups and narratives. Understanding the audience's backgrounds proved to be important as it became one important step to understanding the factors impacting narrative engagement. The rest of the main themes were similarly broken down into several subthemes that provided a more detailed approach to identifying factors affecting narrative engagement.

Analysis was carried out on each subtheme using the key components of NTT as the main source of information to evaluate the presence of influences on narrative engagement. Furthermore, the storytelling styles were taken into consideration to gain a holistic perspective of how these styles impact narrative engagement. Overall, we focused on the meaning behind the conversation, since coding only words can be decontextualizing and can construct a loss of context and meaning (St Pierre & Jackson, 2014). The analysis was deductive, and a collectively constructed meaning of each group was analysed using the paradigm of interpretivism (Tracy, 2019).

## 3.4. Ethical Considerations

No creators of, or actors within, the analysed videos were informed about the study and the significance of their contribution. Although we used a consent waiver approach, we acknowledge and value the privacy of the content creators (DMO and UGC) (Ravn et al., 2019). We anonymized all personal information and changed the video titles to be generic. Names in

the videos have been anonymized and made gender-neutral, however, the focus groups watched the videos un-anonymized, as altering the videos could compromise the aims of the study. To prevent backtracking, we did not reveal the video's origins to the audience and cut the videos into a frame so that no information was visible other than the video itself. We anonymized the names and places in all our transcripts and the analysis section so that the readers of this paper are not shown any protected personal information.

### 3.5. Limitations and Summary

We acknowledge that video selection in this study was subjective to a certain degree. Furthermore, a social desirability bias could arise in the focus groups, which suggests that individuals tend to behave in a manner that they believe others will view favourably and tend to describe themselves in favourable terms (Van Laer et al., 2019). Focus groups were comprised fully of students. However, students in our study represented a diverse range of backgrounds and therefore, it can be argued that it brought heterogeneous opinions and cultural diversity which are important to construct meaningful, creative conversations (Isar, 2006).

In summary, two qualitative methods were used. Video analysis was used to provide a detailed analysis of the videos and to ensure their appropriate categorization into the four storytelling styles. The focus groups aimed to provide a method that allowed us to analyse implicit factors influencing narrative engagement. The design of the focus groups allowed participants to openly interact and discuss the provided questions. The discussion guide was designed using concepts present in NTT. Regarding ethical considerations, a consent procedure and the anonymization of data have been included. This paper does not intend to give a universal answer but to help in the understanding of the identification process of narrative engagement elements by providing a systematic and clear framework. This study is about Swedish DMOs with Swedish destinations, thus the study cannot be generalized but we argue that this study can be transferable to similar contexts (Polit & Beck, 2010). To enable transferability, it is important to present sufficient information about the context of this study. Therefore, all provided steps ensure that our study is replicable, and the detailed description of this methodology chapter enhances the credibility and validity of the overall study (Bryman, 2016).

## 4. Video Analysis

This chapter (4.) provides a comprehensive summary of the analysis of the videos which represent the four styles, found in [Appendix A](#). The following chapter (5.) will provide the analysis of the focus group conversations.

### 4.1. Summary of Video Analysis

Each video represents one of the four styles (table 1), and the complete analysis can be found in [Appendix A](#). In the ‘Natural Disaster’ (video 3) a protagonist is introduced who through lived trauma, decides later to continue working in the field of natural disaster forecasting to which the protagonist expresses passion. This video was DMO-produced and featured serious storytelling elements, particularly knowledge creation and a serious personal pursuit. The video ‘A Day in a Major City as a Tourist’ (video 4) is about a tourist explaining what can be done in a major city in Sweden in one day. The video is recorded from the perspective of the tourist and represents the UGC and entertainment storytelling style since the video shows no deeper reflections and is light-hearted. Video 1, called ‘Fishing Video’ is a humorous short story, which was DMO produced with entertaining storytelling. The video has an unexpected twist and shows a light-hearted and humorous narrative. The video is about a protagonist who caught a big fish at the beginning of the summer and jokes about not knowing what to do with the rest of the summer. The last video ‘Moving Abroad’ was UGC with serious storytelling elements as it represents factual knowledge about the experience of living abroad and offers a psychological challenge with a deeper reflection of belonging and cultural adaptation. The video is about the protagonist’s life which changed upon moving abroad, and highlights struggles with questions of identity and a sense of belonging to a new environment.

The videos that have been analysed display either serious or entertaining storytelling characteristics and are created by either Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) or User-Generated Content (UGC). While a single, clear style can be identified, not all criteria are met to distinguish between the serious and entertaining styles. The differentiation between the two can be seen as more of a scale with strong tendencies, rather than videos exclusively using all characteristics of one style.

## 5. Focus Group Analysis

The following list serves to remind the reader about the categorization of the different videos and their storytelling styles.

*Video #1 – DMO produced, entertainment storytelling.*

*Video #2 – UGC produced, serious storytelling.*

*Video #3 – DMO produced, serious storytelling.*

*Video #4 – UGC produced, entertainment storytelling.*

Group numbers correspond to their respective video numbers, for example, group 1 watched video #1 and group 2 watched video #2 and so on, except for group 5 which was shown all four videos.

### 5.1. Audience Background

#### 5.1.1. Significance of Characters

Audience members' personal backgrounds appeared to play an important role in establishing a degree of identification with the characters in the videos shown (Nabi & Green, 2014; van Krieken et al., 2017; Hocken et al., 2016). An example of this was illustrated by the conversation in focus group 1, where the temperament and hobby of the character came into question. Discussion among the members of this group highlighted the difficulty that was experienced in relating to the character due to mismatches in personal beliefs and interests.

*I don't know, maybe because fishing is not my thing. – Participant from Group 1*

The group came to a consensus that the character in video #1 appeared sad and upset.

*It looked like he was about to cry. Like literally about to cry. - Participant from Group 1*

Another quote demonstrates how one participant of the same group describes that:

*Oh, traveling is also for sad people. Maybe I could go to this region. - Participant from Group 1*

Ultimately the same participant argues that this is not their country's experience, drawing on misalignments with their own personal background. In this conversation, it becomes evident that an identification with this character is not strong. The group overall did not understand why the protagonist appeared sad after having caught a big fish. One participant expressed anger and annoyance at the character when the character stated that the catch of the fish was not deserved, a sentiment that they would not expect to have themselves. We can observe that no positive emotional engagement occurred, and the group appeared to agree that nobody could imagine themselves doing the same things as the character. The protagonist appeared very alienating to the group.

*I feel like it's just a general worldview that you have to put in so much effort, you know if you don't put in the effort, you can't enjoy the thing. And that specific thing really annoys me, personally. - Participant from Group 1*

This strong opinion describes how one participant felt annoyed by the character's expressed view, a sentiment echoed by the rest of the group. Looking back at the analysis of this video, it can be argued that the protagonist of this video was sarcastic, but the group appeared to have difficulty in catching the irony and sarcasm of the situation. This example demonstrates a lack of identification with the character. Furthermore, the group appeared to share little with the character in so far as attitudes, beliefs and interests went (van Krieken et al., 2017). In group 3, however, we see a different outcome:

*I felt a bit of goosebumps in the very beginning because it's a personal story and I feel it by the way the protagonist talks. The protagonist describes the reason why they started this, which is great. - Participant from Group 3*

This quote appears to reveal a level of character identification and it can also be argued that narrative absorption is happening, explaining the participant's deep immersion into the narrative by describing having goosebumps (Kuijpers, 2021). In alignment with, Nabi & Green (2014) and Watzl (2011) it shows how the participant was captive into the narrative with an emotional connection. In the same group, another participant connected the character with their perception of Swedish culture.



*It was a bit monotonous [...] you can feel the culture of Swedish people. -  
Participant from Group 3*

Furthermore, several participants in this group talked about being the wrong target audience as exemplified by this quote:

*But maybe I'm just the wrong target audience. Because I don't want to go  
to this mountain area. – Participant from Group 1*

Later in the conversation, the same participant stated that the protagonist did not share anything relatable, but also acknowledged that the participant is not a risk-seeking person like the character in the story. Through these quotes a discussion in group 3 arose, as not all participants made the same conclusion, showing that identification varied from person to person in the group. One participant, who strongly identified with the character also stated:

*She firmly stated this is what I thought would be my purpose. This is how I  
felt. And maybe in this sense, I felt like a bit jealous of you, that you found  
yours. - Participant from Group 3*

This statement describes one participant who felt a very high level of identification with the character even expressing jealousy about the protagonist finding their passion. The same person was invited to the fifth group, in which all videos were shown, where identification was once again observed for this participant and other group participants:

*I loved it the most [the video]. And I also personally am attached to the  
topic of hiking, I would love to visit the mountain. – Participant from  
Group 5*

While this quote can be seen to indicate identification it also can be seen as adding to the narrative involvement of the participant (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016; Louwse & Kuiken, 2004). This participant in particular shows a personal connection to the theme of hiking, a central theme of this particular narrative.

Ultimately the focus group discussions offered a variety of opinions on the character identification in the narratives of both DMO-produced videos. In video #1 there was a total lack of identification with the character as the participants did not share any similarity with the protagonist. They did not share the same hobby nor the same view of the world. One participant even felt annoyed by the character and this sentiment appeared to be shared amongst the group in

further conversation, making the identification unanimously difficult. However, in group 3 some participants strongly identified with the protagonist while others did not. In group 5 the same participant who showed a strong identification with the character in group 3 (video #3) demonstrated their attachment to the topic of hiking. This not only shows identification with the character but goes on and demonstrate how identification can result from involvement and absorption into the narrative as well. Discussion was often oriented towards participants' personal interests and connections to the themes of the videos. Moreover, emotional engagement and discussion surrounding finding one's passion, which exemplifies characteristics of serious storytelling including self-empowerment and serious pursuits, appeared to complement some participants' identification and absorption (Lugmayr et al., 2016; Hamby et al., 2018; van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016).

### 5.1.2. Misunderstandings

Personal and cultural backgrounds, and the misunderstandings, misinterpretations and expectations resulting from them, appeared to play a role in affecting audience engagement during the focus groups. As Green (2008) expresses, individuals can bring their perspectives and interpretations into account when encountering a story. This appeared to be a factor within group 1's discussion about and interpretation of the message of video #1 as we can see here:

*I'm originally from a different country and this kind of advertisement is definitely not for us. Maybe it's a cultural difference as well because I literally didn't understand anything – Participant from Group 1*

This sentiment was also echoed in the apparent confusion discussed by Group 5 upon viewing the same video as Group 1.

*It's just a hobby. You know, people just go into the woods to the lakes, and they catch a fish and let it – Participant from Group 5*

*This doesn't happen in my country... everyone in my country, I bet they will never let the fish go. No one... they worked for this – Participant from Group 5*

Here we see two examples of personal expectations potentially disrupting the flow and understanding of the video's narrative and hindering the potential for involvement with the story's overall message. The concept of fishing as more of a leisurely activity, as mentioned in Group

5 by one participant appears to make the content of the video confusing for another participant. Overall, this apparent mismatch of the narrative to audience members' own experiences could be responsible for decreasing engagement with the story through diminished personal involvement (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016; Louwerse & Kuiken, 2004).

We can also see positive engagement resulting from cultural expectations being satisfied within the audience. In two cases, audience members became aware that they were watching videos featuring Swedish destinations and Swedish characters. A word that exemplifies Swedish culture, namely 'lagom,' subsequently became a point of discussion for both group 1 and group 3.

*... I took note of the word lagom, because I was like, of course, a Swedish ad would put lagom in there – Participant from Group 1*

And in group 3 this discussion arose:

*Well, it's all Swedish. I think it's Swedish. It's all Swedish by nature -*

*Lagom -*

*Lagom. Exactly! Yeah – Participants from Group 3*

In this case, we can infer that hearing the word 'lagom' as was the case in Group 1, or having associations come to mind that relate to the audience's expectation of Swedish style advertising as 'lagom,' as occurred in Group 3, may have attributed to some level of absorption for the audiences through the capturing of attention or formation of mental imagery relating to this word. This formation of mental imagery, as Kuijpers (2021) suggests, can be indicative of an increased level of absorption for the audiences, thereby increasing narrative engagement.

Finally, we can also infer that the interpretations that arise from familiarity with the Swedish culture could play a role in mediating the expectations of what to expect from an advertisement. As we see in this line of conversation between two participants in group 3:

*For me personally speaking, it was really hard to get like the point of this video... no clue because I guess it's kind of a mixture of everything and, yeah, everyone interprets like in their own way – Participant from Group 3*

*But that's also, this just reminds me of different Swedish advertisements... Swedes are really weird with their [advertisements] – Participant from Group 3*

Here we may interpret the advertising style as being more foreign to one participant than to another. It is possible that the familiarity with a common aspect of the advertising of a culture, or lack thereof, could be responsible for differing levels in a disruption of flow and understanding. While one participant appeared to be very confused about what message video #3 was attempting to deliver to the audience, another participant appeared to be more expecting of this type of media and this would suggest that it is possible that what disrupts the flow of one participant does not do so for another based on personal background. This ties back to the idea that individuals can bring their perspectives and interpretations into account when encountering a story (Green, 2008).

## 5.2. Clarity and Understanding

### 5.2.1. Language Barrier

It became clear to us upon analysis of the conversation transcripts that language barriers presented themselves as an obstacle to clarity and understanding amongst some of the focus groups, ultimately creating interruptions in flow and overall narrative engagement. Video #1 and #3 had characters who spoke in Swedish with subtitles provided in English. Here we can see a handful of examples of how audiences' narrative engagement was intruded upon and diminished by this obstacle. Referring to their overall understanding and ability to follow Video #3, one of the participants describes this difficulty to which other participants in the group agree:

*Was it easy to follow and understand what's happening? What's happening, yes, but to follow, not that easy because I'm not speaking Swedish... - Participant from Group 3*

Adding to this observation, we could see a conversation amongst focus group 5, which viewed all four videos, referring to the difficulties in understanding that arose because of needing to utilize subtitles. One of the participants with an understanding of the original audio language also mentions the shortcomings of the subtitles in adequately translating the original Swedish.

*I think it's a language barrier as well. Like if I don't know the language. I'm more focused on the subtitles. And if I know the language, then I would*

*understand the video because I'm looking at the video or the content. - Participant from Group 5*

Upon agreement from some of the group, a participant goes on to acknowledge that while some people might have an easier time managing subtitles, for them there would be a clear difference in understanding the context of the video if it had been in English. Another participant then goes on to add:

*[...] the subtitles are usually paraphrased to some extent [...] it doesn't quite deliver the entire hundred per cent message for somebody who doesn't speak Swedish. – Participant from Group 5*

While the existence of a foreign language presented itself as an obstacle to engagement, even some of the focus group participants who understood Swedish found the videos difficult to follow due to the strong dialects of the characters speaking in both DMO-produced videos. Referring to one of the Swedish-speaking focus group members' abilities to understand the contents of the video, a participant states the following regarding video #1:

*...it's not about language, right? You say, as well, you didn't understand it very well? -*

*Yeah... he had a dialect... like he had an accent – Conversation from Group 1*

Similarly, in video #3, a participant who understands Swedish states:

*It's a very interesting accent and I don't feel like her pronunciation was so clear in some words, so I was sometimes looking down in the subtitles just to check, did I get what she was saying? – Participant from Group 3*

The frustration expressed by several focus group participants from a variety of conversations can perhaps best be summed up by the conversation that occurred in group 3 which expressed dismay about the difficulty to understand and follow the video due to the presence of a clear language barrier. As was stated:

*Why would you pick as a speaker or as your messenger for the message, a person that might be difficult to understand? – Participant from Group 3*

The presence of a language barrier arising from a language foreign to much of the audience or a dialect unfamiliar to even native speakers of the said foreign language appears to represent an example of interrupted narrative engagement due to a decrease or elimination in the flow experiences by the audiences. Deep immersion, effortless involvement and overall enjoyability, all characteristics of flow (Nabi & Green, 2014) appeared to be hampered by the language barriers present in videos #1 and #3.

### 5.2.2. Audio-Visual (Mis)alignment

One theme that occurred in several focus group discussions related to a discrepancy between the audio and the visual of a video. The first group describes how the music, in combination with the character's demeanour and the video's colour palette, had a sad impact on the group. As one participant states:

*I feel like the character is just so gloomy. And like, dude, enjoy your life.  
...You got fish – yay! - Participant from Group 1*

While discussing the message with the group, the same participant further elaborated that the message might be about how sad people can travel. We can view this misinterpretation of the story's message to be linked to a decreased potential for involvement with the narrative. Later in the group discussion, some minds changed, and the participants understood that the character has a rather positive vibe since he caught a big fish, but one participant explained further:

*If they're selling emotions, of course, you can sell sadness. But shouldn't there be something more? Shouldn't the music maybe make us feel a bit happier at the end? - Participant from Group 1*

This shows that while ultimately the message was better understood, the background music appeared to create some level of confusion and misinterpretation for the group. While the first message was understood as being about 'sad people can travel to the destination', later in the conversation it was more in alignment with the video analysis that the destination has many activities to offer and that the character now has time for more activities. In this case, in video #1, the group's sensation of narrative flow appeared highly disrupted, and the lack of connection between audio and the visual material seemed at least in part responsible for diminishing an effortless focus and enjoyment in the narrative (Nabi & Green, 2014).

For video #2 some participants conversed about the disconnect between the audio voiceover and the pictures in the video. Some audience members suggested that the audio's message did not match properly with the visuals they were being shown.

*I was only focusing on what the person was saying in the beginning, and I couldn't relate what the person was saying to the pictures. It was hard to relate to them. The person is talking about feeling at home and the known and unknown and the pictures showing fun times in good times in this city. - Participant from Group 2*

*[...] But with the images, it doesn't make any sense to me. - Participant from Group 2*

The group discussed further that the other participants focused on the video's visual material first, and in further replays of the video they focused on what the person said, which in this case was also described as cliché. Further potential disruptions in absorption can be seen in these quotes as the audience expresses difficulties concentrating fully on the narrative, resulting in a diminished viewing experience and engagement (Kuijpers, 2021). Furthermore, the flow is disrupted since the audio/visual dealignment appeared to create an unsmooth and interrupted engagement (Nabi & Green, 2014). This discussion is highlighted by one participant from the same group that states:

*I could not remember most of the shots. I just could remember a lady waving. That was the only thing that I remembered. But the audio caught my first attention. - Participant from Group 2*

By not remembering the visual material of the video, the participant illustrates how the audio seemed to catch their attention first. Furthermore, the participant states that:

*If we remove the audio and put another audio about enjoying the city, it will still work. - Participant from Group 2*

This quote directs the focus to that, for this group, the video's visuals seemed very happy, but the audio was of a person talking about leaving their home, underpinned by a rather melancholic musical orchestra. The group even elaborated that it might work better with audio that is upbeat or happier. However, participants described that their attention was first directed to the audio.

The expert group (5) also discussed that video #2's audio was not authentic, and it was not the character's real voice. However, a participant argued:

*[...] Because I still felt like I get to know them more than the character from video #4 who was speaking. - Participant from Group 5*

Following this quote, the group agreed with the participant. Even though the participants acknowledged that the audio was not the real voice of the character, thus not authentic, it still appeared to create a level of identification with the character and an increased level of involvement for video #2. The relatability of video #2 for participants, it can be argued, was fostered by an emotional connection that seemed to originate from sharing the same worldview and life story of the character (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016; Louwse & Kuiken, 2004). Participants appeared to be involved with this narrative by being able to relate to the overall message, despite the lack of original voiceover audio.

Regarding video #3, the group argued that the message of the story was inspirational and that the main character found a passion for the job. However, some participants drew attention to the misalignment between the audio and video.

*And the music as well that's added. It feels like a very sad documentary. - Participant from Group 3*

*I would agree with the music part, I think it was adding this tragic feeling that you're isolated. [...] If they change some music to a more upbeat it will change. - Participant from Group 3*

We can see that the group agreed that changing the music would be beneficial as the music was too tragic for the actual message of the video. Moreover, the group concluded that some inspirational music would fit better. This group consensus was expressed by the following statement:

*There was a text about natural disasters, and you can see this information about natural disasters on their website. - Participant from Group 3*

The quote summarizes the group's confusion about the meaning of video #3. While the protagonist's story is about overcoming trauma and finding a passionate job, the group thinks it should be complemented with some upbeat music as currently, it has more of a tragic



association. The focus group could not identify if this narrative aimed for a personal or informative touch. A quote expressed group 5's confusion about the audio and the video material as follows:

*It was a total mismatch, or at least for us to understand. - Participant from Group 5*

Video #3 was matched to a DMO-produced serious storytelling style. It could be argued that there is some confusion coming from the audio and video perspectives, as it disrupts the involvement of the focus group. The music evokes a personal and emotional response, yet the visuals describe a more informational text, resulting in a sense of confusion among the audience (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016; Louwarse & Kuiken, 2004). One participant of group 5 summarized this confusion as:

*You're just so used to information being at the end. It's like with a movie when the information about who made it comes at the end. - Participant from Group 5*

The quote relates to the conversation of video #3. Moreover, group 5 argued that the video should have stopped at this point and should not continue with the narrator's background information. Ultimately group 5 agreed that the audio would be more important in having a greater reach while the visual material should match the audio and should be constructed to engage and keep the audience watching. Moreover, group 5 summarizes that the audio is more important for them to understand the message of this video. One participant expressed this group opinion as follows about video #1:

*The audio compliments it [the video] with the mood of the setting of the video. So, you can't understand, is it a joke or not? - Participant from Group 5*

The participants argue that they would have perhaps understood the video better if there was no music at all. In contrast to this, the group argues that for video #2, the audio was highly important to understanding the mood and the message. Lastly, one participant describes implicitly how they were absorbed by an audio/visual that induced mental imagery, stating:

*They even have the windswept, like snow sound. So, you can kind of create the visual in your mind, even if you don't see it. - Participant from Group 5*

This quote shows a direct connection to the participant's ability to create visual and mental imagery, thus suggesting a level of absorption through the audio and sound effects (Kuijpers, 2021).

This subchapter gives an insight into the impact of the discrepancies between audio and visual elements on viewers' perceptions and as a result, the impact that can result in indicators of narrative engagement. The first video confused the participants with the melancholic music, it appeared to disrupt the process of absorption and flow (Hamby et al., 2018; Nabi & Green, 2014). The audio video #3 led to confusion about the intended tone and message of this video. Video #2 showed that even a non-authentic audio voice can have a great impact on the emotional connection of an audience and their involvement (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016; Louwense & Kuiken, 2004). Resulting of these (mis)matches between audio and visual elements, a certain level of disruption or increase in the process of absorption, identification, involvement, and flow can be observed. This highlights the potential importance of a matching audio-visual to communicate messages effectively and to provide seamless engagement for an audience.

## 5.3. Digital Trash

### 5.3.1. Quantity over Quality

*Very plain. It's like digital trash. They shouldn't do this. - Participant from Group 4*

The idea of 'digital trash' comes from a quote by a participant in focus group 4, in which an overall disdain and contempt for video #4 was expressed. We interpret this quote as coining a good descriptor for how a video may lack engaging qualities on several levels. On the contrary, from certain focus group discussions, we can also gain insight into what components of engagement can prevent a video from being applied to the 'digital trash' label. One recurring theme within the idea of digital trash relates to the perception of an overabundance of poor-quality content that exists on social media exemplified by this quote:

*I think this is a quantity over quality perspective – Participant from Group 4*

Several members of focus group 4 go on to express their suspicions that video #4 was created by an amateur and that it did not meet their various expectations of good quality marketing of a city. One participant goes on to add their ambivalence to the video and another participant agrees and adds that video #4 may have detracted from their image of the destination that was being displayed, echoing the idea that UGC can at times act as a co-destroyer of value (Lund et al., 2019) in this case by hindering absorption and emotional connection to the video content.

*To me, it's like a nothing. It didn't add, it didn't subtract. It just, it's just out there. –*

*Yeah, if anything kind of subtracted a little bit [...] - Conversation from Group 4*

Adding to the 'quantity over quality' idea, we can see similar criticisms of video #2, which like video #4 falls under the UGC style, echoing the concept that an overuse of a video characteristic is viewed negatively. Conversations revolving around this issue occurred within both Group 2 and Group 5.

*It's a trend. This audio... she's not saying it. It's an audio there, you can just put you [video] clip, so not authentic – Participant from Group 2*

*So, when the numbers of audio use go up, also the trash goes up? –*

*Yeah, yeah, exactly – Conversation from Group 5*

Here we can interpret the perception of discussion participants regarding the over-usage of an audio voice-over as being detrimental to giving the feel of authenticity and a personal connection to the character of the video's story. This appears to suggest that the 'quantity' of this audio sacrifices the 'quality' of potential identification with a character. Additionally, we may interpret this as an interruption in flow, as this audio interrupts the seamless enjoyment of the story for this participant (Nabi & Green, 2014).

Looking at conversations from group #5, we gain insight into what a video can contain that would avoid the 'digital trash' label:

*You know what are the most unique videos on Instagram? Cats... and every time they are adorable –*

*Yeah, I agree... no trash risk there at all –*

*Absolutely, yeah. Every video you watch with cats or dogs... you kind of feel like, it's satisfying. It's soothing your soul. I cannot even consider it as trash. Never – Conversation from Group 5*

After sarcastically mentioning something that is often encountered on social media as 'unique', namely cat videos, the two participants come to an agreement that despite their ubiquity, videos that feature something which captures their attention and makes them feel good would never be considered trash. This suggests that too much 'quantity' can be made up for by 'quality' provided by the content of a video including something that an audience finds interesting. This suggests that absorption and involvement, represented by attention capture and personal connection or preference respectively, (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016; Louwse & Kuiken, 2004; Kuijpers, 2021) can potentially eliminate the 'digital trash' label. This same line of thinking was also echoed earlier in the conversation, to which a consensus was formed amongst group 5 participants:

*If someone was into fishing or trekking... maybe they will enjoy the video...*

*I would agree that the relevance is important... you would skip it if it's something not related to your field of interest. – Conversation from Group 5*

### 5.3.2. "The Overcooked Chicken" – Cliché

Throughout the focus groups, one recurring topic that arose in the discussion was the idea that certain videos were 'cliché.' This was perhaps best exemplified by one participant describing a video's character as 'overcooked chicken.' Here, group 4 questions the character's passion and ability to engage an audience in video #4. As one participant describes in the conversation:

*I had the feeling that the character was reading a paper. It's not a feeling you have when you watch those videos. - Participant from Group 4*

The group describes how this video style is often displayed on social media platforms and describes that usually, a narrator would talk more naturally and in full sentences. In this video, however, the group felt as if the narrator tended to describe things shortly and the group thought that the video could have been produced more engagingly. Another participant describes the video as:

*Probably the most sterile character. [...] The overcooked chicken of people. No salt, no pepper. - Participant from Group 4*

It can be argued that there was no identification happening for this group. Instead of similarities with the character, it seemed that no one in the group could imagine themselves in the character's role, as the protagonist was described as sterile and boring. Thus, the ability to create an emotional connection was lacking, as well as characteristics of absorption or involvement (Hamby et al., 2018; Louwense & Kuiken, 2004). Regarding the flow, the group agreed that video #4 was in a sense effortless to follow since it was not difficult to understand because of its plainness and oversimplicity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Buselle & Bilandzic, 2009; (Nabi & Green, 2014).

Group 2 also described video #2 as very stereotypical and cliché:

*For me, it's very cliché. I didn't really like the real soul. - Participant from Group 2*

Although in video #2 the focus group acknowledged that an emotional speech was used, they also made sense of the audio being very overused. This led to the same participant further evaluating that:

*It's a trend nowadays. I feel like, that's why I hate these videos, they are so cliché. Everyone, like, now travelling has this trend. - Participant from Group 2*

Overall, the group acknowledged that the audio is a trend on the social media platform, and some participants were already familiar with the audio voiceover which is used in many other videos. Moreover, one participant explained how the character was not giving the speech, rather that it was trending audio, making it cliché and inauthentic. This could suggest a decrease in potential identification with the character, as the true voice of the character narrating is hidden. The group understood that this audio was copied onto this video, however, in contrast to the rest of their group, one participant was not aware of this trend and described the following:

*So, for me, it was authentic, because I have no idea. I have never heard this. - Participant from Group 2*

Several times, the same participant described their relatability with the video because the video featured thoughts and reflections that the participant appeared to be intrigued by, describing them as precious moments.

*There were special moments when you could tell that these are the moments you feel like, right now I'm the most present. - Participant from Group 2*

From this conversation, we can observe that a lack of familiarity with content otherwise regarded as cliché could help certain audience members experience engagement with the content while a majority of audience members are turned off by the perceived overuse and repetitiveness. Here, one participant mentioned this, referring to the group member who was unfamiliar with the commonly used audio:

*They're new to this kind of social media. They might be attracted to see it for the first time. - Participant from Group 2*

Observing this, it can be understood that the rest of group 2 had been exposed to this type of content several times in the past and described losing engagement with the content once realizing it was cliché. This suggests that engagement could stagnate and decrease over time, especially after re-watching or hearing a type of video over a longer period. While the video created a more vivid stimulation for one participant, the others appeared to lose their attention towards it.

### 5.3.3.Wasted Time

One recurring constraint to the potential narrative engagement of several of the videos shown to focus groups that fall under the theme of 'digital trash' was the idea that videos could be interpreted as a waste of the viewer's time. This constraint could particularly be seen when focus group participants lacked overall interest in the subject matter, felt an absence of emotional connection, or found videos to be overall undesirable and lacking in the ability to capture attention. This appeared to be particularly applicable to the video representing the style of UGC/Entertainment, video #4. As the conversation in group 5 expressed about this video:

*It's like I just wasted my time watching this, like I could have seen something better –*

*I just wasted my time. He didn't show me any new places at all – Conversation from Group 5*

These participants appear to express a need for more stimulation and connection from video #4, which we can interpret as a lack of absorption and involvement as there is a lack of attention-

grabbing content and personal relatability. We get insight into how video #4 is missing these qualities when we look at more conversation from group 5, where participants compared their experiences of viewing video #2 and video #4:

*You get kind of like that message, like the nostalgia, like the personal touch to it –*

*I wouldn't think after watching this, oh, I wasted my time, because it got me feeling, it got me thinking I learned something about the person – Conversation from Group 5*

Here we can observe that the same two participants who felt video #4 wasted their time did not share the same feelings about video #2. We can infer that video #2 was better able to engage these two participants by evoking feelings, for example, nostalgia in the case of one participant. This could indicate involvement resulting from a personal connection to the message of the story (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016; Louwerse & Kuiken, 2004). The implications of feeling as if though there was a 'personal touch' and that something was learned about the character also suggests that engagement through identification could be responsible for avoiding the label of being a time-wasting video, as we can infer that the participants may have found the character relatable (Nabi & Green, 2014).

Expanding upon the idea of time wasting, we also observed that some participants lacked the desire to take future action based on having viewed video #4, suggesting a lack of engagement and transportation into the narrative. As Visconti (2015) has suggested, effective narrative engagement can have long-lasting implications for the intentions and behaviours of an audience. Not only was the video cited as a waste of time, but some focus group discussions expressed a lack of intention to use any future time in relation to this video. Here we can see this sentiment echoed in parts of the conversation of Group 4:

*I don't think this video gives you any engagement... you have anything to comment on and you don't have anything to share –*

*Nobody would go to the city for this video –*

*If I had decided I want to go to the city someday, this might detract a bit, but if I hadn't already decided... if this [video] just popped up, it would do nothing – Conversation from Group 4*

One participant expressed a lack of future utility when it comes to video #4, suggesting that they would not like to engage themselves with spending time commenting on or sharing the video. Similarly, two participants appear discouraged towards travelling to the destination that the video attempts to promote. Here we can infer that an overall lack of engagement with the video may be responsible for these attitudes.

Finally, we also observed an example of the feeling of time wasting within group 5, commenting on their experience of viewing video #1, a quote exemplifies this group's thoughts:

*I waste my thought-provoking energy with finding out what this video is about instead of thinking about myself and what I make out of it – Participant from Group 5*

This group, we can infer, felt as if time and energy were lost in an attempt to make sense of video #1. The group expressed that they found the video hard to follow and understand and ultimately appeared to be distracted away from the possibility of making a personal connection to the message or character of the video as a result. Here we can suggest that the interruption in flow that the confusion created eliminated any possibility for proper involvement and/or identification.

## 5.4. Relatability

### 5.4.1. Deeper Emotions

The role that emotional connections, or lack thereof, played in revealing the engaging qualities of the four videos was evident. These connections ranged from deep and personal to fully absent. The personal emotional connections were perhaps made most clear in group 2, where conversation largely revolved around a consensus that the group could relate to the message that video #2 was expressing about defining what 'home' really means to someone. This theme within video #2 led it to be assessed as a 'serious' story, as it included elements of personal reflection (Lugmayr et al., 2016). As we see from this excerpt from the conversation:

*I can really relate myself with this contrast that you are like feeling at home and comfortable but at the same time you are a stranger, and you know that this place is never going to become your home, like your true home –*

*...yes, absolutely. We can relate, because I believe for a person like me...it has become really hard to define what home is. –*



*Yeah, everyone's perspective of home is different. –*

*I feel like because I have lived in many different countries... in some countries, I feel more at home than in others. – Conversation from Group 2*

Here we can infer that a deep personal connection to the story's message in video #2 allowed for this group of participants to be engaged through involvement (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016; Louwerse & Kuiken, 2004). Although each participant seemed to have differing perspectives of what home meant for them, they came to a consensus around the video's message. This deeply personal definition, which had participants engage emotionally with the content, supports the possibility that absorption is also occurring in the context of the story presented. The audience is transported, and in a sense has been brought into the story through their mental imagery of 'home' (Hamby et al., 2018; Kuijpers, 2021).

Another example of deep emotional engagement can be observed once again in group 2's discussion, where two of the participants express how their associations with content such as video #2 can illicit tears.

*I don't know if I'm such an emotional person... but I watch such reels, there are many reels like these with such formats on Instagram, and I cry, and I watch them on repeat at night –*

*... my first experience away from home. I was crying every day, literally... whenever you go somewhere, you start to create experiences. You start to meet new people and then you leave them, and you miss them. – Conversation from Group 2*

Here, aside from the similar connections to message involvement and absorption into the narrative mentioned previously, we can infer that the participants can put themselves into the perspective of the story's character and they share emotions that the character may have been feeling. This appears to exemplify character involvement's role in allowing for the audience to increase their level of narrative engagement (Hamby et al., 2018).

A similar engagement through deep emotional connection can be inferred from the conversation from group 3 where two participants delved into the philosophical implications they observed and interpreted in video #3, which featured a 'serious' story, relating to the character's search for meaning in life.

*It's the point where you can easily turn into a philosophical conversation about the meaning of life and your purpose... -*

*... we are always searching for something that we are made for, so, they kind of realized what they were made for – Conversation from Group 3*

Here, once again, we can infer that the participants get transported into the message of the story. They can interpret that the character of the story is dealing with a sort of philosophical dilemma, and they appear to be able to relate to this situation on a deeply personal level. We suggest this can represent an increase in engagement through involvement in the overall message of the video's story.

#### 5.4.2. The Subjectivity of Aesthetics

One factor that was observed to be particularly impactful regarding creating engagement through absorption was the presence of aesthetic elements within some of the videos. These aesthetic elements were characterized by attention-capturing visuals and sometimes complemented by background music that set an overall tone and mood for the stories the videos featured. Group 5's discussion turned towards aesthetics, and one participant described video #3 as the following:

*I'm trying to find the purpose of the video [...] but from the aesthetic point of view, I love it the most! - Participant from Group 5*

We observed that the landscapes of a mountain area with snow and ice were described as beautiful and well-received by groups 5 and 3. Similarly, one participant stated that the overall aesthetic of video #3 was calm and in control, describing later in the conversation that it was a 'very Swedish way'. Combinations of background music and striking visuals appeared to have an impact on providing a feeling of suspense, attention capture and absorption for one participant, stating:

*It's all very, in a way maybe suspenseful. That you don't really know what's coming because everything is kind of appearing calm. - Participant from Group 3*

While the above participant focuses on the positive tension coming from the aesthetics in combination with the music, another participant argues against this, providing an example of how absorption is showcased differently for various participants. They said:

*There's no way they didn't want that. That sounds depressing as hell. Depressing as hell. [...] What is it called? Monotonic? - Participant from Group 3*

The subjectivity of aesthetic preference was also on display in group 1. Overall, group 1 described video #1 as aesthetically unpleasing, making comments on drab and depressing colours, however, one participant also mentioned that:

*The shot at the beginning of the river from the top was really nice. - Participant from Group 1*

This comment led to a discussion in which group 1 agreed that the video featured both aesthetically pleasing and unpleasing scenes. Furthermore, for video #2, the focus group stated that the video was well-edited and included aesthetically pleasing pictures.

Aesthetic elements appeared to play a significant role in the absorption process, as they maintained the audience's attention and immersion in the narrative. Scenes that are described as beautiful landscapes appeared to be visually engaging while on the other hand, aesthetically unpleasing elements appeared to have the potential to destroy the absorption process. From the various group discussions, we can observe that there is not one universal viewpoint on what is aesthetically pleasing or unpleasing. The focus groups in this study show that everyone had their own preferences about aesthetic elements, thus their absorption levels appeared to vary based on personal interests or preferences (Hamby et al., 2018; Nabi & Green, 2014; Kuijpers, 2021).

### 5.4.3. Emotional Apathy

Contrary to the observation of the role that strong emotional reactions appeared to have on engagement, we also observed occasions in which focus groups expressed emotional apathy and disconnection which suggested a lack of engagement. This was observed in group 3 as one participant summed up the group's discussion which described the video as 'boring'. Here we see that this participant, along with much of their group, was critical of the video and its main protagonist:

*It is something that needs to happen. We need drama there. [...] We need, like, more happening. - Participant from Group 3*

Furthermore, the focus group discussed the purpose of this video and the same participant stated that there needs to be some higher relevance to the video for it to be more personal. The participant summarized that they had a hard time following and detecting a storyline. Through this, we can posit that the process of absorption and flow was disrupted for this participant (Kuijpers, 2021; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Buselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Nabi & Green, 2014). The participant further stated that:

*Also, the scenery was not dangerous. - Participant from Group 3*

*[...] Because I think when you have a trauma you should overcome it because you're intrinsically motivated and not the world which is kind of external forces you to do it. - Participant from Group 3*

While some participants in groups 3 and 5 reacted more empathically to the protagonist's personality, other participants were hindered from emotionally engaging in the narrative, likely impacting their ability to identify with the character (van Krieken et al., 2017; Hoeken et al., 2016). It can be argued, in this case, that absorption plays a further role in allowing for the character identification process or vice versa.

Emotional apathy also appeared among group 4's participants, with a participant from the group who watched video #4 describing that:

*I might just be TikTok-brained enough to just turn off my brain and watch it because it's in front of me. [...] I would forget this in 15 seconds. [...] No lasting imprint. - Participant from Group 4*

The participant describes how this video had so little impact on them that it would be forgotten after only a few seconds. Furthermore, the group later concluded that video #4 was purely made for the sake of producing content and that whoever made this video prioritized quantity over quality. Another participant in the same group stated:

*I just watch the clips on TikTok, and I will just go on that next one in like, five seconds. - Participant from Group 4*

The conversation illustrated the group's opinions on video 4, which was identified to be a UGC/entertainment storytelling style, as a video that would be easily skippable. Thus, we can posit that the process of absorption and involvement, but also identification, was lacking. In this case, the minimal interactivity between participants and the character and message of the

video's story, in combination with the disengagement in which participants describe that they are losing interest after a few seconds, could be seen as creating a lack of narrative engagement (van Krieken et al., 2017, Louwerse & Kuiken, 2004; Hamby et al., 2018; Kuijpers, 2021; Nabi & Green, 2014). A possible reason for this lack of engagement was described by one participant of the same group, as they stated:

*The person didn't even say, 'Oh, it was cool', or 'oh, I felt good', or that it was terrifying. - Participant from Group 4*

The quote illustrates the lack of identification with the character and the group's overall description of the protagonist as emotionless. Ultimately emotional apathy highlighted the audience's lack of emotional engagement with a narrative, seeming to result in overall diminished levels of narrative engagement as multiple components of engagement were hindered from occurring.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter summarizes our results and discusses the contribution of these findings to the provided previous research. The conclusion will reflect on the study's contribution to narrative-based destination marketing on social media. Finally, limitations and possible future research implications will be presented. To remind the reader about the research questions; *How do the different storytelling styles impact the narrative engagement of an audience? What factors are influencing the narrative engagement of an audience? How can DMOs optimize their destination marketing strategies in relation to different storytelling styles?*

### 6.1. Discussion

Our findings provide insights into what the audience conversations upon viewing the four videos, each representing a distinct style, can tell us about what factors add or subtract from the ability of a storytelling style to engage through narrative. These factors give us a deeper understanding of how the audiences make sense of the four styles. Some factors played a significant role within specific storytelling styles, while others could be observed across all styles. Focus group conversations included opinions, reflections, and thoughts about the different videos, and with insight informed by the background literature and theory, we were able to identify four major themes, each comprised of several related factors, that had noticeable influences on narrative engagement.

Firstly, it could be observed that the unique backgrounds of the focus group participants had the power to affect the implicit narrative engagement that was observed across the focus groups. The differing perspectives and backgrounds of the audiences appeared influential in determining how different videos were able to engage due to factors such as varying levels of message understanding or ability to relate to characters within the narratives. Factors relating to the audio and visual aspects of the videos seemed to play a role in the clarity and understanding that audiences experienced. Misalignment in the audio and video interplay, as well as language barriers, were found to be potentially disruptive factors in the engagement process. Furthermore, videos that were perceived as cliché and lacking in originality were often regarded as a waste of time and gained the moniker of 'digital trash'. Often these videos were criticized for their lack of authenticity and emotional connection, thereby decreasing engagement. Similarly, it was observed that deep emotional connections with some videos created engagement,

while emotional apathy could lead to disinterest and result in less engagement. Also, visual aesthetics appeared to influence the emotional connections experienced by the audiences.

The analysis highlights the relevance that audiences' personal backgrounds, formed by unique expectations, interests and beliefs, can have in shaping engagement with a narrative; a finding that appears to support the claim made by Green (2008) that individuals can bring their perspectives and interpretations into account when encountering a story. Furthermore, this highlights that DMOs should take traveller's potential perspectives of storytelling narratives into account, as different stakeholders perceive destinations differently (Youssef et al., 2018). This was particularly noted in the observation that audience members' identification with characters across the various video styles was influenced by factors such as shared interests, worldviews and other personal attributes that had the potential to alter how videos were received. Likewise, it could be observed that the audiences' expectations and unfamiliarity with cultural norms and tendencies featured in stories could lead to confusion and decreased engagement, while alignment and familiarity with such cultural cues appeared to enhance message understanding, resulting in such effects as facilitated flow and absorption. One group's encounter with the Swedish concept of 'lagom', and another group's mention of the term, appeared to contribute to increased engagement through absorption and captured attention. This suggests that because the videos featured Sweden as a destination, the audiences may have formed expectations of what content the videos would contain based on their previous experiences or knowledge relating to this country, activating their 'inner schema' of mental imagery associated with the location (Alamäki et al., 2022). This idea may further suggest that awareness of the background knowledge that a target audience brings can be important for destination marketers to consider when attempting to create relatable and engaging story-based content. Moreover, this mirrors the idea that marketers need to develop targeted stories to best orient a destination's brand in the intended direction (Youssef et al., 2018).

Regarding the theme of clarity and understanding, visual and audio elements were often observed as mismatching and had the potential to disrupt audience engagement. The misalignment has been found nearly in all styles, but appeared most present in the DMO-created videos and was observed as hindering narrative absorption and flow. The DMO entertainment and serious style (videos #1 and #3) confused the intended message and tone and distracted the narrative's purpose, thus appearing to detract from emotional absorption into the story (Hamby et al., 2018; Kuijpers, 2021). This finding highlights the importance of a cohesive relationship between audio and visual elements to create an emotional response. Zhang & Ramayah (2024)

argue that positive narrative engagement is observed within stories that elicit emotional responses, highlighting the importance of creating a deeper connection with the audience, which contrasts with the experience observed by some focus group members. Additionally, the usage of subtitles in the DMO-produced videos was found to be disruptive, as participants were distracted from engaging in the narrative, ultimately disrupting the flow of their engagement.

The participants of the group watching the UGC serious-style video had a paradoxical viewing experience. A confusion between the audio and the visual content appeared, however, participants connected emotionally to the character due to the shared experiences. While this video can be improved to align the visual elements, it appeared to show that prioritizing emotional engagement worked to overcome the misalignments by leveraging content that focuses on connecting with the viewer's emotional engagement, such as in shared experiences and ideas that evoke a collective memory, both characteristics of serious storytelling (Lugmayer et al., 2016). This seemed to foster a deeper connection which was understood to be a key in influencing viewers' attitudes and future actions (Broersma, 2019; Busselle & Bilandzić, 2009), which appeared to create an engaging advertisement (Irimiás et al., 2021).

These results highlight the importance of creating cohesive relationships between audio and visual elements. Moreover, in both DMO-produced videos, the results show that more thought needs to be given to the subtitles as they distract the audience from their engagement. Overall, the UGC videos, which are a collaborative co-creation (Pera, 2014) appeared easier to understand than the DMO-produced ones. The less obstructed ability to create flow in the audiences could lend credence to the value of collaborative co-creation that characterizes UGC (Pera, 2014; Grönroos & Voima, 2013). A destination's image can be influenced as the result of co-creation, and active participation from destination product consumers might be able to promote consumer trust by showcasing personal connections to a destination, potentially improving the authenticity of a brand (De Oliveira Júnior et al., 2023; Santos, 2021; Burgess, 2009). DMO-produced videos appeared to be perceived as more professionally created, echoing the suggestion that UGC use can bring a loss of control for DMO destination marketing (Lund et al., 2019). Video #3, which was categorized as serious storytelling, appeared overall perceived by the focus groups as the most informative, which can be brought in alignment with Lugmayr et al. (2016) since this video attempted to achieve serious informative goals. Despite having the ability to exercise their control of producing a destination image, both DMO video styles appeared to fall short of producing clear and understandable content. This might suggest that for DMOs to be able to use storytelling as a powerful tool to market a tourist destination and to



connect and attract consumers to their brand, they should put priority on creating content that can be understood by wide audiences (Zhang & Ramayah, 2024).

UGC videos in this study were described as easier to follow, facilitating narrative flow, however, UGC videos were also often described as cliché, 'digital trash' or a waste of time. UGC-produced videos were described as having been produced by quantity over quality, decreasing the overall engagement and enjoyment of these videos. Moreover, audiences' perceptions that content was too recognizable and lacked originality seemed to hinder several indicators of narrative engagement. However, the voice-over of the serious storytelling style in video #2 was perceived as something positive and created an emotional engagement yet, paradoxically, the participants seemed to be annoyed by encountering this audio trend again. This finding appears to contradict those of Santos (2021), in which it was stated that UGC videos are overall perceived as more authentic. As our analysis showed, the characters in both videos were described as cliché and plain, however, the audience did appear to experience involvement with the message of video #2. For this study, the empirical data analysis suggests that UGC can be co-destructive and can harm the image of a destination (Lund et al., 2019). Furthermore, it was seen that emotional engagement appeared weakened within UGC videos in this study because the process of absorption, involvement and especially identification with the character was not being achieved, perhaps due to the observed perceptions of inauthenticity and lack of originality.

Emotional relatability appeared as an important theme in emphasizing the importance of emotional engagement, aesthetics, and narrative depth as interconnected aspects that influence overall audience engagement. The formation of deep emotional connection appeared especially important in fostering qualities for engagement. Personal resonance with themes such as the concept of 'home' and the search for meaning in life, for example, appeared to increase involvement and absorption in the narratives. Similarly, aesthetic elements such as landscape visuals that provided settings for certain videos appeared to play a significant role in the absorption process by triggering emotional responses, however, this appeared to be a highly subjective factor, as some focus group participants expressed negative associations with the aesthetic properties of the videos while others found them to be appealing. Urry (1992) in *The Touristic Gaze* described that the viewpoint of the surroundings is influenced by our cultural impact, background, and preferences, mirroring the idea of aesthetics being subjective. This variation in expressed opinions suggests that both positive and negative associations with a brand or product

can result from the emotions triggered by a narrative's elements (De Oliveira Júnior et al., 2023).

Some participants expressed emotional apathy towards certain videos, leading to decreased absorption and identification with the characters. Factors contributing to emotional apathy included a perceived lack of emotional depth in the narrative and a disconnect between the audience and the characters. This echoes the line of thought that not all storytelling can trigger emotional responses, but that so-called 'good stories' can evoke emotion and ultimately bring consumer value to a destination as a result (De Oliveira Júnior et al., 2023). Regarding the four storytelling styles, we could note that the two styles understood as 'serious' storytelling appeared to better engage audiences on deeper emotional levels. This could support the idea that serious storytelling featuring real-life situations can work to engage users emotionally and create meaningful outcomes (Lugmayr et al., 2016). The DMO-produced videos also appeared to create more engagement through aesthetic elements, perhaps highlighting a benefit that could come from a more professional approach to creating visual content (Patrick & Hagtvedt, 2011).

## 6.2. Conclusion

Our study's findings work towards creating a better understanding of the ongoing conversation about how to optimize narrative-based destination marketing content on social media. There has been limited research into how different storytelling styles impact audiences' engagement (Cao et al., 2021; Lund et al., 2018; Fortezza & Pencarelli, 2018). By analysing the conversations of five different focus groups, we created an in-depth perspective that allowed us to identify various factors acting on narrative engagement that arose across the four developed storytelling styles. The framework used to determine these styles shapes a useful technique for further researchers who may consider researching additional styles. The focus group analysis ensures our study answers the call for more qualitative research into the understanding of audience perception of destination branding on social media (Egger et al., 2022).

Looking at our results, the findings suggest that audience engagement is shaped differently in the various storytelling styles. Individual backgrounds and a certain familiarity with a story's content can increase narrative engagement, while a misalignment in these factors can lead to a decrease in it. Furthermore, discrepancies in audio and visual elements can disrupt the message and the emotional engagement. The UGC storytelling styles that were featured in this study show an example of how value co-destruction can occur and potentially diminish the image of

a destination (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Lund et al., 2019). Finally, emotional relatability appears to be an important element in determining the level of engagement and showed the greatest effect within the serious storytelling style.

We can point to a couple of practical steps that DMOs may consider implementing in their story-based social media destination marketing strategies based on this study. Upon review of how the four storytelling styles were received by the focus group audiences, revealing the common factors that appear to be instrumental in affecting narrative engagement, we see that there is a balance that can be struck between the various styles in attempts to optimize destination marketing. For example, while the UGC videos that were shown were subject to criticism of being cliché, they were also generally accepted as easy to follow and understand. On the contrary, the DMO-produced videos were generally regarded as more confusing and suffered from misinterpretations stemming from such factors as language barriers and cultural misunderstandings. We suggest that DMOs should be aware of social media trends to better filter for UGC content that would not be characterized by the idea of ‘quantity over quality’. DMOs should also be aware of who they are marketing their destinations to, to better anticipate where an audience may lose engagement due to factors that will disrupt the flow of narrative understanding. Furthermore, our study suggests that elements of a serious storytelling style could be beneficial for DMOs to concentrate on implementing if emotional engagement is central to their marketing goals.

We acknowledge that the developed four styles do not represent every video that can be found on social media platforms such as Instagram. The four styles provide a specific viewpoint which was found on Instagram and addresses the ongoing conversation about the usage of UGC. Furthermore, interpreting narratives in these four styles cannot be fully objective, and thus will always be up to some degree of interpretation. Future research should be aware of this limitation and researchers can use the provided framework to develop more styles to be examined. The existing framework can accommodate new and unique styles. Additionally, we suggest that future research can provide a deeper investigation into the four major themes we discovered to have impacts on narrative engagement. Understanding the impact of different storytelling styles is a strategic need which can ultimately benefit DMOs, especially in further exploring the relationship between DMOs and the role that UGC should play in marketing strategies.

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# Appendix A: Analysis of Videos

## *Video 1: "Fishing Video"*

### **Transcript:**

Fisherman: Like I don't deserve it. It feels good but undeserved.

I don't think I've made more than 10 casts, this year.

Text on screen: When You Know You Don't Deserve It

Fisherman: The entire day has been a rollercoaster. It started when I broke my rod, but the big fish came along and turned things upside down.

The fight was controlled, but the landing was critical.

The guys who were supposed to land it couldn't get his small hands around the tail and grab it.

I don't need to fish anymore. I can just drive around and look at places. Just drive, for the rest of the season. Kind of like when you just got your driver's licence. Except you bring your rods. You just don't use them.

Probably mow the lawn, eat some ice cream. Drive some boat. Maybe. Something like that.

**Character:** The main character is a fishing person who caught a fish. We see the character in a close-up interview as the character is at the river. The protagonist expresses feelings, in a joking manner, of unworthiness and bewilderment and reflects on the experience of catching the fish and how it has now made the character uncertain of what the rest of his summer will look like as a result.

**Message:** The message in this story is light-hearted in its tone and is about the unexpected twists of having caught the 'big fish' too early in the summer. It explores themes of luck and uncertainty after a goal is accomplished unexpectedly fast.

**Plot:** The plot of this story revolves around the character's day, which starts with the set-back of having broken the fishing rod. It is followed by the unexpected success of catching a big fish. The character reflects jokingly on the experience and contemplates the impact it has on him, both emotionally and in terms of future actions.

**Conflict:** The conflict in this story is the character's internal struggle with feelings of uncertainty about the consequences of the catch. There is a conflict between the character's desire

to continue fishing and the idea that the fishing season has already reached the pinnacle of success too soon. This can be seen as a “man vs self-conflict”.

**Entertainment Storytelling:** This story exemplifies entertainment-centric storytelling by combining humour, emotion, and unexpected twists to create an engaging and light-hearted narrative that entertains and captivates the audience. The story follows a straightforward narrative structure, starting with the setback of the broken fishing rod, followed by the unexpected success of catching the big fish and ending with the character’s reflections on the experience. This linear progression makes the story easy to follow and engaging for the audience. The story emphasizes the character’s feelings of bewilderment, uncertainty, and humour, using emotional words to evoke a sense of empathy and amusement in the audience. The light-hearted and humorous tone grabs the audience’s attention and keeps them engaged throughout the story. Furthermore, this story incorporates fictional elements such as the character’s exaggerated reactions and humorous reflections and presents hypothetical plans for the future. Overall, the story works to prioritize emotional engagement over factual accuracy and can be interpreted as humorous rather than serious.

## ***Video 2: “Moving Abroad Video”***

### **Transcript:**

Narrator: The day you start living in another country, you are no longer a tourist or a traveller, but you are not a native either.

You become something in between your old life and your new one.

And it doesn’t matter how long you go for, or if you come back.

You’ll always be part of the collective who has lived this unique experience.

And know all too well the feeling of belonging, and not really belonging...,

of living within the between...,

and knowing that both feeling homesick and at home.

Comfort, and the unknown can exist at the same time.

**Character:** The main character in this story is also the narrator and is someone who has moved to another country and is grappling with the complexities of their identity and a sense of belonging in this new environment. The character is neither a self-described tourist nor a native, but something in between. The protagonist is coming to terms with feelings such as homesickness despite feeling like she has made a new home away from home.

**Message:** The message conveyed in the story is about the experience of living abroad and the sense of belonging and not belonging that comes with it. It highlights the idea that living in another country can create a unique sense of identity that is neither fully tied to one's old life nor fully integrated into the new one.

**Plot:** The plot of this story revolves around the main character's journey of adapting to life in a foreign country. It explores challenges faced as the character navigates the complexities of cultural adjustment and identity transformation.

**Conflict:** The central conflict in this story is the narrator's struggle to reconcile their past identity with their new one. This internal conflict can be seen as a 'man vs self' conflict as the protagonist is dealing with feelings of homesickness and a longing for familiarity while also experiencing moments of comfort and belonging in their new environment. Also, a 'man vs environment' exists and it is described by the external challenge of finding their place within a culture that is both foreign and familiar.

**Serious Storytelling:** This story exemplifies 'serious storytelling' in a variety of ways. Firstly, the story presents factual knowledge about the experience of living abroad and the complexities of cultural adjustment. It offers insights into the emotional and psychological challenges faced by individuals navigating life in a foreign country. The story aims to convey a deeper understanding of the experience of living abroad and the complex interplay between identity, belonging, and cultural adaptation. It seeks to provoke thought and reflection on these topics. Furthermore, the story highlights the intrinsic motivations driving her. The main character is exploring their own experiences and is trying to find internal meaning and attempting to adapt on a personal level to a new environment. The story engages with serious themes such as identity, belonging and exploring the nuances and complexities of cross-cultural experiences. The story contributes to the collective memory of individuals who have lived abroad or experienced cultural displacement. It resonates with readers who can relate to the narrator's struggles and triumphs, fostering a sense of shared experience and solidarity.

### ***Video 3: “The natural disaster”***

#### **Transcript:**

Character:

After my own trauma, when I got buried, I asked myself: is this really what I am supposed to do?

Is it worth the risks?

But the response was also immediate: yes, this is what I want to do, for the rest of my life.

My name is *\*anonymized\** and now we are at *\*anonymized station\**.

My work is to be part of the mission Naturvardsverket has, with making *\*natural disaster\** forecasts for the area.

*Displayed text on screen for a few seconds: In Sweden, avalanche forecasts are produced daily for frequently visited mountain areas. Places with possible avalanche terrain where people engage in outdoor activities. The forecast is found at [lavingprognoser.se](http://lavingprognoser.se).*

Character:

I started as an outdoor guide. Then I took my first *\*anonymized\** course and I found it very interesting. After that, I worked in the *\*anonymized\** patrol and as a technician at several resorts. Finally, I started working in *\*anonymized\** where avalanche control is essential.

I’m educated both in Canada and in the Alps.

Down in the valleys, around *\*anonymized\**, you will not find a lot of snow. It is too windy.

But on the east sides of the mountains, it can be 8 to 10 meters of snow.

Maybe more.

#### **Analysis:**

**Character:** The video’s story is centred around the main character who is a technician. The technician at a mountain station works on creating avalanche forecasts in the area. The technician is portrayed as a passionate employee who cares about the work. Although the character was once trapped in an avalanche, the technician continues to work in the field despite knowing the risks involved, showing an unyielding commitment to the work. This shows the character development over time, since the character asks in the video if the risks, which are taken are worth the risk to contribute the expertise. The answer is an immediate and confident “yes”.

**Message:** The story exemplifies the importance of following a passion despite the risks that could be present in doing so. It shows the gratification which can be experienced when someone finds their calling. Therefore, the message of the story revolves around the ideas of dedication, resilience and overcoming adversity. Furthermore, the video's message raises awareness about the risks of avalanches.

**Plot:** The plot of the story revolves around the character deciding on a future career and leaving the trauma behind the character. The plot also puts emphasis on the importance of avalanche forecasts in mountainous regions and highlights the importance of the characters' work. The video included scenes of the avalanche technician being interviewed and actively working, helping express the importance of personal development and work respectively. The dramatic music in combination with the struggle of the main characters' career path highlights how a story can evoke emotions which are conveyed through the plot.

**Conflict:** Two clear conflicts arise within this video. Firstly, the character battles its' own past trauma, highlighting an internal conflict, of having been buried in an avalanche earlier in life. The avalanche technician must come to terms with itself that the importance of the work and desire to follow the passion outweighs the risks that they had a full understanding of due to this past trauma. Secondly, the character is in an ongoing conflict with the severe weather conditions and environment within which the character works regularly. This harsh environment is featured in scenes such as barren snowy landscapes with imposing mountains and sound effects of windswept tundra. Additionally, dramatic music from string instruments is played in the background to highlight the conflict between women versus nature.

**Serious storytelling:** The video shows that the character reflects on its own story. The video provides facts about the characters' job of being an avalanche technician in which the character produces avalanche forecasts. Moreover, the importance of the work is mentioned, including the educational background. The narrative reflects the wisdom gained from the character's personal experiences which offers the audience an insight into the risks and rewards of the field. The serious goal and pursuit in this video can be argued with achieving the message of the significance of avalanche forecasting which requires a high dedication from the people working in this field. The aim is to inform the audience about the importance of safety measures in mountain areas, as well as give a sense of nature's forces. Indirectly the video instructs the viewers to inform themselves about the daily avalanche forecast if they go exploring in mountainous areas. It can also be argued that the characters' narrative provides valuable insights for people who are interested in outdoor safety in these environments. Furthermore, the avalanche



technicians' journey displays intrinsic motivations and a deep level of self-reflection since the character continuously works for their profession after the trauma. The overcoming of the intrinsic conflict and the passion for the work can inspire the audience to learn more about safety-critical work roles. The video effectively transfers the message about avalanche safety and yet inspires the viewers with the characters' dedication to the field.

#### ***Video 4: "A Day in a major city as a tourist"***

##### **Transcript:**

Tourist:

This is what a day as a tourist in *\*this city\** could look like!

*\*This city\** is one of the most exciting cities in Europe.

And the beautiful *\*city\**.

Today we're going to play tourist and spend a whole day in the city.

*\*anonymized\** is the historic centre of the town.

Here you can visit the royal palace and walk around the colourful streets.

The afternoon we spend enjoying the view from *\*anonymized\**.

After you get some good pictures, we take a trip out to either *\*anonymized\** for a quiet moment,

Or we stay in town to see *\*the city's\** impressive library.

I love spending the evening at *\*anonymized\** to see a concert or ride some of the awesome rollercoasters.

##### **Analysis:**

**Character:** The character in this short video has no name and is not introducing himself. The character can be seen at the beginning of the video, talking to his phone camera about how "A Day as a Tourist in a Major City" could look like. The character expresses enthusiasm in the video about exploring the city and its various attractions. This indicates that the character has a sense of curiosity and adventure towards the city's attractions.

**Message:** The message of this video is that the city has many attractions for everyone to enjoy too. There is a diverse range of activities in the city, highlighting that the destination has an attractive appeal for travellers since the video is about what a tourist can do in one day in the

city. There is an activity for everyone, from amusement parks to concerts or silent places in nature with scenic vistas. Moreover, it is about the enjoyment and excitement of being a tourist in this city.

**Plot:** The plot of the video revolves around the tourist's itinerary for one day spent in this major city. The plot begins with the tourist introducing the city himself and then exploring the historic centre, with landmarks such as a Royal Palace. Furthermore, the plot goes along with the scenic view from a park, which can evoke emotions about the beautiful landscape. The streets are even described as "colourful". At the park, there can be seen calming colours such as green from the trees and blue from the nearly clear sky.

**Conflict:** The conflict in this video is not obvious to see, therefore it can be described as relatively mild (in contrast to all other styles). The more hidden conflict can be seen as that the tourist has many potential choices to face regarding how they can spend their day in this city. It can be decided for quieter areas, such as the library, the museums, or the parks, but there are also options to go to an amusement park and a concert under the sky. The choices do not stand in a significant conflict or tension but rather provide the audience with an overload of attractions and things to do. In addition, the music tends to be calm, the mood is very friendly in combination with light and playful colours. The mood concentrates more on the excitement and exploring of the city.

**Entertainment storytelling:** The video provided an overall more straightforward narrative structure as it outlines a typical day spent as a tourist. It begins with exploring the historical centre in the morning and ends in the evening with some activities. It can be augmented therefore that there is a clear sequence of events without any deep reflections. The video provides typical tourist attractions but no unique or unconventional aspects of the city other than well-known tourist hotspots. The video mentions a general overview of the day of the tourist but no detailed description of any place, the optional afternoon is only mentioned very shortly. Moreover, it can be seen that the video tries to grab the attention of the audience since the tourist uses emotional words and phrases like "exciting city, breathtaking views and awesome roller-coasters". It emphasizes the exciting aspect of being a tourist to catch the audience's interest. Lastly, it can be argued that the story highlights the enjoyment of adventure and entertainment since scenic views, concerts and roller coasters are mentioned rather than pushing serious pursuits or any reflective elements.

# **Appendix B: Focus Group Guidance Questions**

## **General questions:**

### **Q1: What are your thoughts on this video, and did you enjoy it?**

Possible follow-up questions:

What are your initial thoughts on this video?

Did you enjoy the video?

What is your favourite and least favourite thing about this video?

What do you find interesting about this video?

What are your thoughts on how this video is produced?

What do you think about when you see this video?

## **Absorption questions:**

### **Q2: Does this video capture your attention or make you feel in a certain way?**

Possible follow-up questions:

What emotions do you feel when you watch this video?

Does the video capture your attention?

What this video boring for you?

## **Identification questions:**

### **Q3: What are your thoughts on the characters, is there anything interesting about them?**

Possible follow-up questions:

Do you feel like you relate to this video on a personal level?

What do you think about the character in this video?

Do share something Similar with your character (hobby, interest etc)?

**Involvement questions:**

**Q4: What is the message of the video if there is one?**

Possible follow-up questions:

What do you think the message of this video is?

Do you feel like this video expresses a conflict?

Do you think this video could be useful in any way?

Do you feel like you relate to this video on a personal level?

Is this video easy to understand?

**Flow questions:**

**Q5: Was it easy for you to follow and understand what was happening in the video?**

Possible follow-up questions:

Did you enjoy this video?

Was it easy to follow what was happening in the video?

Is this video easy to understand?

**Questions for the 5th group:**

Q0: Which video did you enjoy the most?

Q1: Did you find that one video was more thought-provoking compared to the others? Why?

Q2: Do the videos have any common themes or messages?

Q3: Reflecting on all videos, did you find them easy to follow and understand?

Q4: Were there any standout moments from any video that left a lasting impression?

# Appendix C: Information Sheet

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## *Information Sheet*

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Dear participant,

Thank you for joining in the study on analysing Storytelling on social media! This information sheet provides you with an overview of what this study is about. If you have any questions or uncertainties, please contact one of us.

### **Focus and Aim of the Study**

Storytelling is ubiquitous across our society and is used to market, brand, advertise, and convey messages in a variety of industries. Often, this marketing is disseminated through social media such as Instagram and can be produced by professionals and amateurs alike.

In this study, we aim to gain a better understanding of how an audience reacts to and is engaged by the use of storytelling within videos.

The content of the videos has been assessed before and has been considered to not contain any harmful, offensive, or distressing content.

### **Methodology**

The collection of empirical data will be carried out through the usage of several in-person focus groups that will be conducted in English. Each focus group will be comprised of 4 to 5 individuals, not including the moderators.

The data collection process will look as follows:

1. Focus group participants will take part in an approximately 1-hour long group discussion moderated by the authors of this research project.
2. Focus group discussions will be audio recorded (based on informed consent).

3. Focus group audio recording will be transcribed. All participant names will be anonymized and only the researchers will have access to the transcripts and audio files.
4. Upon completion, this research will be published in the Lunds University database and collected data will be deleted.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Confidentiality: At any time, the participant's personally identifiable information will not be shared. For this study, quoted material will be anonymized.

Withdrawing: Before, during or after the focus group, the participant is free to withdraw from their participation in the research project.

Potential Risks: There is no potential risk identified that could physically or psychologically harm any participants.

Please keep this document for your own record!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at:

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# **Appendix D: Informed Consent Form**

## **Consent to participate in a Master's Thesis at the Faculty of Social Sciences**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a student research study led by Fredrik Karlsson and Damien Noss (researchers) from Lund University, Campus Helsingborg.

1. I have been given enough information about this research and the purpose of my participation in this focus group has been explained to me and is clear to me.
2. My participation in this study is voluntary.
3. Participation involves being in a focus group together with two to four more participants. The researchers will guide the focus group questions and we will discuss the presented questions for approximately 45-60 minutes. I allow the researchers to take notes during the interview, I also allow the recording (audio) of the whole discussion. I fully understand that if I do not want to be recorded, I am fully entitled to withdraw my participation at any point, before during or after the focus group.
4. I have the right to not answer any questions. If I feel uncomfortable or have any other concerns about the focus group, I have the right to withdraw from the focus group at any point in time.
5. I was given a guarantee from the researchers that I would not be identified by my name in any reports using information obtained from this focus group. My confidentiality as a participant in this focus group and study will remain secure. In all cases, subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies at Lund University.
6. I have understood that it is expected of me to treat each other with respect and dignity throughout the discussion.
7. I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time.

Lund University, Box 117, 221 00 Lund, Sweden, with organization number 202100-211 is the controller. You can find Lund University's privacy policy at [www.lu.se/integritet](http://www.lu.se/integritet).

You have the right to receive information about the personal data we process about you. You also have the right to have inaccurate personal data about you corrected. If you have a complaint about our processing of your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer at [dataskyddsbud@lu.se](mailto:dataskyddsbud@lu.se). You also have the right to file a complaint with the supervisory authority (the Data Protection Authority, IMY) if you believe that we are processing your personal data incorrectly.

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Location and Date

Participant's Signature

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Location and Date

Researcher's Signature

Please keep this document for your own record!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at:

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