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Citation for the published paper:

**Mei, X. Y., Hågensen, A.-M. S., & Kristiansen, H. S. (2018).  
Storytelling through experiencescape: Creating unique  
stories and extraordinary experiences in farm tourism.  
Tourism and Hospitality Research, 34, 146735841881341.**

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1467358418813410>

**Storytelling through experiencescape: creating unique stories and extraordinary experiences in farm tourism**

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**Abstract**

Creating unique stories through storytelling as a way to stage extraordinary experiences has become increasingly important in the tourism industry, particularly in experience-based activities such as farm tourism (Mossberg, 2008). However, limited resources and the lack of knowledge of the experiencescape (Brandth, Haugen and Kramvig, 2011; Mossberg, 2007) suggest that many farm tourism operators struggle to integrate the experiencescape as part of storytelling. The research method chosen was an explorative study with the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews with key farm tourism operators in the Inland region in Norway. How stories and concepts are created is dependent on the resources available, the perception of authenticity, the history of the farm as well as the environment. Storytelling can be facilitated through tangible elements in the experiencescape such as the physical environment as well as intangible elements including the interaction and dynamics between the host and guest. The farmer or the person telling the story also need to possess certain skills, engagement and interest in order to be committed to deliver the story or the concept. Essentially, the farmer becomes a part of the product and the experience.

Keywords: Storytelling, experience, experiencescape, servicescape, farm tourism, regional tourism

**1.0 Introduction**

There is a growing interest in staging extraordinary experiences for consumers, especially in the tourism industry. One way to stage such experiences and to achieve success is by linking unique stories through storytelling to the experiencescape (Mossberg, 2008). Storytelling has become increasingly important for companies because people want individual and unique experiences. A story can be a “verbal and visual metaphor, which shows the total offering, the

total package, which for tourists hopefully, is received as a positive experience” (Mossberg, 2007: 71). These positive experiences can lead to positive word-of-mouth, which in turn creates competitive advantages that are difficult for other operators to copy (Mossberg, 2008). Furthermore, stories involve people in different ways than ordinary marketing campaigns, as stories are memorable and evoke emotions (Woodside, 2010). Previous research on storytelling has mainly focused on how stories can affect customers’ perceptions of a brand as well using storytelling internally to motivate the employees (Adamson, Pine, Van Steenhoven and Kroupa, 2006; Baker, Levy and Grewal, 1992; Denning, 2005; Woodside, 2010). However, a global trend in the experience-based industries such as tourism is to develop the business or part of the business around a unique story (Mossberg, 2008).

Experience-related studies remain under-researched and there are even less empirical studies investigating the link between experiencescape and storytelling in the tourism industry (Koll, 2015; Mody, Suess and Lehto, 2018; Mossberg, 2008). Experiencescape is a term derived from servicescape and the latter term include the physical environment where the commercial exchange of service occur. The servicescape affects consumers’ behaviour as the surroundings provide rich cues in the type of image that the organisation wants to convey (Bitner, 1992; Mossberg, 2008). As an experience-based industry, the tourism industry involves more than the exchange of services as the ultimate goal for any tourism operators is to provide extraordinary experiences which are memorable and positive for tourists (Campos, Mendes, Valle and Scott, 2018). Nevertheless, tourism operators and farm tourism operators in particular seldom use professionals to stage the experiencescape, as part of storytelling due to limited resources available. Thus, this is one of the reasons why many farm tourism operators choose to focus more on sales of farm products (Engeset and Elvekrok, 2015). Nevertheless, this is not an ideal competitive strategy in the long term as tourists seldom visit farms or partake in farm tourism experiences just to purchase some products. Based on such notion, there is a need for more studies to understand how storytelling can be facilitated by the experiencescape in order to stage extraordinary experiences (Campos et al., 2018; Mossberg, 2008). The purpose of this study is to explore how extraordinary experiences are staged through storytelling with the use of the experiencescape. Subsequently, the following research objectives have been developed:

- Identifying how unique stories are created by integrating the experiencescape into the story or concept.

- Exploring how experiencescape is used to facilitate storytelling among farm tourism operators.

In order to explore the relevant topics in-depth, a qualitative methodological approach consisting of semi-structured interviews with selected key farm tourism operators in the Inland region of Norway was conducted. The region of the Inland is located in eastern Norway and approximately 1.5 hours by car from the capital city of Oslo. This region has experienced growth due to an increasing number of visitors in the recent years (Bergheim, 2016) and several farm operators are combining farming and tourism in order to offer tourists unique experiences.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Storytelling

There are various definitions of storytelling as it is dependent on the context and usage (Kent, 2015). Mossberg and Johansen (2006) indicate that storytelling appeals to humans' demand for a meaning in life as stories engage emotions, stimulate fantasies and thoughts. Sole and Wilson (1999) further describe storytelling as a communication process whereby people share information and experiences through stories and narratives, with the goal of communicating learning, concepts, and causalities. Essentially, "stories are emotionally and symbolically charged narratives" (Gabriel, 2000: 135). The purpose of storytelling is not merely to convey facts and information, but to enrich, enhance and infuse facts with meanings to create a story around a concept (Gabriel, 2000). A story consists of a beginning, middle and end. It often has a turning point or a climax point and sends across a message that is supposed to evoke feelings in the listener or reader (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus and van Riel, 2012). As stories have entertainment value, they attract and maintain people's attention. (Baumeister and Newman, 1994). Lundqvist et al. (2012) further argue that the listeners or viewers must be able to identify themselves with something or someone in the story in order to be fully engaged. Moreover, a story leads the listener or viewer away from negative thoughts and towards a more positive mind-set. From fields such as history and psychology, storytelling is understood as a social activity, which is central to make human experiences meaningful and it opens the opportunity to think about the present in other ways (Scott, 2011). Storytelling is also important to the development of the self as the emotions in the stories are directly connected to the creation of meaning in regards to cause, consequences and goal attainment (Green and Brock, 2000; McAdams, 2001; Singer and Bluck, 2001).

From a business point of view, a good story told through storytelling can influence customers' experience of the company and brands (Jensen, 1999; Lundqvist et al., 2012). Storytelling in the tourism industry is however more than marketing a company or a brand. As an experience-based industry, tourists are not simply purchasing a product or service as they are seeking novel experiences and hedonic benefits. Despite the relevance of storytelling as a strategic resource in the tourism industry, there are scant empirical firm-driven studies to date as it is generally an under-researched theme (Chronis, 2012; Mathisen, 2014; Lundqvist et al., 2012), with the exception of studies such as Engeset and Heggem (2015), Koll (2015), Mossberg and Eide (2017). Engeset and Heggum (2015) propose for instance that farm tourism serving authentic concepts including locally produced food and storytelling as part of the tourism experience will have positive effects on satisfaction. Through stories, farmers can convey information about the past and present to enhance tourists' experiences (Brandth et al., 2011). Stories can be based on traditional agricultural life and this bring authenticity to the tales. This also makes the stories more significant and creates more impact on the tourists (Brandth et al., 2011). Brandth et al. (2011) further draw attention to the use of symbols, such as language, clothes and behaviour, to influence tourists' perception of the story and the physical environment. Through storytelling, tourism organisations can stage the experience for tourists by creating a holistic image of the concept (Mossberg and Johansen, 2006). Hence, storytelling in tourism is tool and resource that focuses on developing a concept around a story (Deighton, 1992; Mathisen, 2014; Mossberg and Johansen, 2006).

### *2.2 Extraordinary tourism experiences*

While experiences have existed as long as human beings have existed, it was Pine and Gilmore (1998), who conceptualised the term experience economy and the progression of economic value which illustrates how companies can gain a stronger competitive advantage by focusing on staging experiences rather than just selling goods and providing services. Experience is essentially different from service as it is a personal, interactive and complex phenomenon, which emphasises on fantasies and feelings, and requires immersion and active participation from the consumers (Jernsand, Kraft and Mossberg, 2015; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Ooi, 2005). A tourism operator cannot make the experience for the tourist, but it can stage the context around it so that the tourist achieves the best experience as a mental response to the stimulus in environment (Mossberg, 2007). Experience is also intangible as well as host and guest interactions. The presence of other consumers and their performance as well as social status also influence the experience (Lichrou, O'Malley and Patterson, 2008; Poulsson, 2014).

Additionally, as experiences are purely subjective (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), this makes it challenging to develop a sound working definition. In the recent years, the concept of extraordinary and memorable experiences have received more attention. Tourism destinations and organisations have recognised that in order to gain a unique competitive position, they need to provide opportunities for tourists to gain compelling and extraordinary experiences (Andrades and Dimache, 2014; Lugosi and Walls, 2013). Mossberg (2008) defines extraordinary tourism experience as experience outside the realms of everyday and ordinary experiences. In addition, extraordinary experiences are memorable and are made up of memory process functions, as the experience is strong enough to be stored in the long-term memory (Arnould and Price, 1993; Larsen, 2007). Arguably, such experiences are rarely formed based on a single event as they often are the result from many circumstances including surprise, the level of challenge and participation, personal relevance, meaningfulness, interaction with the host, and other stimulations (Arnould and Price, 1993; Berry, Carbone and Haeckel, 2002; Duman and Mattila, 2005; Kim, Ritchie, McCormick, 2012; Poulsson, 2014; Swinyard, 1993). A single event may however be the stimulus that trigger the memorability of such experience. Experience is thus in this context understood as a psychological and mental process, that takes place in the person as a response to stimulus in the environment, or in interactions between the person and the environment.

### *2.3 Experiencescape and tourism*

Introduced by Kotler (1973) and further developed by Booms and Bitner (1981), the physical environment where a purchase takes place can have an impact on the atmospherics by using elements such as sight, sound, scent, and touch to enhance and evoke feelings so that the customer is persuaded to commit to a purchase. The term servicescape was conceptualised to describe such built physical environment in which the service is assembled and delivered. This is then combined with tangible elements that facilitate performance and customer-seller interactions and communication (Bitner, 1992; Booms and Bitner, 1981). The term servicescape is widely applied in the tourism industry including the recent studies of Dedeoglu, Bilgihan, Ye, Buonioncontiri and Okimus (2018) and Line, Hanks and Kim (2018), which focus on experience value and behavioural intentions. Mody et al. (2018) on the other hand used experiencescape in their studies of the hospitableness of hotel staff. It is argued that the tourism industry is in a unique position as although it is technically a service industry, it is beyond simply fulfilling consumers' functional needs (Jernsand et al., 2015). As discussed, when

storytelling is integrated into the “scape” to create unique stories told through storytelling, the tourism operator is not simply delivering a service.

Just as the commercial exchange of service occurs in the servicescape, the exchange of experience or experience creation occurs in the experiencescape. Experiencescape is defined by O'Dell (2006) as the environment in which the tourists' experiences are created as part of their mental process, where the particular contexts, the subjects, the physical objects and their sets of relationships must be considered. The experiencescape influences the way tourists live the experience as it integrates the physical aspects of the environment, the social actors and participants as well as the organisational dynamics and features of the service delivery (Campos et al., 2018; Cutler and Carmichael, 2010). Experiencescape is thus more than the physical environment as understood in the servicescape because consumption that occurs within a physical and social surrounding is themed with hedonic benefits (Mossberg, 2007; Ooi, 2005). The experiencescape is also highly important in tourism since the tourist stays in the experiencescape for a longer time (Mossberg, 2008). The experiencescape is especially important in farm tourism due to the connection between the products that the farm offers and the experiencescape. The latter includes for example buildings, artefacts, and surroundings as well as the persons and the social setting. As the experiencescape is an important way of enhancing storytelling and to stand out from the competition (Koll, 2015; Ryan, 2008), it is vital for farm tourism operators to gain knowledge about how the experiencescape can be integrated in storytelling. Based on the above discussion, it is therefore understood that the experiencescape is the environment and the people involved, which facilitate storytelling whereas storytelling is a tool or resource used to create unique stories around a concept. The ultimate goal for the tourism operator is to ensure that the tourists will gain extraordinary experiences as the output.

### 3.0 Methodology

A hermeneutic and interpretivist view was adopted in order to discover and understand the meaning of people's thoughts and behaviour (Mehmetoglu, 2004). Hence, a qualitative methodology, which focused on conducting in-depth interviews with selected representatives from key farm tourism operators, was chosen as the research methodology. As there are currently scarce studies that combine experiencescape and storytelling, qualitative approach was suitable to discover and explore new topics and concepts (Henderson and Bialeschki, 2002). Such methodological approach allows the phenomenon to be studied in a natural setting,

with a close interaction with the respondents. The study also used an explorative approach, which is a suitable method when the goal is to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon and not to find conclusive evidence (Ringdal, 2013).

### *3.1 Method*

The questions in the interview guide were rooted in existing theories with the aim to gather important information in regards to the research aim and objectives and also to develop new theories and topics (Layder, 2004). Subsequently, the interview guide was adjusted to emerging topics when it was necessary and the questions were designed as semi-structured. The term experiencescape was not directly used in the interview questions; however, it was explained as the physical environment in which experiences are staged. Furthermore, the interview questions also sought to explore the role of the farmer and the host-guest relationships in order to explore the social interaction and other organisational dynamics in the experiencescape (Campos et al., 2018).

The first selection criterion was that the farms had to offer products or activities for tourists, and the second was that the farms had to provide such activities throughout the entire year. Third, it must have been possible for the researchers to conduct the interviews at the farms, as it was crucial to observe the respondents in their own environment (Mehmetoglu, 2004) in order to understand the respondents and the experiencescape. Hence, telephone interviews were not considered. Cooperation from the regional tourism organisation in the Inland region was sought in order to locate suitable farm tourism operators. In total 14 potential farm tourism operators were contacted, and 10 in-depth interviews were conducted which lasted about 1 hour each. A list of respondents is illustrated in table 1. The respondents were informed about the confidentiality and anonymity and that they could terminate the interviews at any given time. In order to maintain their anonymity, the exact location of the farms as well as the size of the farms are omitted in the study. This is because such information would easily reveal the identity of the farms and their operators due to the limited numbers of farms in the region. Participation was strict voluntary and member check was used after the interviews in order to avoid misinterpretations. The member check is an important procedure as it has the ability to determine if the information and findings reflect and represent the realities of the respondents (Hoffart, 1991; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed shortly after the completion of the interviews in order to be verified for accuracy in an ongoing process (Jordan and Gibson, 2004).



As with any studies, certain limitations exist. Due to the limited time and difficulties in recruiting participants, convenience sampling was used. This also indicates that the findings cannot be generalised, which is a common limitation in a qualitative study in general (Myers, 2009). In regards to ethical issues, ethical practice in qualitative methods involves the moral stance employed to respect and protect the people to be studied (Payne and Payne, 2004). The audio material for the interviews and transcripts were stored in a password-protected computer and locked filing cabinet to which only the researchers had access. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study prior to the interviews and an information sheet with information regarding the nature of the project in addition to the researchers' contact details was provided.

**Table 1. List of respondents**

Respondents	Not working farm	Working farm	Type of tourism product offered	Own products for sales in the farm shop	Types of products farmed/produced
R1	x		Accommodation and dining	None	None
R2	x		Accommodation, dining and gallery	None	None
R3		x	Accommodation, dining and outdoor activity	None	Grains, pigs
R4		x	Accommodation, dining, outdoor activities and shop	Edible products	Chicken, cordial, jams
R5		x	Accommodation, dining, and outdoor activities	None	Grains, pigs, cows
R6		x	Accommodation, dining, outdoor activities, café and shop	Edible products	Grains, pigs, potatoes
R7	x		Accommodation, dining, café and gallery	Books	None
R8		x	Shop	Other products	Blackcurrant
R9		x	Shop with small café	Edible products	Eggs, vegetables (tomatoes, cucumbers)
R10		x	Dining, café and shop	Edible products, books and other products	Grains and livestock

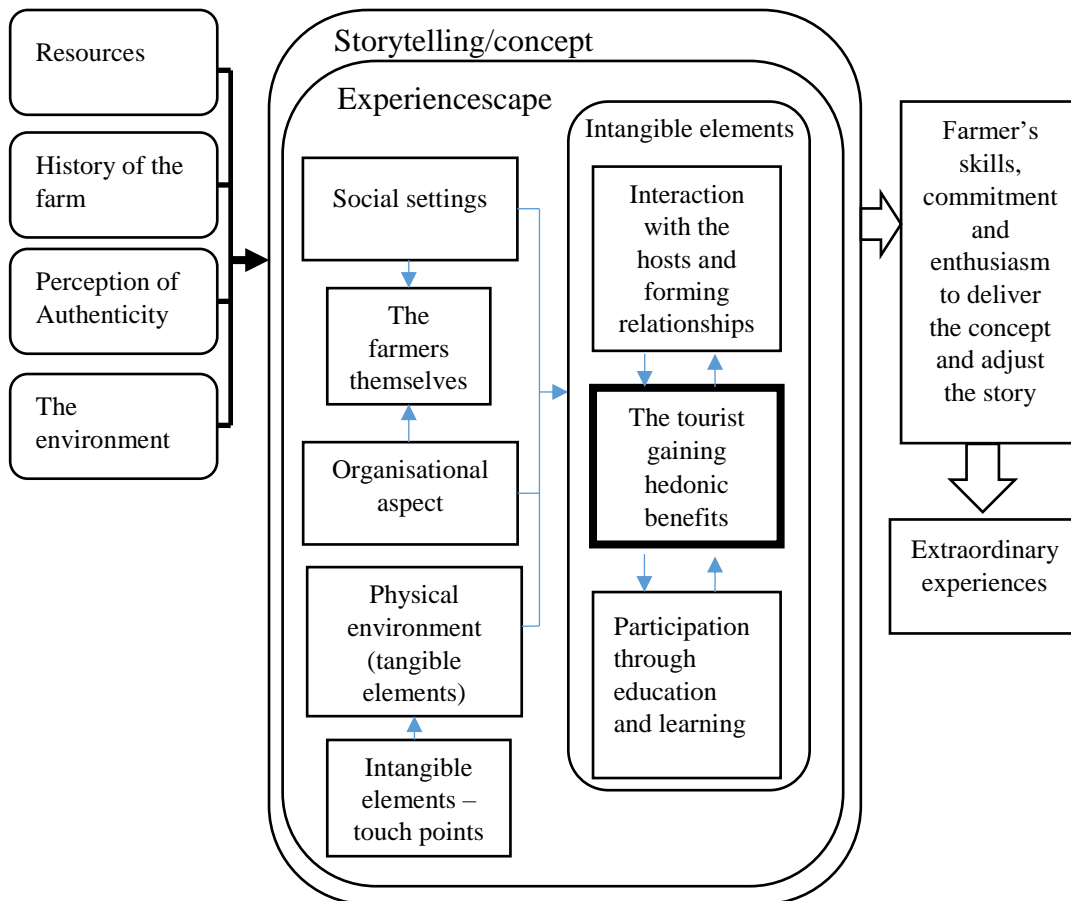
### 3.2 Data analysis

The computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program Atlas was used to organise the data into themes. Although using software programs is risky, as the overview and summary of quotes would lead to irresistibility to quantify these quotes (Bryman and Bell, 2015), the actual analysis and interpretation is still dependent on the researchers and their skills. Precautions was made to

look beyond the numbers connected to the codes. Based on the grounded theory, the analysis method aimed to categorise the collected data in order to gain knowledge about a phenomenon (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). This method consists of three phases of coding. The first phase is open coding where different quotes were identified and categorised according to the research objectives. The codes emerged from the quotes while examining and breaking down the text. Therefore, the code names were related to the topics in question. After identifying the codes, the researchers went through each interview once again, to ensure that each quote had been placed under the most suitable code regarding the interpretation. This phase provided overview of the relevant text and the codes, and made it easier to capture the essence of each category. The next stage was selective coding where the different codes were grouped into categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Four main categories consisting of unique stories, physical environment, interaction and participation, and farmer's skills were identified based on the codes.

### **4.0 Findings and Discussion**

Figure 1 illustrates some of the key findings of the study, which is further discussed in details in the following sections.



**Figure 1. Using experiencescape to facilitate storytelling in farm tourism**

Adapted from Campos et al, (2018, p. 392)

#### 4.1 Creating a unique story

The findings reveal that authenticity and that the story has to be authentic is something that many of the respondents state as important. Authenticity is also regarded by many as synonymous with uniqueness and the uniqueness of the story is often based on the history of the farm itself.

It wouldn't be the same, if we didn't have a good story to tell. Our story is unique compared to everybody else's. And that they (the guests) choose to come here and hopefully [they'll] come back is because they know that they'll have a good experience. An invented story can be dangerous to tell. Then you must be sure that you'll never see them again. I think everyone has a desire

for the real thing, authentic products. That's one of my values in life, everything should be authentic. Real food, real hosts, real environment, the story must be true. The atmosphere is real, it's not fake. I don't wanna tell the history of the farm and tell a lie. That's not how we tell stories. To create a story that doesn't have any connections to me, my parents or the farm would be wrong [R1].

It's about what's personal and real. I just talk with people, it's nothing fake, it's down to earth and real. It's not a story that you've memorised... There might be some storytellers who've memorised some phrases and make that work for them. I just tell what comes naturally to me. It's nothing constructed or planned to make the guest react in a certain way that wouldn't be real. It must be real, natural and heartfelt, it's a feeling you get when you talk to people [R10].

It was also emphasised that the story must be 100 percent or at least close to 100 percent real. From the tourist's point of view, Presas, Grua and Muñoz (2014) also argue that they want to experience something authenticity and real, and negative reactions will occur if the story is revealed as fake. By focusing on the history of the farm, the respondents were also aware of the environment as part of the experiencescape.

I use it [the environment] as much as I can. It's what's unique about the farm. There's no place like this place, and I've to communicate how [beautiful] the environment is. I tell the [guests] where the cows are from... and tell them about how we use the environment [R5].

Many respondents were reluctant to change anything to their story, which also affects how the stories are created and how they make use of the experiencescape to facilitate storytelling. For instance, the idea that the story has to be authentic actually prevents some of the operators from creating unique stories using the experiencescape. Nevertheless, Mossberg and Johansen (2006) and Lundqvist et al. (2012) argue that the story itself do not necessary have to be authentic as long as they are perceived as authentic and credible. Hence, the term "staging experiences" were used by Pine and Gilmore (1998). The scene such as the experiencescape and the storytelling are often staged in order to provide a themed concept. Thus, the story must be

adjusted to fit the concept. Furthermore, the tourists' perception on what is authentic can also be very different from the farmers.

You've to explain how Norwegian farming works, and maybe something about farming politics. He's (a guest) used to, or has only seen farming on film, and a cowshed with 1000 cows, that's what he knows about farming. So then, you've to adjust the story and what you tell... [R5].

Argued in the studies of Mossberg (2007) and Wang (1990), while tourists are still concerned with authenticity, they are mostly concerned with the symbolic authenticity, which a result of social construction and stereotyped images constructed by the media and other forms of marketing activities. Nevertheless, not all respondents were concerned about authenticity. For some, they believe that stories based on the history are not necessary unique or interesting. They would rather create new, unique, and good stories from the present time by making use of the environment and resources available.

It's not very 'wow'. In the old one (the historical farm story), it was cows and pigs. There were a lot of people living here, and that was the way that it was at all the farms...We're building our own story now. When thinking about that, we've...started to grow tomatoes and cucumbers, and nobody here in this area does that [R9].

This also concur with Cohen (1995), stressing that tourists have become less concerned with the authenticity of the original. Hence, how to create unique stories will depend on the resources available at present. This suggests that while the environment and the history of the farm can affect how stories are to be created, the resources that the farmers have available as well as the perception of the authenticity can also affect storytelling in farm tourism and thereby how the experiencescape can be utilised.

### *4.2 The physical environment in experiencescape*

Although no direct questions in regards to the term experiencescape were included in the interviews, the respondents recognise the importance of the tangible elements in the physical environment of the experiencescape to create unique stories. These include the architecture, landscape, venue layout, usable spaces, furnishing and cleanliness (Campos et al., 2018).

Everything is connected, all the pictures that I take are a part of the history... I'm very conscious about which photos I post, about the text, everything is about the life in the countryside, the good life in the countryside, local products, praises of the farmer, Norwegian farming, farm living, to emphasise, yes...that people from urban areas could experience the good life in the countryside. Everything is interrelated, and that's everything 100 percent, from the coffee cups, to the chairs you sit on, to how the cakes are...to the colour of house...From my side, everything has a meaning [R10].

What I said about the quality and that it (the shop) looks clean and tidy, I think that's important for the story, and for the guests, and that they'll visit again. I think storytelling is part of the whole experience, the package and will contribute to an increase in visitors. The investment in a patio with tables and chairs will contribute to a good experience for everybody, both young and old [R9].

In addition to the tangible elements, Woodside (2010) also discusses touch points such as locations, decisions, actions, attitudes, quandaries, decisions, or conclusions in storytelling as a way to influence humans and evoke emotions, which are intangible elements.

That's the main story that I tell. The story from when the house was built. Because the history of the farm goes back more than a thousand years. I could've told the stories about the Vikings, but since I'm interested in the houses and in restoring them, I chose to tell this story. It fits me and my concept, and then I build my story around that. It gives the story a little extra if you tell where it happened. For example, there was a famous person, he stayed in that room. You're going to sleep in that room tonight. Of course, that adds something extra to the story [R7].

Thus, as well as emphasising on the tangible elements in the physical environment, the respondents have recognised that intangible elements are also important as part of the story and experiencescape. In this way, something extra and unique is integrated into the story to affect the experience by creating emotions, excitement, and the opportunity to experience how a

particular famous person have lived the history and the lifestyle (Lundqvist et al., 2012; Mossberg and Johansen, 2006).

### *4.3 Interaction and participation*

While the physical environment is an important part of the experiencescape, interaction between the host and the guest is arguably an even more crucial dimension (Campos et al., 2018). The findings indicate that such host-guest interaction goes beyond an interaction between a business and its customers. For instance, the respondents regard such interaction as personal relationships. Furthermore, they recognise that their physical presence and availability throughout the tourists' entire stay is an important part of the story and the experiencescape.

We're present all the time so the people (the guests) get a very personal relationship with us. It's not a new person they meet the next day, it's us again. Guests who stay in the hotels don't usually say 'thank you so much for having me'. That's something you say when you've visited friends in their home. The hostmanship in this regard is very important [R2].

I've to be here, or my mother. It's something about the personal presence that's somewhat important to people. I notice that people want to talk with us [R4].

The findings concurs with Presas et al. (2014), who state that familiarity is connected to authenticity. As discussed, tourists believe that to have the feeling of authenticity or to be a part of an authentic experience and hear authentic stories is important. This is also achieved when tourists have close interactions with the family owning the business, which in turn lead to positive experiences for the tourists (Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010) and enhanced experience value (Chronis, 2012; Green and Brock, 2000). Further explained by one respondent:

I think it's alpha and omega that we've a personal ownership of the product and the place. I leave at night when my guests are content. I leave them when they go to bed, and greet them in the morning for breakfast [R5].

Thus, the respondents are highly concerned about creating a familiar atmosphere, which is important as familiarity helps them to connect with the tourists and vice versa, and to provide

them with a better experience (Presas et al., 2014). By achieving familiarity, it is also easier to know what the tourists want.

They (the guests) want to experience something. They want to get an insight into how it's here. How we live and how we do things. It wouldn't have been the same if we're not here personally. I'm here all the time, so I can answer their questions...The personal contacts are very important...[R1].

It is highly important to be available to their guests to answer questions and to take care of their well-being. Such level of interaction and hostmanship by an engaging host plays a vital part in experience-based tourism (Mei, 2014). More significantly, many respondents consider themselves as a part of the product and as a part of the experiencescape. This is particularly relevant among farm tourism operators (Engeset and Heggum, 2015). Furthermore, the findings indicate that in addition to create unique stories about the farm as a way to provide additional hedonic benefits for the tourists, many of the respondents were also keen to integrate learning and education elements into the stories and the experiencescape in order to educate the guests about everything from farming to farm policies and local produce.

I tell and speak a lot about the food, everything about the food. Where it comes from, where the recipes come from. It's natural to talk about my food experiences and connect them to the meal [R5]

I'm using the environment (experiencescape) as a reason to talk about farming policies. No one expects that when they arrive here, but when they leave, they know that they've obtained a lot of information about that [R8].

The literature debates about means to create extraordinary experiences that are memorable as some studies argue that tourists themselves need to participate both physically and mentally in order to create memorability (Arnould and Price, 1993; Berry et al., 2002; Duman and Mattila, 2005; Poulsson, 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Swinyard, 1993). Nevertheless, in context of farm tourism, when tourists participate in learning activities and interact with the farmer and new people as a part of storytelling, they find themselves in a new environment, which strengthens emotions and feelings because new knowledge is acquired. Such stimulus and engagement lead to the elements of surprises, which arguably can also create meaningful memories (Campos et al., 2018).



### *4.4 The farmer's skills and commitment*

The findings reveal that the person delivering the story has an important impact on storytelling. This includes the skills and commitment to tell the story and recognise the different needs among the audience. Storytelling is more than simply transferring information (Lundqvist et al., 2012). The same story may not be interesting and unique for everyone, it is thus important to adjust the experiencescape and storytelling according to the audience.

But of course it depends on each customer or the guest here. Some guests just want to have fun, right, then you tell them fun stories. Others are searching for more in-depth information. Then you use different stories, and then you express yourself in another way, yes. You've to listen to the ones that you communicate with...There are some [guests] who wouldn't listen to one single story...You've to listen, you've to see and feel how the recipient is. Is there a dialogue? [R8].

They want to hear different stories. People from this area want to hear more about people they know who've lived and worked on the farm. They're familiar with the surroundings and therefore they want more specific information about the farm history. I don't think that it's so interesting to tell stories about my great grandfather to strangers. I tell them stories about the history of the area [R5].

Just as experiences are subjective, how the story is perceived by the audience is also subjective (O'Dell, 2006; Ooi, 2005). A genuine storyteller would create the story according to the social, cultural, physical and emotional needs of the participants (Ryan, 2008). The storyteller's enthusiasm and commitment will also affect how the story or the concept is delivered. This is because storytelling is an active mechanism for communicating events and other contextual information as a way to develop connections between people (Quesenbery and Brooks, 2010). These are also part of the social setting such as interaction between the farm and the host as well as the organisational aspects in the experiencescape including the availability and the skills of the staff as discussed by Campos et al. (2018) and Cutler and Carmichael (2010).

Because I greet people when they arrive, I try to twist a bit (the story), sometimes to check how I tell it (the story). When my husband is nearby during the guided tours, he says that I must not tell all the little details. People are going mad, but I sense that they like it. I'm aware of it (how stories are told) myself when I'm somewhere, you've to pass it (the story) on with some enthusiasm, a sort of engagement. Families with children might be some of the most difficult [guests]. It could be a little bit boring for children, but then I try to tell them to taste and smell. And I could always pull the dog's ear, and that's fun for both parties. So, I adjust things a little bit like that [R4].

If I didn't work with food, I'd miss it a lot ... my passion for food is very, very important, also regarding my guests. They become excited too when they see my love for food. That creates a good experience for them as well [R5].

The more knowledge you've the more information authority you have in comparison to those you tell the story to... The more you know, the more fun it's to stand and listen to it (the story). It becomes interesting (for the guest). I've to engage myself...in order to show that it's worthwhile to take a trip there. We've gradually developed an interest and it is not by accident...[R1].

Quesenbery and Brooks (2010) highlight that this is the hardest part of storytelling, to understand that people have different perceptions and thoughts. Not all respondents displayed such enthusiasm and commitment in bringing their story or concept to life. For some, they did not believe that they possess the skills and knowledge on how to create a unique story using the experiencescape.

If it's a skilled person, who understand what it's all about, the ones who are outgoing and social and like to talk to people, it will be fine. If it's the shy ones who do not even like to talk in Norwegian, it'll be difficult. But a smile, something good to eat, and the beauty of the surroundings and the mood, I hope that they'll catch the feeling anyway...[R10].

It's my task... it dawned on me on how bad we farmers are at telling the story. My task is to tell them why the food costs. So there we have a lot to learn [R9].

For some others, they stated that they simply did not have the interest in creating the story and staging the experience.

I think that it has to do with my interest (in storytelling), I think so [R3].

The findings concur with Brandth et al. (2011) as farm tourism operators often struggle to transit from being farmers to tourism businesses, which requires interactions with the tourists. Based on the findings, it can be argued that the farmers or the staff at the farms play a crucial role in creating and delivering unique stories by using the experiencescape. Their skills, commitment, level of involvement and enthusiasm are crucial determinants in delivering the story or concept.

### **Conclusion**

Given the increasing competition among tourist businesses, the use of the experiencescape in storytelling could mean the difference between success and failure. As the physical, social and cultural context in the experiencescape affects storytelling (Ryan, 2008); they in turn affects the experiences that are staged. The history of the farm, the resources available, the importance of authenticity and the environment influence how the experiencescape can be utilised accordingly. Although the perception of authenticity has an impact on how unique stories are to be created, unique stories are not solely dependent on the history of farms as they can be based on the present resources. As not all real stories are unique and interesting, and that tourists may have a very different perception of authenticity and authentic farm experience, the focus should be on creating a unique concept or story based on the uniqueness of the resources available. Subsequently, by combining both tangible and intangible elements in the experiencescape, unique stories can be delivered through storytelling. This will then trigger a mental response among the tourists leading to hedonic benefits and extraordinary experiences that are memorable. While both tangible and intangible elements are important in this process, the intangible elements are arguably the unique determinants that add something extra to the experience, which cannot be easily copied by other competitors. These include the interactions between the farmer and the tourists, the tourists' own participation in the process as well as the farmer's skills. Due to the nature of farm tourism activities where the interactions between the

farmer and the tourists are regarded as a part of an authentic experience, such relationship is crucial in the experiencescape. Likewise, the farmer's skills to deliver the story has a direct impact on how well the concept is conveyed. While it is understandable that many farmers struggle to transit from being a farmer to a host and that not every farmer is comfortable in the new role, such important role cannot be underestimated as the farmer is considered as a part of the product and the experience.

While this study has taken a qualitative approach where limitations exist in terms of generalisability, it has investigated an important area, which scarce studies exist to date. As this study has focused on the suppliers' side in regards to creating unique stories and staging extraordinary experiences, future studies should focus on the demand side and the opinions of the tourists as well as additional farm operators in other regions and locations. Moreover, although this study has identified participation through education and learning as important stimulus in gaining extraordinary experiences that are memorable, future studies should investigate in details the various types of activities in farm tourism that trigger such memorability. Since the ultimate goal for any tourism operators is to stage extraordinary experiences in order to compete in the ever-competitive tourism industry, more emphasis should be on creating unique stories through storytelling and experiencescape in other parts of the industry as well.

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