

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Brown, David and Wilson, Sharon (2021) Climbing the virtual mountain: A netnography of the sharing and collecting behaviours of online Munro-bagging. In: Emerging Transformations in Tourism and Hospitality. Taylor & Francis, London, pp. 170-186. ISBN 9780367616625, 9781003105930

Published by: Taylor & Francis

URL: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003105930-13>
<<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003105930-13>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<https://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/48105/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)

Brown, D.M. & Wilson, S. (2021). Climbing the Virtual Mountain: A Netnography of the Online Sharing and Collecting Behaviours of Munro-Baggers. In A. Farmaki & N. Pappas (Eds.). New Directions in Tourism Analysis: Emerging Transformations in Tourism and Hospitality. Abingdon: Routledge

Keywords - netnography, Munro-bagging, online travel communities, serious leisure, sharing and collecting, adventure tourism, hillwalking

Abstract

In this chapter, we explore how Munro-baggers share and collect information, experiences and identity in online spaces, and the potential influence exerted by this emerging phenomenon upon Scottish Highlands adventure tourism. The 282 Munros are Scottish mountains at least 3,000 feet (914.4m) high. Several thousand Munro-baggers are attempting to climb each and become 'Munroists'. The pastime appears to be growing, encouraged by Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) within digital communities. It is in transformation, as much of the interaction between enthusiasts, and much of the visibility of the pastime, is migrating from offline to online spaces, but it is also transformative inasmuch as it changes the manner in which potential tourists perceive the Highlands, and the contexts in which they understand them. The economic contribution of Munro-baggers to Scotland is significant and they convey the Highland 'brand' to other tourists. However, most Munro-bagging literature is tangential, barely exploring the influence of community, sharing and collecting behaviours, social media and eWOM upon 'imaginative travel' (Urry, 2002, p.256). This chapter utilises theory on collecting and sharing, and heeds recent calls for netnography (Mkono & Markwell, 2014) – the study of online communities – to contemporise understanding of adventure tourist interactions and consider implications for tourism marketing.

Introduction

Munro-bagging is a form of hillwalking. Munro-baggers are hillwalkers who ascend Scottish mountains which are over 3,000 feet (914.4m) in altitude - the Munros - at least partially for the purpose of increasing their 'collection' of summited Munros. They are peak-baggers. They may be attracted to their pastime by the promise of exercise, fresh air, exploration, self-sufficiency, beautiful views, companionship, and a host of other factors, but their choice of mountains is influenced by a 'tick-list' mentality. By the 1990s, a thousand walkers had 'completed'¹ a 'round' of Munros (McNeish, 1996) – climbed all 282 of them. By 2015, this number surpassed 6,000, with numerous more walkers currently partway through the challenge (Scottish Mountaineering Club, 2018). Most rounds exceed two decades, others are intensive. Although successful ascents cannot strictly 'transfer ownership' to the walker, they contribute towards completion of a prescribed collection. 'Bagged' Munros, unlike tangible collectors' items, cannot be traded or bequeathed, but bestow incremental knowledge and experiences to be stored, revisited and shared.

As the Munros are located in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, Munro-bagging has been geographically bounded, necessitating repeated visits. However, social media groups enable Munro-baggers to augment the pastime's physical, geographical situatedness with non-physical, temporospatially non-specific elements (e.g. – planning and reflection). Part of mountain walking is effectively removed from the mountain, de-territorialised and dematerialised, but intermediated through other community members. Through eWOM, visitors disperse credible, cost-effective, interactive and non-timebound communication across geo-cultural boundaries. By reprioritising interpersonal communications against the spatiality of the pastime, a 'telepresence' (Wellman, 2001) challenges the dominance of place and space in defining participation, presenting social implications

¹ The Scottish Mountaineering Club and many Munro-baggers adopt the archaic spellings, 'compleat', 'completed', 'completion', and 'compleater', which were used by Sir Hugh Munro, originator of the Munro-bagging concept.

for members, and commercial implications for stakeholders. Moreover, through videos, drone footage and photographs, participants' touristic experiences can be shared widely, immediately and naturalistically to existing and potential Highland tourists.

Munro-bagging, and peak-bagging more generally, has received relatively little focus within leisure and tourism literature. Whilst the deliberate and processual nature of peak-bagging has been acknowledged (e.g. - Lorimer & Lund, 2003), this is yet to prompt the introduction of theories on collecting as an analytical lens. This is a curious omission, given the central objective of 'set completion' underpinning much literature on collecting and collectors (e.g. – Olmsted, 1987), and is clearly central to the Munro-bagging pastime (McNeish, 1996). Naturally, Munro-bagging has certain characteristics which separate it from, for example, philately (stamp collecting), and either complicate or prevent the applicability of theory into this context. Perhaps the most obvious consideration is that mountains cannot be bought, earned or acquired as material possessions except by the very wealthy. Instead, the collecting is of experiences, memories, achievements, and perhaps prestige. A second major gap in the research relates to how the advent of the internet and social media has impacted upon the experiences of Munro-baggers. In the last generation, Munro-baggers have been able to seek information, plan, exchange stories and advice, publish photos and route descriptions, express their explorer identities, and interact with other Munro-baggers, in online spaces. This suggests that the scope and experience of Munro-bagging has expanded beyond its previous temporal, spatial, and social boundaries, demanding fresh research to explore the phenomenon.

The theoretical implication arising from the chapter is that, whilst serious leisure pastimes such as Munro-bagging have been recognised as contributors of tourism in the Scottish Highlands, more research into the role and effects of social media interaction amongst participants is required. The practical implication is that the Scottish Highland brand is socially constructed and transmitted in part by online communities of people drawn together by a common offline pastime, and that therefore tourism marketers must pursue new ways to engage them and harness their informal marketing

potential. Moreover, the 'collecting' approach to Scottish tourism is currently spreading from Munro-bagging to island-bagging (i.e. – visiting as many Scottish islands as possible), and anecdotal evidence suggests that visitors are also starting to tick off lists of officially recognised long-distance trails (Walkhighlands, 2021), and even road routes.

In this chapter, we explore how Munro-bagging is quickly evolving as a Scottish hillwalking phenomenon due to the rapid expansion of membership of, and interaction within, social media sites which are specifically for Munro-baggers and hill walkers. Whilst Munro-bagging has collecting as its central focus, the scant previous literature on hill-bagging has largely ignored the rich theory on collecting behaviours which is particularly well-developed amongst commentators on consumer culture and social psychology (e.g. – Rigby & Rigby, 1944; Johnston & Beddow, 1986; Olmsted, 1987; Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1988; Belk, 1994; Belk, 2014). Likewise, the few previous studies of Munro-bagging (e.g. – Lorimer & Lund, 2003; 2008; Bentley & Ormerod, 2009) have largely restricted themselves to traditional interviews and observations – most of them dating from before the popularity of social media and the introduction of social media sites for hillwalkers. Moreover, the intersectionality of social media participation, sharing and collecting behaviours, and hillwalking, has not previously been explored. We address this gap in the theory by observing the sharing and collecting of Munro-baggers interacting in online spaces, and by analysing how this rapidly evolving phenomenon is not only being transformed, but is also increasingly transformative to the manner in which potential participants gain knowledge and information about a pastime which, if adopted fully, requires them to indulge in Scottish Highland tourism. As such, this research should be of considerable interest to theorists or practitioners of Highland tourism.

We will appraise the generic academic literature on collecting and collectors, and on online communities, before analysing the theory of sharing and collecting within tourist communities. Using these three fields, we will explore the intersection of them through netnographic observation of Munro-baggers in online spaces. As the lead author is a Munro-bagger who frequents such websites

for pleasure, the approach may be deemed interpretative autonethnography. We will then analyse the findings against the extant literature, before identifying emerging insights and proposing how researchers and practitioners may build upon them.

Theoretical background

Hadrup and Larson (2006) argued through the 'cultural turn' in the social sciences that tourism is more closely connected to physical sensations than traditionally assumed. We seek to return to this but to theorise ways in which online sharing might re-constitute the tourism landscape. Munro-baggers undertake experiences which necessitate embodied strain, exposure to the elements, and interaction with specific places. However, as online interactivity becomes ever more pervasive, they also use technology to 'collect' and share specific ascents (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1988) as memories, blogs and digital holograms. We therefore suggest that this work follows the thread that leaves behind the tourist, contemporising a discussion that focusses upon the "*contingent networked performance and production of places that are remade as they are toured*" (Bærenholdt, Hadrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004, p.151).

We argue, in essence, that place is represented as a collage of experience, and as a dematerialised gaze. These are manifested as biographies which attempt to constitute the affective experiences of nature and, in doing so, popularise and estrange yet form new socialities. The implications for wider tourism discourse are the potential of the reducibility of connectivities with the 'virtual proximity' (Urry, 2002, p.265) offered by remote beings and things on the one hand, and new ways of seeing and promoting travel into the wild on the other.

Collecting

Many people choose, or feel compelled, to collect things for leisure. To frame such behaviours, Belk (1987) saw collections as extensions of self. By imparting ownership and order upon the mundane,

objects acquire non-utility status and are sacralised pseudo-religiously (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1988). Indeed, mountain exploration by seminal climbers (e.g. - Norman Collie's Skye Cuillins) bestows cultural significance. Collecting may be conscious or unconscious, structured or unstructured, vertical or horizontal (Belk et al, 1988). Most Munro-baggers collect vertically, working down lists. A tiny minority climb summits by order of altitude, relinquishing the convenience of combining neighbouring peaks. Munro-bagging by region (e.g. - climbing all the Torridon Munros, then all the Glencoe Munros, etc.), constitutes a more horizontal strategy. Some walkers stumble into the pastime unintentionally, thereby blurring the conscious/unconscious distinction, and collecting may begin through serendipitous events such as family summit hikes undertaken without prior awareness of Munro-bagging (Rigby & Rigby, 1944; Johnston & Beddow, 1986).

Collectors enjoy legitimisation through others considering their activities 'worthwhile' (Belk et al, 1988), reinforcing their sense of taste and judgment (Stewart, 1984, cited in Belk, 1990). Collecting is sometimes a reaction against anxiety or self-perceived inadequacy, and is often considered addictive or compulsive (e.g. – Johnston & Beddow, 1986; Belk et al, 1988), and this potentially skews the characteristics of those transmitting the Highland brand this way. Participants seek reassurance through ritualised repetition (Peele, 1985) and frequently specialise (Belk et al, 1988), explaining the specific forms of mountain-bagging (e.g. – of Munros, 'county tops', etc.). They may tangibilise travel experiences with physical artefacts (Belk et al, 1988), and the digitization of photographs and journey logs has not entirely superseded this. Younger users, especially 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), are less likely to tangibilise cloud-based assets (Belk, 2013a), whilst older people derive less satisfaction and authenticity from digital possessions, which are therefore more peripheral to their extended selves (Cushing, 2012). This may influence how and what differently aged Munro-baggers collect and share online, and suggest that younger walkers' transmission of the Highland brand is often through more ephemeral means.

Items are collectible for their set membership and their role in set completion, rather than for aesthetic or utilitarian value (Duroust, 1932, cited in Belk, 1994). Collectors nearing completion may feel conflicted, desiring fulfilment of an ambition yet dreading its removal (Dannefer, 1980; Olmsted, 1987). Although many collections are bequeathed to heirs (Olmsted, 1987), creating a legacy, Munro-baggers have nothing tangible to bequeath. The internet facilitates peer-to-peer interactivity and user-generated content (Carroll & Romano, 2010). Narratives co-create places and touristic experiences (Prebenson, Vitterso, & Dahl, 2013). Kankanhalli, Tan and Wei (2005) described sharing through social media as motivated by intended usefulness and expected gratification, and Marwick and Boyd (2014) found that users visualise an unknown audience to judge appropriateness, acceptability and audience reception (Born, 2011). This may be easier where group members are more homogenous and bound by a pastime such as Munro-bagging, demonstrating their values, potentially leading to a largely consistent communication of their touristic experiences.

Online Communities

Online leisure communities help members to gain skills, feel accomplished, and express self (Nimrod, 2014). Built upon shared interests, values and goals, they transcend the geographical boundedness inherent in offline communities (Kraut & Resnick, 2012). Most members never meet offline, so consider their communities 'online' (e.g. - Preece, 2000), 'virtual' (Rheingold, 1994) and 'portable' (Chayko, 2008). By sharing mutual interests and perspectives, members establish interpersonal relationships, group cohesion and identity, despite the turbulence potentially experienced within diverse memberships (MacQueen et al, 2001). Online community members may be categorised by their contributions: posters and creators, lurkers, and trolls (Bishop, 2013).

Some online community members archive and document their activities (Krotoski, 2013). Moreover, digital identity, evolving over time with one's technological, personal and social contexts, represents users' values and characteristics (Rannenbergh, Royer, & Deuker, 2009). The social and psychological

benefits of self-expression (Kang, Tang, & Fiore, 2014) are often more attainable online (Chayko, 2008). Self-expressions may change as the user develops competence, an evolving social identity (Schmalz, Colistra, & Evans, 2015) and social integration (Parry, Glover, & Mulcahy, 2013). Therefore, online social identities are unstable, multidimensional and context-driven, and may suggest that users' communications of their pastime and portrayals of Scotland may follow this pattern.

Online communities require a shared purpose, interactions which satisfy a need to perform a role, and common rules and policies to guide such interaction (Preece, 2000). Users overcome social isolation (Chayko, 2008) by maintaining connectivity (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Ivan & Hebblethwaite, 2016) and developing friendships (Bishop, 2013; Krotoski, 2013) through support, loyalty, acceptance and trust (Fehr, 1996; Karbo, 2006). The group identities may be more readily constructed in specialised forums such as Munro-bagging sites, which promote cooperation and reciprocity (Chayko, 2008).

Most tourist internet usage occurs before trips for planning journeys, and social media underpins that usage (Leung, Law, Van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). The difference between Munro-baggers who post content during trips, and those who simply access others' content during their trips, appears potentially significant to the dissemination of touristic knowledge. Travellers use online communities to collect information, connect with likeminded partners, advise others, and share experiences (Wang, Yu, & Fesenmaier, 2002). Social media can greatly influence tourists' emotions and brand, place or event identification (Hudson, Roth, Madden, & Hudson, 2015). Mkono and Tribe (2017) segmented online tourism community members into trolls, socialites, activists, information seekers and social critics. Kozinets (2015) categorised online community members, albeit not specifically within travel communities: interestingly, the first category is 'tourists', who post casual questions but feel unbound by community (his tag 'tourists' seemingly conveying negative assumptions); 'minglers' perceive strong social ties but lack motivation towards 'consumption activities' (e.g. - climbing mountains); 'devotees' identify strongly with the pastime but not the community; and 'insiders' enthusiastically contribute to intra-community connections, friendships, credibility and influence. Members' sense of

belonging is reinforced by active participation, encouraging the sharing of knowledge and promoting the community externally (Qu & Lee, 2011). Knowledge sharing is stimulated by individual, community and affiliation factors, producing community identification (Lee, Reid, & Kim, 2014). Therefore, Munro-bagging sites may also enjoy higher levels of knowledge-sharing and active participation than those communities focused on easier pastimes. Hedonic outcomes include excitement, enjoyment, happiness and entertainment (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Community interaction often derives from 'giving back' (Cothrel & Williams, 1999). Membership may stimulate affiliative feelings (Rheingold, 1993) unattainable to solo Munro-baggers, thereby becoming transformational (Kozinets, 2015) to members' self-concepts.

Although 'tourism as consumption' is a contested notion (Stebbins, 2009), 'community membership as consumption' enjoys wider acceptance (e.g. - Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2010), including within travel communities (e.g. - Hagel & Armstrong, 1997; Preece, 2000). Online community members may contribute for self-gratification (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004), or to be followed (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). By posting photographs, members archive materials for future retrieval, contributing to the group's heritage (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013) and providing the 'bridging capital' of cooperative connections with others (Putnam, 2001). Photographs, by conveying the emotions of a former self to the current self, often underpin autobiographical memory (Belk & Yeh, 2011), but perhaps also the perceptions of those yet to visit the Highlands – a foreshadowing 'folk memory'.

The geographical unboundedness of social media (Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010) may democratise access, but sites are bounded by language, cultural references and style, which constitute online identity representation (Boyd, 2010) and may bar participation. Whereas most Facebook relationships begin offline (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), this is much less true of online travel community friendships (Kunz & Seshadri, 2015), so members are more likely to discuss their pastime with those they have never met. Individuals' prior expectations of participation dictate their interaction levels and loyal consumers harness online community membership to socialise the process of evaluating

quality (Kozinets, 2015). This appears applicable to the judging of Munro routes. All communities are subject to spatial and social constraints, socialisation, behavioural norms and interactivity. Therefore, the following section reviews theories appertaining to sharing, collecting and consuming more generally, contemplating their applicability to online tourist communities.

Sharing, collecting and consuming within tourist communities

Through sharing information, tourists interacting through social media can become the 'media' themselves (Li & Wang, 2011), suggesting that tourist organisations which buy media space for promotions should consider the efficacy of these actors. To explore Munro-baggers' online sharing, we adopt Belk's (2010) characteristics of sharing. He states that it is nonreciprocal; it nurtures social links, encouraging social reproduction; it entails shared ownership or rights over something; money is irrelevant to the act; objects are singular; there is networked inclusion; the action is personal, dependent and inalienable; it occurs within a context conducive to sharing; it demonstrates love of caring; and it is nonceremonial. He separates 'sharing in', which breaks down materialistic interpersonal barriers and possessiveness from 'sharing out', which is a nonreciprocal, one-off act undertaken with a stranger (e.g. – the giving of a cigarette). Moreover, he distinguishes between ownership-based and non-ownership-based sharing (Belk, 2013a), which potentially presents a grey area for community members such as Munro-baggers, who share knowledge freely, but may imply some sort of ownership of the Scottish mountain landscape based upon nationality, residency, attachment and identification, or physical engagement and experience.

Lamberton & Rose's (2012) findings on sharing jar slightly against Belk's (2010/2013a) 'sharing in', as actors are motivated through social utility (e.g. - gaining approval). Belk (2013a), illustrating his notion of 'open sharing', describes a host saying "my house is your house" in a non-specific, undetailed manner, whereas 'demand sharing' services a request for a specific resource, such as a child demanding breakfast (ibid). Intangibles like ideas, values and time may be shared (Belk, 2010). By

contributing online, actors may pursue community or others' generosity, and these actions render resources available to others (Belk, 2014). As users archive and share their personal information and thoughts (Derrida, 1996), and have ever more platforms to do so (Hennig-Thurau, Henning, & Satler, 2007), they retain contact with others, share their opinions, display interest and 'active listening', discuss issues, and express their values. This perhaps suggests a normative message is likely to form in these groups. Such values have been categorised as social presence, self-presentation, social conversation, easy connection, and self-management (Ham, Lee, Hayes, & Bae, 2018). It is worth noting that tourists' motivational factors on social media differ according to the type of content shared and types of media, although altruistic, community-related motivations most commonly drive tourists' sharing information online (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Sharing may be the primary reason for visiting blogs and social media sites (John, 2013). Recent academic debate considers whether sharing is (Arnould & Rose, 2016) or is not (Price & Belk, 2016) a form of gift-giving, as digital gift-giving is motivated by factors as diverse as altruism and love, the quest for status and reciprocity, and ingratiation (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007). However, its social embeddedness in everyday routines and rituals, values and norms (Belk, 2010; Price & Belk, 2016) provokes less disagreement. Technology-enabled interaction has encouraged access-based consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017) in which users are defined not solely by their production (Ritzer, 2014), consumption or ownership, but through what they access and share (Belk, 2013b). Sharing motivated by reciprocity expectations may be deemed pseudo-sharing (Belk, 2014), and can instigate the phenomenon of prosumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), in which actors simultaneously produce and consume a resource. Furthermore, collaborative consumption can occur. Botsman and Rogers (2010) defined it as a marketplace exchange encapsulating both gift-giving and sharing. Therefore, we will explore how online members of Munro-bagging communities share, collaborate and engage in prosumption, and its effects within the group.

Methodology

Using Interpretive Autoethnography

Kozinets' (1999; 2002) principles of netnography (and autoethnography) underpin this research methodology and the central ethos of democratising the research through empowerment of participants within a naturalistic setting. More broadly, the research adheres to the central tenets of interpretive autoethnography (e.g. - Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Denzin, 2014), by exploring the following: the ways in which history, biography, society and culture intersect and act upon each other; the narratives, meanings and voice arising from online posts and comments; the emotionality, experience and reflexivity which underpin how Munro-baggers represent themselves in digital spaces; the myths, performances, rituals and words which take on special significance and help to bind together diverse members into a coherent and cohesive social unit; any epiphanies or turning points which members experience, such as unexpectedly positive 'unlurking' processes or hostile member reactions to well-intentioned posts, which have brought about changes in perception; the facts, facticities, fictions, truths and realities which form the basis by which members understand their communities and their places within them (Denzin, 2014). To ensure methodological robustness, the research has been guided by Bochner's (2000) criteria for interpretive sufficiency and Richardson's (2000) criteria for evaluating ethnography, as per the table below.

Bochner's (2000) criteria (adapted):

Narratives' language should convey experience to readers
Abundance of concrete detail
Structurally complex narrative
Vulnerability, honesty & emotional credibility
A sense of transitioning identity
High standards of ethical self-consciousness
Concern for participants and subjects
Emotionally, not purely intellectually, engaging
Empowerment & resistance in the narrative of the self

Richardson's (2000) criteria (adapted):

Substantive contribution to understanding of life in the social unit
Aesthetic merit
Researcher reflexivity, familiarity & subjectivity
Emotional, intellectual and scholarly impact
Truth, credibility & expressive of a reality

Table 1: Criteria for achieving interpretive sufficiency and for evaluating ethnographic research.

Using Netnography and Autonetnography

Netnography – the study of a social group in an online setting (Kozinets, 2010; 2015) – is well suited to extend knowledge of hillwalkers. Although hillwalking is located outside and embodied (Stevenson & Farrell, 2018), many of the actions, emotions and interactions associated with the pastime occur at different points in time and place. By studying online communities of Munro-baggers, we aim to uncover otherwise obscured insights. Whilst a netnographic approach to researching Munro-baggers may appear to focus on the ‘before’ (planning) stage and the ‘after’ (reflecting) stage, some participants post status updates and photographs to social media mid-activity, sharing the moment, broadcasting their achievement, seeking moral support, or tackling social isolation. Netnography can therefore capture a longitudinality which evades other forms of research.

Autonetnography (Kozinets, 2010) is to netnography (Kozinets, 1999; 2002) what autoethnography is to ethnography – the study of an online community to which the researcher belongs. In calling for an autonetnographic approach to tourism studies, Mkono, Ruhanen, & Markwell (2015) noted both the pervasiveness of digital communities within modern life, and the intersection between researchers’ online actions and identities at work and in their private lives. One of the co-authors has been a Munro-bagger since 2001 and a member of associated social media sites long before research commencement. Therefore, this is partially an autonetnography.

Autoethnographic data collection explores and illustrates the following: the involvement which members seek and undertake within the group; forms of engagement between members and the social unit, their frequencies, limitations, importance and outcomes; the contact and interactions between members at an individual or small group level, and their characteristics; and the ways in which members commune, relate to each other and to those outside the group membership, collaborate and co-create (or co-destruct) value, and forge connections. Analysis of the data is through immersion, reflection, and iterative re-readings.

The main social media sites accessed through Facebook were as follows: Scottish Hillwalking and Wild Camping; Munroaming; Munro Bagging; Scottish Hills; Mountains of Britain; Mountains of the Mind; Scottish Hillwalking, Wild Camping and Mountaineering; I Am Bagging the Munros; Scrambling and Mountaineering UK; and several other sites dedicated to Highland mountain tourism which include Munro-specific content.

Netnographic findings

We used Netnography – the study of online groups (Kozinets, 2015) – to examine hillwalkers’ collecting and sharing. Whilst this may appear to focus on the ‘before’ (planning) and ‘after’ (reflecting) stage, many participants post content mid-activity, sharing the moment, broadcasting their achievement, seeking moral support, or tackling social isolation. Netnography can therefore capture a longitudinality which evades other research. Autonetnography (Kozinets, 2015) is the study of an online community to which the researcher belongs. In calling for autonetnographic approaches to tourism studies, Mkono, Ruhanen, & Markwell (2015) noted the pervasiveness of digital communities within modern life, and the intersection between researchers’ online actions and identities at work and in their private lives. One of the co-authors has been a Munro-bagger since 2001 and a member of associated social media sites long before research commencement. Therefore, this research is partially autonetnographical and explores those sites.

Sharing content

Photographs and videos typically share the aesthetics and euphoria of hillwalking. Some capture meteorological phenomena, flora and fauna. Other members routinely add their own photographs or reminiscences - a process of value co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Occasionally, posts are unintentionally controversial, eliciting negative responses. Although Belk (2010) considered the sharing of physical resources inalienable, the sharing of public spaces is negotiated (Griffiths & Gilly,

2012), albeit tacitly. This fits Munro-bagging sites, which are ‘third places’ where members interact in a publicly accessible area beyond the ‘first place’ of home and ‘second place’ of work (Oldenburg, 1999). Where members misunderstood the negotiated, acceptable use of public space, they may subvert it unacceptably, attracting opprobrium.

Selfies - especially summit selfies - proliferate within Munro-bagging sites. Posters share their achievement and elation with peers, perhaps seeking compliments. Sharing summit selfies is not unceremonial (Belk, 2010), but part of a routine and of a rite of passage from Munro-bagger to Munroist - not sharing in its truest sense but partially self-focused.

Munro-baggers’ online knowledge sharing

Walk reports, reviews and route descriptions often carry several photographs or a video, showing summits, views, walkers, wild camps, bothies, flora or fauna. They are reflexive, first-person accounts posted soon after trips, often incorporating humour and self-critique. (Posts during trips are usually briefer, comprising few photographs.) There may be a blurring of boundaries between landscape, pastime and walker. As fatigue and blisters are described, the embodied nature of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2009) is conveyed. Posters relate the performativity of hiking (Lorimer & Lund, 2003), even ‘breaking the fourth wall’ between actors and audience. Some undertake strenuous expeditions which are physically impossible to most and entail specialist skills, resourcefulness, resolve and independence. For example, two friends ‘bagged’ the Mullardoch Horseshoe – twelve remote Munros normally split into four tough hikes – within 24 hours. Such descriptions entertain, inspire and impress others, but also perhaps reinforce an unspoken pecking order within the community.

Many posts request advice on gear, routes, destinations and ground or weather conditions. Most elicit responses from well-informed members, but also from ‘socialites’ (Mkono & Tribe, 2017) who lack the

skills, knowledge and experiences to socialise effectively in this environment and are not prepared to wait before becoming 'minglers' (Kozinets, 2015).

Munro-baggers' collecting behaviours

Several websites displayed potted walking biographies beside users' profile pictures, sometimes stating the number of mountains climbed, length of membership, number of posts made, and number of followers. Potentially, this may provide a decision-making heuristic to others when judging a member's social standing, negating scrutiny of other social cues, such as the type of responses to their posts. Someone whose display indicates many Munro ascents will likely attract respect (although proof is not required), and some seem to display 'classic' experiences (e.g. – witnessing Aurora Borealis) as prestige indicators. It is likely that these members accrue credibility, and that their representations of Scotland and touristic experiences are trusted and impactful.

Many Munro-baggers, especially those early in their bagging careers, prioritise summiting by the easiest self-propelled means, mainly on foot but sometimes as a 'bike-and-hike'. Some summit, take photographs, then immediately descend – perhaps because of poor weather conditions, time constraints or public transport schedules. Occasionally, such people are criticised as mercenary or disconnected from the 'mountain ethos', despite the reductionist goal of Munro-bagging. Amongst many participants, who are partially motivated by a quantitative objective, there appears a need to moderate the somewhat arbitrary, prescriptive 'rules' of the pastime and present themselves less as 'collectors', more as 'connoisseurs'. On general hillwalking sites, Munro-baggers have been castigated for reasons such as supposedly prioritising list completion over aesthetic appreciation. For example, detractors note that beautiful mountains like The Cobbler, Suilven and Stac Pollaidh are below 3,000 feet yet superior to many Munros. The inference that a Munro-bagger would deliberately omit such mountains is only partially accurate – many seem to deprioritise and defer their ascents of them. However, there is clearly a tension between members' pastime and the ethos and characteristics which they wish to transmit to their publics.

Numerous Munro-baggers have expressed regret before completion of the challenge. Having achieved series completion, some move onto the Corbetts (i.e. – Scottish mountains between 2,500 and 3,000 feet high), Wainwrights (English Lake District summits) or other list-oriented challenges like the Great Run events. A few begin fresh Munro rounds. Some vary these, taking different ascent routes or including subsidiary ‘tops’. Others introduce relatives and friends to the challenge. This does not bequeath a collection as one might a stamp collection but removes the unsatisfactory closedness of finishing a long challenge. Even those replicating their first rounds as closely as possible cannot achieve identical collections as they could with tangible items, as the weather, encounters, timings, and the walkers’ mental and physical states, cannot be reproduced. Through communicating their experiences to others, Munro-baggers may pursue continuity and permanence, thereby transmitting highly personalised, subjective portrayals of the Highlands and pinning them once more to a specific temporospatial context which is otherwise blurred online.

Conclusion

Many online Munro-bagging community members share to build identity, social standing and rapport, to enjoy their pastime whilst away from the hills, and to benefit from full participation online. The work of Witte and Hannam (2017) - who recently looked at the hybrid worlds of five Chinese hillwalking communities in a netnography about the social nature of these spatially and socially stretched networks (Larsen et al, 2006) - analysed online walking identities with only nominal discussion of sharing, focussing instead on identities which developed out of dematerialised space. Therefore, we propose that the literature still currently has minimal engagement with either portals or people who support these socialities of ‘mountain love’, which this work seeks to consider.

As Munroists check in online as ‘proof of life’ verification, they share knowledge, emotion and experiences by posting photographs, videos, status updates and replies pre- during and post-trip. Sharing may be constructive or destructive – for instance, expressing nationalistic sentiment which

reinforces the perceptions of some whilst offending others. Members collect information and advice, and may display their progress within their Munro-bagging 'career' through conversations and personal summaries. Series completion (i.e. – becoming a Munroist) often triggers ambivalence, which online interactions partially address. Elements of serious leisure participation are now extendable into the online domain, elongating its social aspects and enabling actors to derive new value from and within the pre- and post-trip stages, especially through the communitarian sharing of socio-cultural values. By transcending geo-cultural boundaries and dismantling many elements of the pastime's temporospatial situatedness, Munro-bagging is augmented through online technology, and its participants interlinked through renegotiations of self which blur the boundary between the communitarian and the hedonic. The power and credibility of eWOM and the extent of knowledge sharing between Munro-baggers suggest that entities such as National Park authorities, local and national governments, and Highland businesses, could harness online communications for their benefit. Moreover, the use of social media may be considered transformative both to the pastime of Munro-bagging, and the manner in which it establishes itself as a touristic phenomenon within the Highlands. It has helped to transform the pastime from one of relative social isolation, geographical locatedness, specificity of time, and near-invisibility, to one in which adherents can instantly publicise their experiences within an interactive social audience, indulge in remembrances of their own activities and vicarious experiences of others' in unbounded temporospatial situations, and become visible to enthusiasts, novices, and other would-be tourists. This then promotes the Highlands – or at least one facet of them – by Electronic Word-of-Mouth to audiences which would have previously relied on closer social connections and traditional information formats. As tourists hence climb the 'virtual mountain' whilst hiking the real one, we suggest the industry is yet to fully utilise the personal biographies of these body-nature quests, arguably missing the opportunity to drive more footfall if so desired.

References

- Arnould, E.J. & Rose, A.S. (2016). Mutuality: critique and substitute for Belk's "sharing". *Marketing Theory*, 16(1), 75-99.
- Bærenholdt, J., Haldrup, M., Larsen, J. & Urry, J. (2004). *Performing tourist places*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- Bardhi, F. & Eckhardt, G.M. (2017). Liquid consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44(3), 582-597.
- Belk, R.W. (1987). A child's Christmas in America: Santa Claus as deity, consumption as religion. *Journal of American Culture*, 10(1), 87-100.
- Belk, R.W. (1990). The role of possessions in constructing and maintaining a sense of past. Proceedings of the Association for Consumer Research, North American Advances.
- Belk R.W. (1994). Collectors and collecting. In Pearce, S.M. (Ed.), *Interpreting objects and collections*. London, UK & New York, NY: Routledge. p.360.
- Belk, R.W. (2010). *Global consumerism and consumption*. London, UK: Wiley
- Belk, R.W. (2013a). Extended self in a digital world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(3), 477-500.
- Belk, R.W. (2013b). *Collecting in a consumer society*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Belk, R.W. (2014). Sharing versus pseudo-sharing in Web 2.0. *The Anthropologist*, 18(1), 7-23.
- Belk, R.W., Wallendorf, M. & Sherry, J. (1988). Collectors and Collecting. In Houston, M.J. (Ed.), *Advances in Consumer Research, Vol 15*. Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, p.548-553.
- Belk, R.W., & Hsiu-yen Yeh, J. (2011). Tourist photographs: signs of self. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 5(4), 345-353.
- Bentley, A. & Ormerod, P. (2009). Tradition and fashion in consumer choice: Bagging the Scottish Munros. *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 56(3), 371-381.
- Bishop, J. (Ed.). (2013). *Examining the concepts, issues, and implications of internet trolling*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Born, G. (2011). Music and the materialization of identities. *Journal of Material Culture*, 16(4), 376-388.

- Botsman, R. & Rogers, R. (2010). *What's mine is yours: the rise of collaborative consumption*. London, UK: Collins.
- Boyd, D. (2010). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Boyd, D. (Ed.), *A Networked Self*. London, UK: Routledge, p.47-66.
- Boyd, D., Golder, S., & Lotan, G. (2010). Tweet, tweet, retweet: conversational aspects of retweeting on twitter. *Proceedings from the 43rd Hawaii International Conference of System Sciences* (p.1-10).
- Carroll, E., & Romano, J. (2010). *Your digital afterlife: When Facebook, Flickr and Twitter are your estate, what's your legacy?* San Francisco, CA: New Riders.
- Chayko, M. (2002). *Connecting: How we form social bonds and communities in the digital age*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Chayko, M. (2008). *Portable communities: the social dynamics of online and mobile connectedness*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Cothrel, J. & Williams, R.L. (1999). On-line communities: helping them form and grow. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 3(1), 54-60.
- Cushing, A.L. (2012). *Possessions and self extension in digital environments: Implications for maintaining personal information* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
- Daily Record (2018) "Scots climber plans to get NAKED at the top of every mountain he climbs after viral starkers summit snap" (21st July, 2018, accessed 2nd December, 2018). DOI: <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/scotland-now/scots-climber-sets-trend-getting-12954449>
- Dannefer, D. (1980). Rationality and passion in private experience: Modern consciousness and the social world of old-car collectors. *Social Problems*, 27(4), 392-412.
- Denegri-Knott, J. & Molesworth, M. (2010). Concepts and practices of digital virtual consumption. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 13(2), 109-132.
- Denzin, N.K. (2014). *Interpretive autoethnography* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage.
- Derrida, J. (1996). *Archive fever: a Freudian impression*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ellison, N.B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook 'friends': social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143-1168.

- Fehr, B. (1996). *Friendship processes (Vol. 12)*. New York, NY: Sage.
- Flanagin, A.J. & Metzger, M.J. (2001). Internet use in the contemporary media environment. *Human Communication Research*, 27(1), 153-181.
- Griffiths, M.A. & Gilly, M.C. (2012). Dibs! Customer territorial behaviors. *Journal of Service Research*, 15(2), 131-149.
- Hagel, J. & Armstrong, A. G. (1997). *Net gain*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Haldrup, M. & Larsen, J. (2006). Material cultures of tourism. *Leisure Studies*, 25(3), 275-289.
- Ham, C.D., Lee, J., Hayes, J.L., & Bae, Y.H. (2018). Exploring sharing behaviors across social media platforms. *International Journal of Market Research*, 61(2), 157-177.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Henning, V., & Sattler, H. (2007). Consumer file sharing of motion pictures. *Journal of Marketing*, 71(4), 1-18.
- Hoffman, D.L. & Novak, T.P. (1996). Marketing in hypermedia computer-mediated environments: Conceptual foundations. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(3), 50-68.
- Hudson, S., Roth, M.S., Madden, T.J., & Hudson, R. (2015). The effects of social media on emotions, brand relationship quality, and word of mouth: an empirical study of music festival attendees. *Tourism Management*, 47, 68-76.
- Ivan, L. & Hebblethwaite, S. (2016). Grannies on the net: grandmothers' experiences of Facebook in family communication. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, 18(1), 11-25.
- John, N.A. (2013). The social logics of sharing. *The Communication Review*, 16(3), 113-131.
- Johnston, S. & Beddow, T. (1986). *Collecting: the passionate pastime*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Kang, J., Tang, L., & Fiore, A.M. (2014). Enhancing consumer–brand relationships on restaurant Facebook fan pages: maximizing consumer benefits and increasing active participation. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 36, 145-155.
- Kankanhalli, A., Tan, B.C., & Wei, K.K. (2005). Contributing knowledge to electronic knowledge repositories: An empirical investigation. *MIS Quarterly*, 113-143.
- Karbo, K. (2006). Friendship: The laws of attraction. *Psychology Today*, 39(6), 90-95.
- Kozinets, R.V. (2015). *Netnography redefined (2nd ed.)*. London, UK: Sage.

- Kraut, R.E. & Resnick, P. (2012). *Building successful online communities: evidence-based social design*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Krotoski, A. (2013). *Untangling the web*. London, UK: Faber & Faber.
- Kunz, W. & Seshadri, S. (2015). From virtual travelers to real friends: relationship-building insights from an online travel community. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(9), 1822-1828.
- Lamberton, C.P. & Rose, R.L. (2012). When is ours better than mine? A framework for understanding and altering participation in commercial sharing systems. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(4), 109-125.
- Lampel, J. & Bhalla, A. (2007). The role of status seeking in online communities: giving the gift of experience. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(2), 434-455.
- Larsen, J., Axhausen, K.W., & Urry, J. (2006). Geographies of social networks: meetings, travel and communications. *Mobilities*, 1(2), 261, 288
- Lee, H., Reid, E., & Kim, W.G. (2014). Understanding knowledge sharing in online travel communities: antecedents and the moderating effects of interaction modes. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 38(2), 222-242.
- Leung, D., Law, R., Van Hoof, H., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social media in tourism and hospitality: a literature review. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(1-2), 3-22.
- Li, X. & Wang, Y. (2011). China in the eyes of western travelers as represented in travel blogs. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 28(7), 689-719.
- Lorimer, H. & Lund, K. (2003). Performing facts: Finding a way over Scotland's mountains. *The Sociological Review*, 51(2), 130-144.
- Lorimer, H. & Lund, K. (2008). A collectable topography: Walking, remembering and recording mountains. In Ingold, T. & Vergunst, J.L. (Eds.), *Ways of walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate. (p.185-200).
- MacQueen, K.M., McLellan, E., Metzger, D.S., Kegeles, S., Strauss, R.P., Scotti, R., ... & Trotter, R.T. (2001). What is community? An evidence-based definition for participatory public health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91(12), 1929-1938.
- Marwick, A.E. & Boyd, D. (2014). Networked privacy: How teenagers negotiate context in social media. *New Media & Society*, 16(7), 1051-1067.
- McNeish, C. (1996) *The Munros: Scotland's highest mountains*. Broxburn, UK: Lomond Books.

- Meenagh, J. (2015). Flirting, dating, and breaking up within new media environments. *Sex Education*, 15(5), 458-471.
- Mkono, M. & Markwell, K. (2014). The application of netnography in tourism studies. *Research Notes and Reports / Annals of Tourism Research*, 48, 289-291.
- Mkono, M., Ruhanen, L., & Markwell, K. (2015). From netnography to autonetnography in tourism studies. *Research Notes and Reports / Annals of Tourism Research*, 52, 167-169.
- Mkono, M. & Tribe, J. (2017). Beyond reviewing: uncovering the multiple roles of tourism social media users. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(3), 287-298.
- Munar, A.M. & Jacobsen, J.K.S. (2014). Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media. *Tourism Management*, 43, 46-54.
- Nimrod, G. (2014). The benefits of and constraints to participation in seniors' online communities. *Leisure Studies*, 33(3), 247-266.
- Oldenburg, R. (1999). *The great good place: Cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community*. Boston, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Olmsted, A.D. (1987). Stamp collectors and stamp collecting. In *Proceedings of Popular Culture Association Annual Meeting*. Montreal, Canada.
- Parry, D.C., Glover, T.D., & Mulcahy, C.M. (2013). From 3Stroller-Stalker3 to 3Momancer3: Courting friends through a social networking site for mothers. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 45(1), 23-46.
- Peele, S. (1985). *The meaning of addiction: Compulsive experience and its interpretation*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books / DC Heath and Com.
- Prahalad, C.K. & Ramaswamy, V. (2004). Co-creation experiences: the next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5-14.
- Prebenson, N.K., Vitterso, J., & Dahl, T.I. (2013). Value co-creation significance of tourist resources. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 42, 240-261
- Preece, J. (2000). *Online communities: supporting sociability, designing usability*. Hoboken, NJ.: Wiley.
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants, part 1. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1-6.
- Price, L.L. & Belk, R.W. (2016). Consumer ownership and sharing: Introduction to the issue. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 1(2), 193-197.

- Putnam, R. (2001). Social capital: measurement and consequences. *Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, 2(1), 41-51.
- Qu, H., & Lee, H. (2011). Travelers' social identification and membership behaviors in online travel community. *Tourism Management*, 32(6), 1262-1270.
- Quadri-Felitti, D.L. & Fiore, A.M. (2013). Destination loyalty: effects of wine tourists' experiences, memories, and satisfaction on intentions. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 13(1), 47-62.
- Rannenbergh, K., Royer, D., & Deuker, A. (Eds.). (2009). *The future of identity in the information society: challenges and opportunities*. New York, NY: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Rheingold, H. (1993). *The virtual community: finding connection in a computerized world*. Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Longman Publishing Co., Inc.
- Rheingold, H. (1994). *The virtual community: surfing the internet*. London, UK: Minerva.
- Rigby, D. & Rigby, E. (1944). *Lock, stock and barrel: the story of collecting (Vol. 692)*. Philadelphia, PA: JB Lippincott Company.
- Ritzer, G. (2014). Prosumption: Evolution, revolution, or eternal return of the same?. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14(1), 3-24.
- Ritzer, G. & Jurgenson, N. (2010). Production, consumption, prosumption: the nature of capitalism in the age of the digital 'prosumer'. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10(1), 13-36.
- Schmalz, D. L., Colistra, C. M., & Evans, K. E. (2015). Social media sites as a means of coping with a threatened social identity. *Leisure Sciences*, 37(1), 20-38.
- Scottish Mountaineering Club (2018). *The Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal 2018*. Glasgow, UK: SMC Publishing.
- Stebbins, R. (2009). Serious leisure and work. *Sociology Compass*, 3(5), 764-774.
- Urry, J. (2002). Mobility and proximity. *Sociology*, 36(2), 255-274.
- Walkhighlands website, accessed at www.walkhighlands.co.uk on 11.3.2021
- Wang, Y., Yu, Q. & Fesenmaier, D.R. (2002). Defining the virtual tourist community: implications for tourism marketing. *Tourism Management*, 23(4), 407-417.
- Wang, Y. & Fesenmaier, D.R. (2004). Towards understanding members' general participation in and active contribution to an online travel community. *Tourism Management*, 25(6), 709-722.

Wellman, B. (2001). Physical place and cyber place: the rise of networked individualism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 25, 227-252.

Witte, A. & Hannam, K. (2017). A netnography of China's emerging hiking communities. In C.M. Hall, Y. Ram & N. Shoval (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Walking*. London, UK: Routledge.