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How Green Marketing Works

Practices, materialities, and images

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Abstract

There are surprisingly few empirical studies of green marketing practices, and when such studies are carried out, they tend to take a simplistic approach. In this paper, the need to develop more complex and critical analyses of green marketing practices is addressed through the development of a practice theory approach to green marketing.

Drawing on an ethnographic study of the Nordic Nature Shop, this paper explores the marketing of green outdoor products. Through various marketing practices, the Nordic Nature Shop presents the purchase and use of green outdoor products as a way to carry out outdoor practices while simultaneously protecting a fragile outdoors and thereby enabling consumers to be good both in and to nature. The analysis shows that not only are green products marketed through practices, but they are also marketed as practice-enablers, that is, tools in the accomplishment of environmentally problematic practices.

How Green Marketing Works

Practices, materialities, and images

Christian Fuentes

Introduction

In the managerially oriented studies that dominate the field of green marketing, the focus is on understanding how to accomplish the marketing of green products in an efficient and profitable manner (see also Kilbourne, 1998b; Meriläinen, Moisander, & Pesonen, 2000; Ählström, Macquet, & Richter, 2009). These studies set out to profile the green consumer (e.g., Baker, Thompson, & Engelken, 2004; Burke, Milberg, & Smith, 1993; Dickson, 2005; McDonald, Oates, Alevizou, Young, & Hwang, 2012; McEachern & McClean, 2002; Megicks, Memery, & Angell, 2012) and to explore how green consumers make purchasing decisions (e.g., Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Harper & Makatouni, 2002; Leonidou, Leonidou, & Kvasova, 2010; Schröder & McEachern, 2004). Discussions within this body of work revolve around how to communicate with green consumers (e.g., Banerjee, Gulas, & Iyer, 1995; Lord & Putrevu, 1998; Zinkhan & Carlson, 1995), as well as if and how to design and implement green-marketing strategies and programmes (for a more comprehensive overview of green-marketing research, see Chamorro, Rubio, & Miranda, 2009; Charter & Polonsky, 1999; Fisk, 1998; Grove, Fisk, Pickett, & Kangun, 1996; Nair & Menon, 2008; Peattie, 2002; and, e.g., Wong, Turner, & Stoneman, 1996). While these studies generate important and useful insights into the character of green consumers and provide valuable discussions concerning the design of green-marketing programmes, they have two important limitations.

First, although the matter of how green marketing should be carried out is often discussed, there are relatively few studies of how green marketing is actually carried out in practice. That is, there are surprisingly few empirical studies that examine how green marketing is accomplished in the day-to-day practices of corporations.

Second, when empirical studies of green marketing are carried out, those that are produced are highly abstract (often at a general industry level), linear, and rational accounts of green marketing (see, e.g., Grove et al., 1996; Iles, 2008). Following the marketing-management approach (for a critique of the marketing-management approach, see Svensson, 2003), in these studies green marketing is presented as merely a matter of adapting traditional marketing techniques and ideas to environmental issues. The favoured strategy is referred to as green niche marketing (Crane, 2000), and to market green products, a company needs only to find a suitable green consumer segment, develop a green offering that will align with this segment's ethical values and attitudes, and then communicate the benefits of its green products effectively (e.g., Chamorro et al., 2009; McEachern & Willock, 2004; Tsakiridou, Boutsouki, Zotos, & Mattas, 2008).

Neither have these limitations been addressed properly by sociocultural green marketing studies. Studies within this subfield frequently discuss green marketing but do so for the most part in conceptual terms (see, e.g., Burroughs,

2010; Kilbourne, 1998a, 2004; Prothero & Fitchett, 2000; Prothero, McDonagh, & Dobscha, 2010). Furthermore, when empirical studies are conducted, they tend to take a discursive approach, addressing green marketing primarily as discourse (see, e.g. Binkley, 2003; Burgh-Woodman & King, 2012; Kadirov & Varey, 2012).

However, although green marketing practices as such have not received the attention they deserve, there are several sociologically informed studies of green marketing that stress both the importance of examining actions/doings and the social complexity involved in accomplishing green marketing. Crane (1997), for example, develops a cultural approach and analysis of how green products are developed and marketed. Through a qualitative and inductive case study of a large, established UK manufacturing and retail company he refers to as ABC, the author explores several of the cultural and political organization processes that are involved in developing and marketing green products. He shows, among other things, that the greening of the organization in this case also involved a demoralization of greening, in which green issues are made part of the existing non-green organizational culture. In a similar vein but drawing on recent developments in the market practice research stream (Araujo, Kjellberg, & Spencer, 2008; Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006, 2007), Reijonen and Tryggestad (2012) examine the “greening” of markets through a study of the development and commercialization of a “polyvinylchloride-free” and “environmentally friendly” urinary drainage bag in the medical market. By tracing this process of market making and product qualification, the authors show, among other things, that sociotechnical arrangements play a crucial role in defining what counts as environmentally friendly and in what way or ways. Finally, working along the same lines but broadening the scope, García-Rosell, Moisander and Fahy (2011) propose and illustrate a multi-stakeholder perspective on creating and managing strategies for sustainable marketing. Drawing on a study of a network of female, rural, and small tourism entrepreneurs and their development of sustainable tourism services, the authors show some of the social complexities involved in integrating sustainability issues in day-to-day business practices.

What these studies demonstrate is that there is much to be gained by drawing on social theory and examining the actions/doings/micro practices involved in green marketing. These studies indicate that green marketing involves and draws on complex social processes that include both discursive and material elements.

Against this background, I argue that there is a need to further develop theoretical and methodological approaches to green marketing that acknowledge and “unpack” the complexity of this specific form of marketing. Taking a step in this direction, the goal in writing this paper is to contribute to sociocultural studies of green marketing by developing a *green marketing as practice* approach and analysis. More specifically, the aim of this paper is twofold: first, to formulate a practice-based approach to green marketing and, second, putting that approach to work, to develop a practice-based analysis that explains some of the social mechanisms involved in green marketing.

In what follows, this is undertaken in two steps. First, drawing on practice theory, a conceptual framework of green marketing as practice is outlined. From a practice theory perspective, practices are complex units of analysis involving and depending on understandings, know-how, feelings, and material artefacts. Practice theory advocates argue that the social consists of a nexus of practices

(Schatzki, 2001) and that it is by thinking and studying practices – arrays of doings and sayings – that we can trace the continuous making of social entities, (Reckwitz, 2002). Within marketing, practice theory informed studies have shown that marketing involves more than mere technique. Marketing practices are complex and performative. The marketing of any product or service involves a range of different elements, such as knowledge, artefacts, a specific understanding of the world, and so on, and transforms these elements (Araujo, 2007; Cochoy, 1998). Marketing plays an active and, sometimes, important role in constructing the entities of the world, both economic and non-economic. From this perspective, green marketing cannot be expected to be a simple and linear endeavour. Nor can it be delimited to fulfilling the (already-existing) needs and wants of green consumers. Instead, one can assume that green marketing is performative; it is about enacting a reality and about presenting green products and services as meaningful alternatives to consumers. Furthermore, the practices that are involved in accomplishing this can be expected to be complex and to include various elements.

Second, the “green marketing as practice” framework is put to use in a specific empirical context. Drawing on an ethnographic study of the Nordic Nature Shop and its marketing work, I explore a specific example of green marketing. The analysis that follows examines the marketing practices carried out at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets. It demonstrates how the practices of window dressing, decorating, and trail-making carried out by shops’ assistants work to frame outdoor products as “green” in different ways and construct a purpose for these products.

The analysis developed will show that green marketing is indeed a practical matter. The marketing of green products, the paper argues, is both accomplished through practice and aims at promoting a specific set of practices as a way of constructing a purpose for green products.

A practice theory approach to green marketing

Within marketing, practice theory has, for example, been used to discuss how marketing constructs markets (e.g., Araujo, 2007; Cochoy, 1998; Cochoy, 2009; Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006, 2007) how corporate branding is accomplished in/through organizational practices (Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, & Laine, 2011), how service work practices relates to organizational logic (Svingstedt, 2012), and how value is formed in and through service marketing and consumption practices (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Korkman, 2006). Practice theory is thus one of the theoretical resources employed within the emergent field of marketing-as-practice (Skålén & Hackley, 2011).

Continuing in this vein, I will draw on practice theory to conceptualize green marketing as a complex of practices. In what follows, I draw on three general traits of practice theory in order to devise a version of practice theory to be used in the analysis of green marketing.

First is the focus and status of practices. From a practice theory approach, practices are the smallest units of analysis, the lens through which the social and its multiple productions are to be viewed. According to Schatzki, a practice approach involves analyses that either “develop an account of practices” and/or “treat the field of practices as the place to study the nature and transformation of their subject matter” (Schatzki 2001: 2). Following Reckwitz, a practice is often defined as:

. . .a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (Reckwitz, 2002: 250)

A practice involves (human) bodies trained to behave in certain ways and to engage with the world in specific ways. The individual is here an embodied performer of practice and the meeting point of multiple practices (Reckwitz, 2002; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012).

Second, most practice approaches take a heterogeneous approach, using the “practice unit” to connect many elements previously treated in isolation. Practices, Reckwitz tells us, involve and depend on understandings, know-how, feelings, and material artefacts:

A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. – forms so to speak a ‘block’ whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements. (Reckwitz, 2002: 249–50)

Simplifying the heterogeneous approach somewhat, Shove and colleagues have developed a scheme in which the multiple elements of practice are collapsed into three: materials, competences, and meanings (Hand, Shove, & Southerton, 2005; Shove & Pantzar, 2005; Shove et al., 2012; Shove, Watson, Hand, & Ingram, 2007). *Competence* includes background knowledge, know-how, and skills – all the necessary cognitive capabilities required to successfully perform a practice (Hand et al., 2005). *Meaning* is used to collapse what Reckwitz (2002) describes as mental activities, emotion, and motivational knowledge. Meaning thus includes “the social and symbolic significance of participation at any one moment” (Shove et al., 2012: 23). The term *materials* encompass what we normally understand as materials such as objects, tools, and infrastructures as well as the body itself (Shove et al., 2012). The term is used to denote the material dimension of practices, that is, the hardware required to perform a practice. The separation between these three different types of elements is only analytical. In practice, these elements co-constitute each other; they form inseparable socio-material assemblages. Any one practice is thus dependent on a specific configuration of meanings, competences, and materials – a configuration that can, and often does, change over time, as old links are broken and new ones are made (Hand et al., 2005; Shove et al., 2012).

From this perspective, to think in terms of practice is to treat materiality and its meanings, images, and things, and humans and non-human entities alike as simultaneously and intrinsically interlinked. Taking a socio-material approach means acknowledging that things “play an active part in the generation, stabilization, and reproduction of social order” (Preda, 1999: 349) and can also be carriers of practices (Hagberg & Kjellberg, 2010). However, of course, the agency of materiality is dependent on the specific practice (or practices) in which it is incorporated and the specific configuration of which it forms a part (Shove et al., 2012).

Finally, practice studies often take an explicitly performative approach.

Every practice is both dependent upon and a producer of a set of elements, a socio-material assemblage. A practice as an entity, that is, as a recognizable conjunction of elements, is held together (and transformed) by multiple performances – the doings of the practice (Shove et al., 2012). It is thus through socio-material practices that links are formed and broken; it is through practices that the social itself is *enacted* (Law & Urry, 2004; Schatzki, Cetina, & Savigny, 2001; Shove et al., 2012).

Drawing then on the framework sketched out above, one can say that taking a socio-material practice approach to green marketing involves three things. First, it involves the conceptualization and examination of the actual practices involved in green marketing. Second, taking a socio-material practice perspective means considering the materials, meanings, and competences involved in the marketing of green products, services, and practices. An analysis of green marketing cannot be focused solely on the human aspect but must also take into account the role that artefacts and technology play. This means that green marketing has to be understood as a heterogeneous accomplishment carried out through, and also co-constitutive of, specific socio-material assemblages (see also, Fuentes 2011). Third and finally, drawing on practice theory, green marketing is in this paper conceptualized as a performative practice (as all marketing is argued to be; see, e.g., Araujo, 2007; Cochoy, 2008, 2009; Hagberg & Kjellberg, 2010; Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006, 2007). In this way, green marketing, like all marketing, co-constructs the world and its entities (see also, Fuentes 2014). The question is how this is accomplished, that is, through which practices and processes, and what is produced as a result.

In summary, a practice theory approach offers a distinct heuristic device that allows us to understand green marketing work as an on-going accomplishment that is situated in the intersection of multiple practices (Skålén & Hackley, 2011). It is a way of thinking and writing about green marketing that allows us to treat green marketing as a social, practice-based, complex, and performative phenomenon (Fuentes 2011). From this perspective, green marketing cannot be delimited to fulfilling the (already existing) needs and wants of green consumers, and it cannot be expected to be a simple and linear endeavour. Instead, one can assume, green marketing is about enacting a reality; it is about presenting green products, services, and practices as meaningful alternatives to consumers. Furthermore, the practices that are involved in accomplishing this goal can be expected to be complex and to include various elements.

Method and materials

In this paper, green marketing is explored through an ethnographic study. The focus is on the marketing practices carried out at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets and how these marketing practices work to promote green products. The Nordic Nature Shop and its marketing practices work, therefore, as an example of green marketing. This case is used to illustrate and develop a practice theory approach to green marketing.

The Nordic Nature Shop has, at the time of this writing, 31 outlets where consumers can find a wide range of products, including backpacks, sleeping bags, camping tents, hiking boots, sandals, jackets, t-shirts, camp stoves, cooking gear, and books, covering different needs related to outdoor life. The outlets are almost exclusively located in city centres, are usually well organized, and are decorated to signal a nature theme.

As I have stated elsewhere (Fuentes 2011), there are several reasons why the Nordic Nature Shop is a suitable case for studying green marketing as practice. To begin with, the phenomenon under study, green marketing, is easily visible at the Nordic Nature Shop. Like many other retail corporations (Blombäck & Wigren-Kristoferson, 2011; Jones, Comfort, & Hillier, 2005), the Nordic Nature Shop has taken measures to include more environmentally friendly products in its merchandise line. During the three and a half years I studied the company, the number of green products marketed increased, and environmental issues became more prominent in the company's marketing materials. Towards the end of the fieldwork, a substantial share of products carried by the Nordic Nature Shop were using environmental arguments in their marketing.

There are also several reasons why an ethnographic approach is appropriate for this study. With a focus on doings and sayings, emergent design, and a holistic approach, the ethnographic method (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Crang & Cook, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Moisander & Valtonen, 2006) has been argued to be well suited for studies influenced by practice theory (Halkier & Jensen, 2011; Korkman, 2006). The attention to detail; the combination of interviews, observations, and collections; and the analysis of textual and non-textual artefacts allows researchers to examine and illustrate (some of) the complexities of heterogeneous practices involving meanings, competences, and materials. Thus, this is what can be called a heterogeneous ethnography (see also Bruni, 2005) focused on a specific set of marketing practices. Although this ethnographic study, unlike many of the ethnographies carried out within marketing and consumption studies, does not focus on consumers and their community-building and identity-construction processes (see, e.g., Belk & Costa, 1998; Peñaloza, 1999; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), there are many similarities. Like most ethnographies, this study concentrates on a single case (but not on a single site), has an emergent design, and combines multiple data-gathering techniques. More specifically, this study comprises three sets of ethnographic data.

First, to understand the (green) marketing practices carried out at the Nordic Nature Shop, I conducted approximately 80 observations over a period of 40 months. I began the fieldwork in April 2006 and performed the final observation in August 2010. Of these observations, 70 were carried out at 13 different Nordic Nature Shop outlets and 10 were at other outdoor and sporting goods stores. Observations lasted anywhere from 10 to 45 minutes, and field notes were written within a day, usually directly after a session in order to ensure retention of as much detail as possible. When visiting the stores, I also collected marketing materials and took photographs of the premises and display windows.

These observations gave me an understanding of how green outdoor products are marketed at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets and how consumers shop for these products. I observed different marketing practices utilised at the various outlets by shop assistants and store managers in order to market the company's products and attend to customers. I also observed and categorized different shopping practices employed by consumers at these outlets.

Second, to get an idea of how outdoor enthusiasts shop for outdoor products, construct their own outdoor practices, and, more generally, relate to the outdoors, I conducted 12 interviews with 12 outdoor enthusiasts. The informants had three things in common: they described themselves as outdoor enthusiasts; they carried out outdoor practices (trekking, climbing, canoeing, etc.); and they

shopped at the Nordic Nature Shop. Aside from these criteria, they constituted a fairly diverse group. Eight men and three women ranging in age from 24 to 73 years were interviewed. The informants had different educational backgrounds, occupations (e.g., students, managers, computer technicians, retirees, and guides), and outdoor interests (e.g., trekking, climbing, skiing, kayaking, fishing, and mushroom picking). Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was transcribed verbatim.

The interviews produced material in which consumers described both their shopping practices at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets and the outdoor practices they performed using the acquired products, framing and ascribing different meanings to these practices as they described them.

Third, to better understand the marketing practices employed by the Nordic Nature Shop and how they were used to market green products, I interviewed two shop assistants about their work, and I conducted a brief telephone interview with the CEO of the Nordic Nature Shop Company. The interviews with the shop assistants lasted approximately 50 minutes each and were also transcribed verbatim. The telephone interview with the CEO was much briefer but nevertheless yielded valuable information. While the interviews with the shop assistants were concerned with the marketing work carried out at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets, the interview with the CEO was directed towards more-strategic issues. The information collected through these interviews gave me a better understanding of the understandings and knowledge involved in the marketing carried out at the shops and the meanings ascribed to these practices.

The analysis was on going throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and writing. The analytical categories were developed through close readings of the material (e.g., interview transcripts, field notes, brochures, and websites), the use of common coding techniques, and the constant comparative method (for an introduction to the constant comparative method, see, e.g., Crang & Cook, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The analysis emerged from two types of questions. The first type comprised more-basic questions concerning what was done/said at the stores: What types of marketing practices are carried out at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets? What elements are involved? The second type of question dealt with what these practices produced: What is enacted in/through these practices? In what way(s) do they frame green products as meaningful? All types of materials were used in combination to generate answers to these questions, although some types of materials were more central in answering some questions than others (e.g., observational data was more central to describing the practices carried out, while text material and interviews were more central to answering questions regarding what was enacted).

These categories were not developed solely from the empirical data. Both the outlined theoretical framework and the formulated research questions guided the coding and development of categories. Practice theory worked, in other words, as a heuristic device, organizing the analysis/material. The specific practices and processes, mechanisms discussed were, however, the result of the specific analysis of this case.

Quotes from field notes, quotes from marketing materials, and interview excerpts are used to illustrate the analysis. These quotes and excerpts have been selected to illustrate the analytical points made. An effort has also been made to illustrate the various types of materials collected to give readers a “feel” for them.

Marketing practices at the shops

While the Nordic Nature Shop outlets carry green products, they are marketed in the same way as other products, using the same practices. Green marketing practices are green only in the sense that they include different green products and messages. Therefore, to understand how the Nordic Nature Shop works to market green outdoor products, we must understand how these stores market outdoor products in general (Fuentes 2011).

In this section, I describe the marketing practices of window dressing, decorating, and trail making; the meanings, competences, and materials involved in their performance; and the socio-material effects of these practices. While these are only a few of the marketing practices carried out at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets, they are consequential to how the products are framed.

Arranging window displays

As I approached the shop, I was met by a large green sign with white letters proclaiming “The Nordic Nature Shop” to those who passed by. Three large display windows dominated the front of the shop. In the first of these window displays were mannequins dressed in colourful outdoor clothing of the Haglöfs brand. In front of the mannequins was an advertising poster explaining the various high-tech properties of the Haglöfs jacket and pants. The phrases “water resistant”, “wind resistant”, and “excellent breathability” were complemented by informative and illustrative graphics showing how the various layers of material worked together to produce these properties. Behind the products, framing the whole display window, were large posters depicting beautiful landscapes – green hills, rivers, and snowy mountains in the background. (Field notes, 2 April 2007)

The first marketing practice I want to discuss is the practice of window dressing. Window dressing is, I would argue, one of the more important practices involved in the organizing of retail space.

Window displays require considerable work and involve a number of different artefacts. As I could observe and was also told by the shop assistants I interviewed, shop assistants stage products and decorative elements according to themes: items such as artificial snow, sand, rocks, dried leaves, stuffed animals, logs, landscape posters, informative signs, and mannequins are used. Some display-window arrangements are limited to promoting a specific set of products, an ecologically responsible jacket–shorts–shoes combination, for example; others are organized around a specific outdoor practice (such as kayaking), a specific type of landscape (such as a jungle), or a season.

How the windows are arranged, that is, their design, is guided by both organizational procedures/artefacts and locally (re)produced understandings of how a window display *should* look in order to appeal to potential consumers. The outlets typically receive messages conveying a head-office window-arrangement concept, as well as an example formulated by a “shop designer” hired by the head office:

. . . It often comes from above. Not always, but . . . more or less. Right when the catalogue comes out and it’s peak season, there’s usually more. We may have ordered a lot of one product and want to get it moving. . . . We have an activity plan with planned campaigns. (Interview with Jakob, shop assistant)

At other times, shop assistants are allowed to design the window displays according to their own designs and ideas, something that many of the shop assistants appreciated, I was told. The competence involved in making a “proper” Nordic Nature Shop display is, in part, diffused through formal instructions and examples (abstracted know-how) but has to be re-contextualized by the shop assistants as they build the displays (on the dispersion of competence, see Shove et al., 2012).

As the quote above illustrates, the window displays are designed with specific purposes in mind and to accomplish various tasks, such as “activating” a product or launching a new catalogue. By putting together these arrangements, shop assistants are not merely arranging window displays; they are also assembling consumption promotion devices (du Gay 2004). The intended function of window displays devices is to communicate the Nordic Nature Shop concept to potential customers passing by in the hope of attracting their attention and to entice them to enter the stores and enrol them into the stores network (Brembeck et al. 2007). Their goal is to make the stores and their products relevant to consumers in various ways. The window displays show products and connect them to specific outdoor activities such as trekking or skiing, to specific landscapes such as tropical jungles or deserts, or simply to specific brands. The use of large glass windows allows passers-by to see into the shops. People on the street are able to see not only the products staged in the display windows but also products within the store. They see the products on display, people walking around browsing, shop assistants organizing products, and many other aspects and activities central to the outlets. In this way, the material itself, that is, the glass, is an important actant (Latour 2005) that makes the shop’s space transparent and helps display the products. The window-display assemblages also help “open up” the shops by visualizing the theme of the shop to consumers passing by.

Decorating the shops

I entered the shop and took a look around. The décor was dark-green in colour. The walls, some of the racks, and the cashier’s counter were all made of wood. There were also some benches, placed there for shoppers to sit on when trying on shoes, made out of logs and surrounded by artificial grass. I could hear birds singing. The sound, I realized, was coming out of small speakers cleverly positioned throughout the shop. As I examined the décor more closely, I was surprised to see several reindeer heads mounted on the walls. (Field notes, 5 April 2007)

Another important marketing practice is the decorating of the Nordic Nature Shop outlets. It is common to decorate shops according to a theme that, in one way or another, is connected to the products being marketed (see, e.g., Borghini et al., 2009; Peñaloza, 1999; Sherry et al., 2001). As one might expect, the overriding theme at the Nordic Nature Shop is “nature”. The thematization of this retail space (and the subsequent representation of indoor “nature”) is achieved mainly through placing and ordering a number of nature producers. That is, several artefacts are used to represent (and perform) nature in different ways. The use of real wood is one example. The walls are often lined with timber and the floors are made of unpainted wood; in addition, the shops are also decorated with a range of other wooden décor details. One can find fitting rooms made of wood, tree stumps used as display devices, old tree branches used as decorations, and cashiers’

counters made completely out of wood. Similarly, rocks and sand are used to symbolise “beaches” and “mountain walls” inside the outlets. In some outlets, walls and parts of the floor are made of granite or another type of rock, often in connection with displays of climbing equipment. Artificial grass is used to stage products in display windows and inside shops, often in combination with real plants used in an effort to reinforce the nature theme.

The practice of decorating the outlets, as in the case of window displays, is guided both by organizational procedures and by understanding what it means to decorate a shop. The shop designer designs the outlets, and the shop assistants maintain them, adding decorative elements, changing them, and rearranging them over time and with specific goals in mind. The competences involved in this marketing practice are thus both materialized, in the store design itself and in the instructions and illustrations provided by the head office, and embodied by shop assistants (for a discussion on human and non-human competence, see Watson & Shove, 2008).

The inclusion of these nature props can be understood as efforts to thematicize the shops, and the nature theme is used to frame the products sold. Often, consumers who like to stroll around the themed shopping trails appear to also appreciate such efforts. What is constructed in and through this practice is a marketing assemblage that stretches across the outlets. These decorating assemblages are seamlessly intertwined with the shopping trails and other spaces within the stores, and they serve to “naturalize” the indoors, so to speak.

Making trails

Guided by the trails, I browsed through products, looking at, touching, and even smelling them at times. I read brochures that were laid out and looked at posters. It was all fairly pleasant, and I soon felt comfortable enough to start trying out products. A jacket in a dark-brown colour, not unlike the one I was wearing, attracted my attention. I proceeded to look for a medium-sized jacket, found one, and took it with me as I tried to find a mirror. I put my own jacket along with my bag on the floor and tried on the jacket. Looking at myself in the mirror, I felt somewhat disappointed; I did not look at all as I had imagined I would. The jacket didn’t seem to fit – too short in the sleeves, too long in the waist. I took off the jacket and put it back on the rack where I’d found it. (Field notes, 5 February 2009)

A third marketing practice at the Nordic Nature Shops is the practice of trail making. Much of the work of shop assistants concerns arranging shopping trails. This entails organizing the trails, replenishing stock, and continuously tidying up the shops. According to shop assistants, organizing and replenishing the shopping trails is their most time-consuming task:

Often during the week there are so many deliveries to hang up. . . . A pile of boxes usually stands right at the entrance of the store. Then you have to attach the price tag and alarm, and then hang everything up. It takes quite some time . . . that’s why so many of us work there. There are actually three of us on weekdays. . . . (Interview with Cecilia, shop assistant)

As mentioned by Cecilia, stock arrives at the shops during the day and must be unpacked, labelled, and arranged in an organized fashion on shelves, rails, counters, tables, and display cupboards. T-shirts are folded and put on display

tables; jackets are hung on rails; GPS devices are placed in display cases; and hiking boots are mounted on shelves.

This task requires know-how often acquired on the job as more-experienced workers teach novice shop assistants the practice. In addition to this more-informal component, the Nordic Nature Shop also has clear guidelines on how the trails should be organized.

The Nordic Nature Shop's extensive stock is organized according to various logics. Some products are organized according to product category; for example, one often finds an entire section of an outlet devoted to backpacks. Other products are instead organized around an activity, such as climbing. With the current increase in "shop-in-shop" arrangements, it has also become common to organize product displays around a brand. Finally, products are also organized around categories of users. The most obvious examples of this are the sections assigned to products for men, for women, and for children.

What emerges from the practice of designing shopping trails is perhaps the most complex and artefact-intensive marketing device (on the complexity and scale of market devices see Callon et al. 2007) constructed at the Nordic Nature Shop. The shopping trails are seen as central to the Nordic Nature Shop, as they both allow and shape shopping. The intention is to produce a trail that guides consumers through the retail space in certain trajectories. Products, signs, and images of various sorts are arranged to guide consumers, informing them of what the path offers. The trails are also designed to allow consumers to interact more directly with the products. As I observed often at the stores, consumers touch the materials, try on outdoor clothing, and step into staged tents. The different ways of organizing products facilitate different forms of browsing. Organizing products according to product category allows for comparative browsing: consumers can look at various products in the same category, comparing their quality and price. Consumers also explore various products of the same brand, informing themselves about the brand and establishing a relationship with it. Finally, organizing products according to the intended user or intended practice helps consumers reinforce their identities as climbers, trekkers, fishers, men, women, fathers, mothers, etc.

Marketing practices and devices

I have described three marketing practices, each involving a specific set of activities, materials, competences, and meanings. Each practice also resulted in the making of a specific socio-technical marketing device: window displays, decorations, shopping trails. These marketing practices and devices are co-ordinated and interlinked.

From this *complex* (Shove et al., 2012) of marketing practices surges a socio-material assemblage designed to promote specific ways of shopping and consuming. The assemblages put together, in turn, perform various tasks needed to keep the Nordic Nature Shop stores functioning properly: attracting consumers, guiding them through the stores, informing them, and displaying products. It is an example of a market device – a material and discursive assemblage that intervenes in the making of a market (Callon et al. 2007) – for (green) outdoors products.

Promoting outdoor practices for the products

How do the marketing practices and devices described above work to market green outdoor products? My argument is that, more than simply making

environmentally friendly outdoor products available, displaying them, and providing information about them, the Nordic Nature Shop outlets work, through the practices of window dressing, decorating, and trail making, to promote a *set of outdoor practices* for which these products are indispensable. This retailer works simultaneously to make associations and circulate images that create the conditions needed for consumers perform outdoors practices (Shove and Pantzar 2005) and frames its products as necessary for the performance of these practices.

In the following, I present my argument in two sections. I begin by discussing how the Nordic Nature Shop stores promote a set of outdoor practices for outdoor products in general. In the next section, I examine in detail how these practices are “greened” in order to construct a purpose for green outdoor products.

Ways of being outdoors

First and most basic, in the process of marketing its products, the Nordic Nature Shop promotes outdoor practices, showing consumers that the outdoors can be experienced through various practices. For example, the Nordic Nature Shop shows consumers that there are various ways of walking in nature. Outdoor enthusiasts can walk alone, enjoying the tranquillity of the landscape. Marketing images used in the catalogues and at the outlets depict lone trekkers making their way through empty but beautiful mountain landscapes. But trekking and hiking are also commonly promoted as “social” practices. One of the most vivid examples of this is the Nordic Nature Shop’s marketing of the Fjällräven Classic, a 110-kilometre trekking race in Northern Sweden. At the outlets, one can find posters and brochures marketing this yearly event:

Come join the Fjällräven Classic – a trek in the Lapland Mountains of Sweden and a folk festival for one and all – young and old, people who like to speed through life as well as those who like to stroll, experienced mountain climbers and curious beginners. With the right preparations, you and a group of people who share your goal will conquer a 110-kilometre challenge. (Fjällräven brochure, 2010)

Similarly, the Nordic Nature Shop outlets show consumers that the outdoors can be experienced through kayaking, climbing, skiing, ice-skating, fishing, cross-country biking, and other outdoor practices. Through elaborate product arrangements inside the shops and in window displays and the use of posters, marketing materials, product tags, and flat-screens, these practices are brought to life and promoted.

Thus, the Nordic Nature Shop markets multiple outdoor practices and promotes many types of outdoor practices as well as numerous variations of them. Through the use of various marketing artefacts such as brochures, catalogues, tags, and product arrangements, consumers are shown that there are numerous ways of being in nature. By doing this, the Nordic Nature Shop is also presenting and circulating a specific image of the outdoors (regarding the construction of natures, see, e.g., Braun, 2002; Castree, 2004; Castree & Braun, 2001; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998). The outdoors as represented by the Nordic Nature Shop is not simply a place to revere from a distance, to read about in books, or to enjoy through paintings; it is a place to experience first-hand. You must go trekking, kayaking, and climbing to access the outdoors promoted by the Nordic Nature Shop; you must move into the outdoors, some would say, to truly sense it (Macnaghten & Urry, 2000a, 2000b).

Pleasurable and rewarding outdoor practices

It is, however, not enough to promote various ways of being outdoors in order to sell outdoor products. For a practice to make sense, it needs a purpose (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2001). The logic behind this is straightforward: if a practice has no purpose, there is no point in partaking in it. Accordingly, to market outdoor products, the Nordic Nature Shop also works to connect outdoor practices to specific purposes and meanings. It presents outdoor practices as pleasurable and rewarding and, in the process, presents the outdoors as a worthwhile place to visit. Practices such as kayaking, climbing, and trekking are shown to be exciting, relaxing, fun, family friendly, and so on. In the world presented by the Nordic Nature Shop, it is these qualities that make outdoor practices worthwhile.

For example, many outdoor practices marketed at Nordic Nature Shop outlets are promoted as relaxing; outdoor practices offer “relaxation”, “calm and quiet”, an opportunity to “recharge”. Trekking and hiking are often presented as something one does to “recharge one’s batteries”. In fact, trekking is sometimes presented almost as a healing practice:

Hiking is relaxing and relieves stress in many ways, [leaving you] with many impressions. You get a sense of well being and oneness with nature. Many people also like to hike on their own, often absorbed in meditative harmony, alone with nature and their own thoughts. (Nordic Nature Shop 2007 spring/summer catalogue)

Furthermore, it can be worth mentioning, this vignette clearly resonates with how consumers talk about and experience the outdoors. In the interviews conducted, outdoor enthusiasts described the tranquillity of nature and the pleasures of “getting away from it all” and escaping to the outdoors. Erik, for example, explained what motivates him to go fishing:

. . . but just getting away and just – you don’t have to sit in a boat. You can stand on the shore or . . . It’s calm and nice, you can take it at your own pace. If you don’t want to . . . you maybe cast ten times, and then you feel that now you just want to take it a little easy. Then you put down the rod, and if you’re sitting in a boat, maybe you lie down in the boat and take it easy. It’s like a kind of relaxation. (Erik, interview)

Outdoor practices can, however, also be adventurous, the Nordic Nature Shop shows consumers. For example, in addition to being marketed as a relaxing practice, trekking expeditions are also at times framed as heroic achievements offering physical and psychological challenges. The Nordic Nature Shop catalogue presents the story of two trekkers who took on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route in Northern Spain. At the end of this three-page story, the authors tell us:

Relating the full details of our pilgrimage is impossible: the experience is so much greater than can fit on paper. I was looking for a break from everyday life, and that’s what the pilgrimage trail offered. Callis became captivated by the intense physical challenge of hiking. Personally, I’d never pushed and stretched the limits of my body as I did during this trip. (Nordic Nature Shop 2009 spring/summer catalogue)

Emphasised in this and similar stories are the hardships involved in outdoor practices and the joy and excitement of overcoming the difficulties associated with these challenges.

Again, this way of framing outdoor practices seems to resonate with the meanings ascribed to outdoor practices by consumers. For example, when talking about his Mount Everest trek, Daniel told me that what really attracted him to mountain trekking was:

. . . the idea of going higher and higher up and having a goal. You reach the top and you think, “Now I’ve got here, that’s great”, and then you go down. But still, it’s being in nature too. But mostly I feel that it’s a hundred times more fun to try to go up somewhere than to just go out and walk. So I guess it’s still in some way that you’re reaching a goal. That’s how it is for everyone – you want to achieve your goals in different ways. There’s still something that attracts . . . hiking up to a mountain peak. (Daniel, interview)

In this story of trekking, we see the same theme of struggle and adventure that was put forward in the marketing material.

Another way to frame outdoor practices as pleasant and rewarding is to portray them as “social” activities that you can do with friends and family. For example, a number of outdoor practices are connected to the family theme at Nordic Nature Shop outlets. Images of children trekking, camping, skiing, and cycling appear in the catalogues and in posters displayed in the shops. Children are shown exploring the outdoors on their own terms, looking at branches, investigating shrubs, or playing with rocks. The outdoors is a playground, a place for family expeditions:

What could be better than spending time with children in the world’s best playground, nature. Small adventures like grilling hot dogs, walks in the woods, mushroom hikes, and camping in shelters await just around the corner. (Nordic Nature Shop 2007–2008 autumn/winter catalogue page)

Outdoor practices can also offer an opportunity to spend time with friends, the marketing work of the Nordic Nature Shop shows consumers. Similarly, the marketing material frames outdoor practices such as climbing, kayaking, and fishing as sociable practices. Nature is here enacted as a “social” space (for a similar argument, see Dilley & Scraton, 2010).

In addition, this way of framing the outdoors can be found in the way consumers talk about their outdoor practices. For Erik, for example, fishing was not only relaxing but also a family practice:

I began fishing when I was very young. . . . I’ve fished with the family, or mostly with my dad, since I was little. We have a summer house down on Gotland right next to a lake . . . we always went out with a small boat and just . . . fished for perch, pike, and a lot of herring when I was young. (Erik, interview)

In summary, through the use of multiple devices - posters, signs, product arrangement, and more - the Nordic Nature Shop presents outdoors practices as multipurpose in character. Outdoor practices, the Nordic Nature Shop shows consumers, are simultaneously relaxing and exciting; they offer the opportunity to strengthen relationships and nurture and educate children. Outdoor practices, it becomes evident, are varied and so, it seems, are the experiences they provide.

Problematic outdoor practices

So, one might ask, why are specialized outdoor products required? If outdoors practices are so relaxing, rewarding, and rife with adventure, why not simply go out and enjoy them?

In its process of marketing outdoor products, the Nordic Nature Shop not only presents an image of outdoor practices as pleasurable and rewarding; it also shows them to be problematic. After all, if outdoor practices were only pleasurable, rewarding, and unproblematic, there would be little need for specific outdoor products. A purpose for outdoor products is thus motivated by simultaneously presenting outdoor practices as pleasurable/rewarding and problematic.

The problems highlighted by the Nordic Nature Shop are very much material and physical problems. For example, one of the ways in which outdoor practices are presented as problematic is by showing that they can be uncomfortable. The marketing practices of the Nordic Nature Shop highlight the difficulties that the outdoors and outdoor practices can present for the human body. At Nordic Nature Shop outlets, consumers are shown that, when engaging in outdoor practices, one can get too cold or too hot. It can rain or snow; even sunshine can create practical problems that must be managed. The marketing of rain jackets, waterproof packing bags, water-resistant fast-drying pants, trekking umbrellas, and other water-resistant products contributes to the image of an uncomfortable outdoors. These products are featured in window displays, often as part of arrangements put together to present the spring and autumn “news”. The shop décor also serves to reinforce the rain theme: pictures of rainy landscapes, although uncommon, are also part of the display space of Nordic Nature Shop outlets.

The theme of uncomfortable nature was also easily visible in the stories of consumers. Sara, for example, told me about her trekking trip to Norway, her encounters with uncomfortable nature, and the role her sleeping bag played:

It was really cold. And I freeze easily. So I went to bed really early in that wretched sleeping bag to get warm. I was absolutely freezing and then you couldn't get up even for half a minute. I was practically dying of frostbite. I had to stay in my sleeping bag with a flashlight and read. I didn't want to poke my nose out because my nose got so cold. (Sara, interview)

Besides being described as uncomfortable, outdoor practices are also presented as risky. The marketing practices of the shops associate going outdoors with a number of hazards. Outdoor practices, the Nordic Nature Shop tells us, have the potential for danger. A particularly illustrative example is the marketing of safety products at Nordic Nature Shop outlets. Safety products are marketed for almost every outdoor practice imaginable. Winter landscapes are constructed as particularly dangerous. The Nordic Nature Shop markets first-aid kits for “alpine adventures” as well as “avalanche packages” that include a transceiver, probe, and snow shovel with which to search for skiers buried under snow.

Finally, outdoor practices are represented as difficult and knowledge demanding. For instance, a range of books on the outdoors is marketed at Nordic Nature Shop outlets. The shopping trails often include tables on which books related to various outdoor topics are neatly organized and on display, such as how to recognize edible wild food, how to identify bird species, and even how to

survive in the wild. Similarly, the prominent position given to maps and GPS devices in Nordic Nature Shop outlets sends the message that outdoor practitioners must be able to navigate to avoid becoming lost. Displaying maps and GPS devices suggests to consumers that being a competent outdoor practitioner involves being able to find one's way in "the wild".

Interviews with consumers also show that nature is discussed as risky and challenging. Some consumers spoke of the importance of learning how to navigate. Others mentioned some of the hazards involved in activities like rock climbing and trekking.

Outdoor products as practice enablers

In summary, in addition to attracting consumers, guiding them through the stores, informing them, and displaying products, the marketing practices performed at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets also work to produce and circulate an image of the outdoors and outdoor practices as simultaneously pleasurable/rewarding and problematic, which in turn constructs a purpose for the products this retailer markets (for a similar argument see Shove and Pantzar 2005). In this image of the outdoors and outdoor practices, outdoor products serve a dual purpose. Outdoor practitioners require assistance, first, to carry out outdoor practices and, second, to manage the uncomfortable, risky, and difficult natures of the places where these practices are performed. The job of the products is to provide this assistance. If one wishes to go outdoors to escape from the stresses of everyday life, experience adventures, or simply spend time with family and friends, one must first solve various material-physical and cultural problems associated with the outdoors. In this world, outdoor products function as human-nature mediators for (for a similar argument see, Michael 2000a, Michael 2000b): they solve the problems of the outdoors and enable consumers to carry out outdoor practices by making these practices more comfortable, safer, and less complicated. A practical purpose for the products is thus constructed by linking these products to the accomplishment of (imagined) future practices.

Green in outdoor practices

Green outdoor products are given purpose in very much the same way as are regular "conventional" outdoor products. Like conventional outdoor products, green outdoor products are framed as problem solvers and enablers of successful and enjoyable outdoor practices. The marketing of green outdoor products follows very much the same logic as the marketing of conventional outdoor products, but with several significant differences.

Fragile outdoors

The marketing of green outdoor products adds a layer of problematization to the already problematic outdoors presented at Nordic Nature Shop outlets. However, when promoting green products, the issue is turned around. The Nordic Nature Shop shows consumers that not only are outdoor practices problematic for humans, but humans and the outdoor practices they engage in are also problematic for the outdoors. Paradoxically, by marketing environmentally friendly outdoor products, the Nordic Nature Shop actually problematizes the outdoor practices and products it is simultaneously promoting.

For example, the Nordic Nature Shop has developed a "Greener Choice" label that is affixed to select items in its product range. The rationale is to help

consumers make more environmentally friendly choices, to be “choice editors” (Gunn and Mont 2014). However, in developing, marketing, and using this label to distinguish green products from other ones, the Nordic Nature Shop is also implying that being outdoors and buying outdoor products may be problematic for the environment. As explained in the company’s catalogue:

Our own “Greener Choice” symbol indicates that the manufacturer has actively chosen to make the product more environmentally friendly. It is not a guarantee that a product is 100% environmentally friendly. For example, the manufacturer may have chosen to work with recycled materials, use organic materials, rid the manufacturing process of chemicals, make the product energy efficient, make the product recyclable or to make other choices that are less harmful to the environment. (Nordic Nature Shop 2009 spring/summer catalogue)

By discussing the “Greener Choice” label and featuring it in its shopping trails, the Nordic Nature Shop brings a host of environmental problems to the fore. Drawing on the now-widespread environmental critique of a consumer society, the label indirectly reminds consumers of the “dark side” of consumption (for a similar argument, see Binkley & Littler, 2008; Littler, 2009). First, consumers are reminded that manufacturing products is often a resource-intensive process that can and often does involve toxic materials. Second, consumers are also reminded that consuming these products can demand energy and generate waste.

The marketing of specific green products works in a similar manner. The green products themselves, the texts and pictures on the products’ tags, the display signs, and the catalogues arranged along the trails all serve to market green outdoor products and, in the process, problematize outdoor practices. In the meeting between consumers and product displays, between humans and artefacts, this image of the outdoors is communicated. For example, on one visit to a Nordic Nature Shop outlet, I noticed a display featuring Houdini products. In front of the clothes rack, a sign explained that Houdini was cooperating with the Eco Circle recycling system:

Eco Circle means that the polyester can be recycled again and again without any deterioration in quality. So every polyester garment turned in for recycling makes a great contribution to the environment in which we ultimately hope to eliminate our need for crude oil. If you are uncertain about which garments can be recycled, please contact us to find out. Houdini saves not only your skin – but also the world! (Field notes, 30 June 2010)

By linking its products to the Eco Circle recycling system, Houdini is not just greening its products. These display arrangements also bring to the forefront a number of environmental problems. In the above text, we see a linkage between the raw material of the clothing, polyester, and a substance often associated with environmental problems, crude oil. Through signage and brochures, text and images, Houdini illustrates part of a manufacturing process and highlights some of the environmental problems this process causes.

The marketing of environmentally friendly products simultaneously enacts environmental problems and problematizes other outdoor products and practices. This is something that the traditional literature on green marketing often misses. In the traditional literature, green marketing is portrayed as simply a matter of finding green consumers and informing them about green products (see, e.g.,

Charter & Polonsky, 1999; Grove et al., 1996; Lai, Cheng, & Tang, 2010; Peattie, 2002; Wong et al., 1996). The fact that the marketing of green products draws on and reproduces broader environmental critiques is seldom discussed.

Being good *in* nature, being good *to* nature

However, the Nordic Nature Shop does more than portray the outdoors as fragile. The marketing of environmentally friendly outdoor products also, and simultaneously, enacts the outdoors as a potential political arena. Although the outdoors is fragile, this does not mean that you cannot enjoy it. What the Nordic Nature Shop demonstrates to consumers is that with the right products, there is no reason why one cannot consume the outdoors and outdoor products and still be environmentally conscientious. In fact, the Nordic Nature Shop creates the impression that by purchasing and using environmentally friendly products, one can help preserve nature.

For example, using a combination of product tags, signage, and brochures, the Nordic Nature Shop tells consumers that buying Patagonia products is an environmentally friendly act. This is accomplished by drawing attention to a number of product qualities. Many of the Patagonia products marketed at the Nordic Nature Shop, such as t-shirts, sweatshirts, shorts, tops, and pants, are manufactured with organic cotton. This quality is emphasized in the products' tags, the Patagonia marketing material placed around the stores, the Nordic Nature Shop catalogue, and also, at times, by shop assistants talking to consumers. Similarly, Patagonia products are very often made partly or entirely from recycled material. Recycled cotton, polyester, fleece, rubber, and even latex are used to produce Patagonia shoes, boots, shirts, jackets, and other products. Purchasing and using Patagonia products frequently means consuming an organic, recycled, and recyclable product while contributing to an array of environmental causes and campaigns.

The point is that, in the marketing of green outdoor products, an image of the outdoors is presented in which outdoor practices such as trekking, kayaking, climbing, and skiing can, provided one has purchased the correct products, be considered environmentally friendly consumption practices. The environmental problems brought to the forefront are converted into opportunities for political action, and the purchasing and use of green outdoor products is portrayed as a form of political consumption (for discussions on consumption as politics, see Littler, 2009; Micheletti & Follesdal, 2007; Micheletti, Follesdal, & Stolle, 2004).

What we are talking about here, however, is not traditional politics; rather, this mode of consuming is framed as a form of "life politics" (Butcher, 2008; Connolly & Prothero, 2008). Through the Nordic Nature Shop's marketing practices, the purchase and use of green outdoor products is framed as a way to manage large-scale global environmental problems through everyday practices and a way to build a rewarding sense of identity (for a more-thorough discussion of green consumer identities, see Connolly & Prothero, 2008). The political is not connected to broader collective action but is instead framed as something individualized, closely connected to everyday consumption choices and the process of self-actualization.

Through the marketing practices of window dressing, decorating, and trail making, the Nordic Nature Shop shows consumers that being outdoors is good. The outdoors is an adventurous, relaxing, and social place. And it can also, with the proper products, be an arena for political action and identity construction. In

this context, green consumption is also framed as an opportunity to “act upon the world” (Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, & Malpass, 2005) and as a form of identity construction (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). The implicit promise is that by consuming the “right” products, outdoor practitioners can “solve” environmental problems and turn a problematic activity – being outdoors – into an enjoyable, rewarding, and environmentally benign form of consumption. What seems at first to be a serious problem for outdoors practitioners becomes yet another way in which the outdoors can be enjoyed. Being outdoors, the Nordic Nature Shop suggests, can be a way of expressing one’s ethical-political stance and of constructing a green identity. It can be a way to manage environmental problems through everyday practices.

Enablers of green practice

In the image presented here, environmentally friendly outdoor products offer both a “solution” to the “sustainability problem” and a means by which to transform a problematic practice into a rewarding one. The Nordic Nature Shop presents the purchase and use of environmentally friendly outdoor products as a way to protect a fragile outdoors, thereby enabling consumers to perform outdoors practices while at the same time being good both in and to nature. Environmentally friendly outdoor products are here needed in order to solve environmental problems and enable green pleasures. Green products are thus framed primarily as enablers of practices and solver of problems – both discursive and material (see also Fuentes 2011).

Conclusions

This paper develops a practice theory approach to green marketing and presents an empirically grounded of the practices involved in a specific case of green marketing. The analysis presented shows that green marketing is, at least sometimes, carried out through a complex set of marketing practices such as the practices of window dressing, decorating, and trail making. These practices were shown to be complex and heterogeneous, encompassing both discursive and material elements.

This analysis also suggests that the promotion of green products is a performative project. The marketing practices of the Nordic Nature Shop, I argued, are configured to promote outdoor practices as both pleasurable and problematic, thereby constructing a setting in which the products they sell (both green and conventional outdoor products) are framed as tools needed to “solve” the problems of the outdoors and enable consumers to carry out their desired outdoor practices. In this performance of green marketing, the green products promoted were framed primarily as tools aimed at solving specific cultural and material problems and enabling the (pleasurable/rewarding) green consumption of the outdoors.

And, importantly, the argument here has also been that this performativity is both discursive and material. While the analysis argued that the marketing practices performed at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets worked to produce a specific image of the outdoors, it also showed that this image was produced through specific, socio-material practices and was, in turn, intended to promote other (outdoor) practices.

This practice-analysis both questions and extends the literature on green marketing. In contrast to most managerially oriented green marketing research,

this analysis demonstrates that green marketing is not a linear, rational, easily managed undertaking, as managerial green marketing studies imply (see, e.g., Iles, 2008; Nair & Menon, 2008; Unruh & Ettenson, 2010), but rather a complex, practice-based, socio-material, performative endeavour. Seen from this perspective, green marketing is not primarily about finding the elusive green (or ethical) consumers and developing a product offer that fits their values/attitudes, as we are told by managerially oriented green marketing studies (e.g., Chamorro et al., 2009; McEachern & Willock, 2004; Tsakiridou et al., 2008). It is, instead, a matter of enacting a reality and set of practices in which a company and its products have a clear purpose, in which they make sense. Corporations and other organizations play, then, a more active role in the marketing of green products than managerially oriented green marketing literature admits (see also Fuentes 2014).

In relation to sociocultural green marketing studies, this analysis offers primarily two contributions. It complements cultural and critical studies of green marketing by showing that the performativity of green marketing is not only discursive but also material. It is then not that discursive elements are unimportant but rather that they can, and sometimes should, be understood as linked to social practices (see also, e.g., Crane, 1997; Reijonen & Tryggestad, 2012).

In addition, this analysis contributes to sociocultural studies of green marketing by drawing attention to and illustrating a set of socio-material “mechanisms” involved in marketing green products that have previously not received attention. This specific analysis shows that, in contrast to what one might expect in an identity-focused consumer culture, green products are marketed as tools rather than identity makers. More specifically, green products, this analysis shows, are marketed by promoting sets of social practices in which they have a purpose. A purpose is manufactured by drawing attention to a set of (both cultural and material) problems and framing the green products as (socio-technical) solutions to that problem.

Different settings and conditions for green marketing will undoubtedly change the way green marketing is carried out and the socio-material “mechanisms” involved. As shown in this analysis, the way green products is marketed is very much context-specific. The practice theory approach developed here is therefore not intended as a blueprint for practice theory studies of green marketing. Rather, it is to be considered an effort to develop and illustrate a useful conceptualization and shed light on some of the socio-material mechanisms involved in the marketing of green products.

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