

Learning to slow down: an inquiry of cold-water swimming in Finland

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore how consumers learn to temporarily slow down through active engagement in embodied learning. By adopting an embodied perspective, this study extends understanding of temporal slow-down in consumption experiences.

Design/methodology/approach – This study is designed as a phenomenological inquiry into the lived experiences of cold-water swimmers. Twenty semi-structured interviews with regular swimmers (11 female and 9 male) were conducted.

Findings – This study explores embodied experiences of cold-water swimming and the learning process through which consumers achieve temporal slow-down. This process involves learning various body techniques, extending successful techniques across the entire temporal frame of the experience, engaging in experimentation, and ultimately discovering stable, embodied connections.

Originality/value – This study contributes to consumer research on temporality and embodiment by conceptualizing temporal slow-down as an embodied skill and showcasing the process through which it is learned. It also suggests that emergent experiences that offer consumer autonomy provide fruitful ground for acquiring this skill.

Research limitations/implications – All informants practiced cold-water swimming in Finland, where such activity is culturally and socially accepted and promoted by both government and media. Findings may differ in other contexts.

Practical implications – At the individual level, consumers may benefit from engaging in activities that foreground body awareness to develop a slow-down skill. At the managerial level, service providers should design escape experiences that encourage embodied learning. At the societal level, public institutions may promote embodied experiences as means for developing coping and well-being skills.

Keywords Temporal slow-down, Embodied learning, Experiential learning theory, Consumer escapes, Cold-water swimming

Paper type Research paper

More and more consumers engage in experiential consumption not merely for enjoyment and pleasure but also to escape the anxieties and pressures of their hectic lifestyles (Cova *et al.*, 2018) and achieve temporal slow-down (Canniford and Shankar, 2013; Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). Previous studies suggest that escape into a different temporality often entails engagement in novel body movements or embodied experiences (Hewer and Hamilton, 2010; Scott *et al.*, 2017). For instance, Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) highlight that engagement in slow and repetitive movements is crucial for achieving deceleration. Similarly, Woermann and Rokka (2015) acknowledge that body skills are central to altering the temporal perception of fastness and slowness in various consumption practices. Hence,



previous research recognizes the body's significant role in escape experiences as it aids in attuning to a novel activity or surroundings and even serves as a vehicle for perceiving time as passing more slowly. Nevertheless, previous studies fall short of explaining how exactly consumers acquire the skill of slowing down. This study provides such an account and explores how consumers learn to temporarily slow down through active engagement in embodied learning.

This study is designed as a phenomenological inquiry into the lived experience of cold-water swimmers. Cold-water swimming refers to an activity of swimming in water below 15°C (Knechtle *et al.*, 2020). Such activity does not entail fixed rules and takes place in an extreme and dynamic environment. The findings illustrate how consumers who pursue cold-water swimming on a regular basis achieve temporal slow-down. The process primarily entails learning various body techniques, extending successful techniques over the whole temporal frame of the experience, engaging in experimentation, and finally discovering stable, embodied connections. Moreover, findings showcase that consumers use slow-down skills in their daily lives. This study contributes to the scholarship on temporality and embodiment in consumer escapes primarily in three ways. Firstly, it extends existing literature on temporality and embodiment in consumer experiences by conceptualizing temporal slow-down as a skill that can be acquired through engagement in embodied learning. Secondly, it showcases the process through which consumers learn to temporarily slow down. Finally, it suggests that emergent experiences that offer a degree of consumer autonomy provide learning opportunities and facilitate skill development related to temporal slow-down.

This study is structured as follows. I begin with reviewing prior literature on consumer escapes, specifically focusing on temporality and embodiment in such experiences. I then offer a selective review of previous consumer research on embodied learning and frame temporal slow-down as a skill consumers develop through engaging in the experiential learning process (Kolb and Kolb, 2009). Next, I introduce the contextual settings and methodological procedures of this research, followed by the presentation of research findings. Findings focus on the uncomfortable embodied experiences of cold-water swimming as well as on the learning process through which consumers can seize control over their shocked bodies and achieve a temporal slow-down. I conclude by discussing theoretical contributions, outlining practical implications, and identifying avenues for future research.

Literature review

Escapes in consumer research

Over four decades ago, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) noted in their seminal work on consumption experiences that consumers are willing to engage in such experiences not only for fun and pleasure but also to escape reality. Escape is often linked to alienation and entails a condition of being disconnected from "other people, institutions, or one's natural state of being" (Cova *et al.*, 2018, p. 448). Cultural consumer researchers have devoted an ample amount of effort to studying the notion of escape primarily in extraordinary experiential settings (Arnould and Price, 1993; Belk and Costa, 1998; Canniford and Shankar, 2013; Scott *et al.*, 2017) since immersion in extraordinary settings is the most effective way to disconnect from reality (Cova, 2021).

Consumer escapes take different forms, ranging from small and ordinary to grandiose and extreme. In their recent attempt to reconceptualize consumer escapes, Cova and colleagues (2018) offer three distinct escape categories: mundane, restorative and warlike. Mundane escapes are often small, happen at home or nearby, and can be engaged in regularly. Such

escapes are usually facilitated by technology (e.g. binge-watching) or involve the consumption of various substances. For instance, nightclubbers are seeking to escape the boredom of their lives by consuming ecstasy and “losing it” on the dance floor (Goulding *et al.*, 2009, p. 767). Similarly, consumers engage in binge drinking to facilitate self-loss (Griffin *et al.*, 2009). Restorative escapes are neither small nor grandiose. They entail engaging in various activities in safe spaces, such as familiar restaurants and shopping malls, that offer refuge from the overwhelming and chaotic aspects of daily life (Cova *et al.*, 2018). Finally, warlike escapes entail engagement in physically challenging, often acutely painful activities that allow consumers to simultaneously rediscover their corporeality and lose themselves through pain. Cova and colleagues (2018) propose that the recent rise in the popularity of physically challenging activities such as pilgrimage (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019), hiking (Cutler *et al.*, 2014) and CrossFit (Dawson, 2017) lies in consumers’ desire to escape the pressures of contemporary life.

Regardless of categorization, most consumer escapes are escapes from the responsibilities and tensions of overwhelmingly stressful, hectic and rushed lives that Western consumers primarily lead (Cova *et al.*, 2018). In a similar vein, Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) recently proposed that most of the consumers’ escape attempts might be driven by the desire to not just break away from contemporary life but to break away from the *speed* of such life. I elaborate on temporality in consumer escapes next.

Temporality in consumer escapes

Previous research has offered a variety of time conceptualizations. Time can be seen as a finite intangible resource (Berry *et al.*, 2002) or as a subjective experience embedded in various practices (Adam, 1998). It has also been conceptualized as something ordinary and chronological (*Chronos*) or extraordinary and sacred (*Kairos*) (Bradford and Sherry, 2024). In consumer research, Woermann and Rokka (2015) provided the most comprehensive account of time and temporality. Through an ethnographic investigation of extreme sports, they showcase how alignment or misalignment of various elements within consumption practices affects consumers’ temporal perceptions of fastness and slowness. Accordingly, when all practice elements are aligned, consumers may experience a coherent slowness or fastness. However, if some of the practice elements are misaligned, consumers experience boredom or stress and hecticness.

Instead of treating temporality as emerging solely from alignment or misalignment in consumption practices, Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) propose that consumption experiences are also affected by the societal temporal logic of acceleration. Social acceleration relates to the constant increase in the speed of life (Rosa, 2013). Husemann and Eckhardt (2019) further note that with such an increased speed of life, consumers actively seek experiences that promise slowness. Through an ethnographic inquiry into pilgrimage experiences, authors showcase that for a consumer to start perceiving time as passing more slowly, one must desynchronize with the accelerated logic prevalent in daily life and synchronize with the slow-paced logic. Such resynchronization is possible through three distinct forms of deceleration – embodied, technological and episodic. Embodied deceleration entails engaging the body in movements of decreased speed (e.g. walking instead of driving). Technological deceleration refers to the decrease in the use of technological devices. Finally, episodic deceleration entails a decrease in the number of actions consumers engage in.

A close reading of previous literature on escapes indeed highlights that consumers are at least partially drawn to such experiences because they offer transportation into a slower temporal logic. For example, Belk and Costa (1998) emphasize that consumers who

participate in Mountain Man rendezvous are drawn by the nostalgic appeals of simpler times. Through reenacting the life of a pre-industrial society, they can temporarily escape into a slower life. Similarly, [Sherry and colleagues \(2007\)](#) showcase how consumers participate in ancient rituals to escape the fast-paced modern world. The remote locations of such rituals allow consumers to break away from daily life. Finally, some consumers are drawn to slower means of transportation as they hold a promise of slower temporality. An ethnographic study by [Hamilton and Alexander \(2017\)](#) highlights how consumers embrace the relaxed pace of a slow Jacobite train and the ensuing sense of escapism from the fast pace of everyday life. Escape experiences that take place in natural settings highlight the differences between the temporalities of urban life and nature even more prominently. For example, river rafters in [Arnould et al.'s \(1999\)](#) research specifically refer to the divine experience of nature as “slow time” or “river time” (p. 44), emphasizing a slower rhythm of life compared to the one they are used to in daily life. Similarly, consumers in [Canniford and Shankar's \(2013\)](#) study prefer secluded and isolated surfing spaces not just because they contrast with the well-known “daily experiences of stress, noise” (p. 1057) but also due to the possibility of experiencing the time as passing slower and adjusting to distinct temporal “patterns of the wilderness” (p. 1056). Noteworthy, most consumer escapes entail utilizing one's body in novel ways compared to daily life. Whether it is a reenactment of pre-industrial time ([Belk and Costa, 1998](#)), a slow train journey ([Hamilton and Alexander, 2017](#)) or a long wait for the right kind of wave to come ([Canniford and Shankar, 2013](#)), the body plays a crucial role in escapes, as it works toward attuning to a different activity, environment or prevailing temporality. Next, I turn to elaborate on embodiment in consumer escapes.

Embodiment in consumer escapes

In recent decades, consumer researchers have devoted an increased effort to studying the embodied aspects of consumption ([Joy and Sherry, 2003](#); [Goulding et al., 2009](#); [Canniford and Shankar, 2013](#); [Stevens et al., 2019](#)), drawing on the notion that the body is central to all experiences and that all knowledge resides in the body ([Merleau-Ponty, 1962](#)). For instance, salsa dancers admit to engaging in novel body movements to temporarily escape from the anxieties of hectic life ([Hewer and Hamilton, 2010](#)). Those consumers are thrilled to discover a new mode of self-expression that is distinct from the “language of calculation and rationality” prevailing in contemporary society (*ibid.*, p. 123). Other studies illuminate the role of sensory intensification in escape episodes. For example, [Stevens and colleagues \(2019\)](#) showcased how a combination of material objects within the brandscapes, their design, atmospherics and intense sensory activation helps consumers completely immerse themselves in retail environments. Retailers use various tools and sensory activating techniques to facilitate sensory overload. Such overload simultaneously transports consumers to a different reality and evokes temporalities of “busyness” and “timelessness” in different parts of the brandscape ([Stevens et al., 2019](#), p. 821). A similar notion of escape through sensory intensification was alluded to in [Goulding et al.'s \(2009\)](#) study of nightclubbers. Not only do consumers see these experiences as antidotes to daily life, but they are also actively escaping such life through immersion in faster or slower bodily movements that are carefully curated by club management through light and sound changes. Finally, [Scott et al.'s \(2017\)](#) account of consumer participation in grueling obstacle races showcases how white-collar workers are drawn to engage in extremely painful and potentially lethal pursuits to escape habituated 9-to-5 work environments full of stress and pressure. Event organizers lay out obstacles in a way that intensifies pain, enabling consumers to simultaneously rediscover their bodies and experience a cut-off from selves ([Cova, 2021](#)).

Consequently, previous research illuminates that the body not only plays a vital role in escapes but also works as a vehicle toward achieving a different temporal experience. In this vein, [Husemann and Eckhardt \(2019\)](#) emphasize that slow and repetitive movement is crucial for temporal slow-down since deceleration is not possible without skillful adaptation. Furthermore, [Woermann and Rokka \(2015\)](#) acknowledge that body skills play a significant role in temporal perceptions and practice (mis)alignment. Despite the body's central role in helping consumers achieve a temporal slow-down, previous research has not addressed slowing down as an embodied skill or focused on the process of learning such a skill. Next, I turn to elaborate on embodied learning in consumer research and present an experiential learning theory ([Kolb and Kolb, 2009](#)) as an approach to understanding how consumers learn to temporarily slow down.

Embodied learning in consumer research

Most of the previous consumer research focused on embodied learning and skill acquisition in relation to a particular activity, such as yachting ([Scott and Uncles, 2018](#)), yoga ([Kuuru, 2022](#)), beer tasting ([Maciel and Wallendorf, 2017](#)) or sleeping ([Valtonen and Närvänen, 2016](#)). Such accounts showcase how consumers deliberately learn to do something in the pursuit of a concrete goal based on certain rules and institutional discourses ([Bhatnagar et al., 2024](#)). Yet, prior studies remind us that consumers may also learn unintentionally, especially when learning is taking place in a dynamic environment (*ibid.*). Accordingly, [Murphy and colleagues \(2019, p. 433\)](#) note that embodied learning in relation to the activity where the rules are fixed (e.g. tennis or chess) can be rather straightforward since the consistent engagement in fixed body techniques serves as a “reliable predictor of success.” On the other hand, embodied learning in relation to the activity where rules are less fixed (e.g. high-speed motorcycling) or where the environment is uncertain, often provides fruitful opportunities for unintended learning. Accordingly, informants in their research not only mastered the skillful riding but also developed an “embodied feel” for the environment – a skill that allowed them to quickly react to the constantly changing sense of balance in the dynamic environment of motorcycling ([Murphy et al., p. 436](#)). Furthermore, [Canniford and Shankar \(2013, p. 1058\)](#) noted that seasoned surfers displayed “sensory vigilance” – an embodied skill that helped them become attuned to the dynamic environment and sense when the good waves were coming.

Consumers in this research pursued swimming in an extreme and dynamic environment of cold water. Moreover, this activity did not entail fixed rules or procedures. The process of learning in such conditions is best approached through an experiential learning theory (ELT) ([Bhatnagar et al., 2024](#)). ELT conceptualizes the learning process as a dynamic and continuous set of interactions between an individual's experience and the environment ([Kolb and Kolb, 2009](#)). Individual subjective experience in a particular environment is thus viewed as the central learning material. Furthermore, ELT emphasizes the role of active experimentation in the creation of new knowledge ([Kolb et al., 2001](#)). Consequently, ELT accounts for uncertainties, failures and dynamism instead of focusing on deliberate learning towards a concrete goal. The learning process represents a never-ending cycle that generally starts with a concrete experience upon which an individual reflects. Then, reflections are assimilated into abstract concepts. Such concepts serve as a basis for new actions that are later experimented with. Finally, new experiential knowledge is integrated alongside the old one, and the process continues as further experiences are encountered.

In summary, previous research highlighted that consumers aspire to engage in experiences that offer a temporal slow-down. Furthermore, such experiences often entail engagement in novel embodied experiences. Yet, previous research falls short of explaining

how exactly consumers learn to slow down and whether they can successfully transfer this skill into their everyday lives. This study provides such an account and showcases how consumers learn to temporarily slow down in an extreme learning environment. Next, I introduce the contextual settings and methodological procedures of this research.

Context and method

Research context: cold-water swimming

Empirical work took place in the context of cold-water swimming in Finland. Cold-water swimming refers to the activity of swimming in water with a temperature below 15°C (Knechtle *et al.*, 2020). Cold-water swimming usually takes place in natural outdoor settings (e.g. the sea, lakes, rivers) or indoor settings (e.g. cold pools). Swimming in cold water during the winter months is also known as “winter swimming.” Swimming in an ice hole when the water surface is frozen, and the water temperature drops below 5°C, is referred to as “ice swimming” (Knechtle *et al.*, 2020). To avoid becoming caught up in the semantics, I use the term “cold-water swimming” in the article regardless of the exact season or presence of ice on the water surface.

Cold-water swimming is especially popular in the Northern countries (e.g. Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, and the UK) where the season starts as early as October and lasts until April. In Finland alone, over 720,000 people pursue cold water swimming on a regular basis (Suomen latu, 2025). Cold-water swimming is typically promoted by the Finnish media not just as a national pastime (Lindfors, 2021) but also as an activity that offers an abundance of physical and mental benefits (Pantzar, 2018). For instance, regular exposure to cold water has a positive effect on cardiovascular and immune systems (Knechtle *et al.*, 2020), improves general well-being (Huttunen *et al.*, 2004) and helps to deal with depression and anxiety (Søberg, 2022).

Cold-water swimming is an extremely condensed, extraordinary experience that involves submerging oneself in cold water for a short period of time. While average time spent in the water depends on personal preferences, the latest research among regular cold-water swimmers in Finland suggests that a person typically spends up to 40 seconds in the water and repeats an exposure 2–3 times per week (Humalajoki, 2021). Around half of those attend the sauna before the plunge, which intensifies the experience by increasing the difference in temperature between the hot sauna and cold water (*ibid*). Easy access to open water, along with minimal required equipment, makes cold-water swimming an affordable winter pursuit suitable for everyone regardless of age, gender and occupation (Søberg, 2022). The growth in popularity of cold-water swimming around the world resulted in the professionalization of this pursuit – in 2009, an International Ice Swimming Association was founded, which organizes competitions on both national and international levels (Knechtle *et al.*, 2020). Yet none of the informants pursued cold water swimming professionally.

Data collection and analysis

Consumer studies that deal with temporality and embodiment often tend to move away from phenomenological inquiries. Instead, a practice-oriented perspective and ethnographic methodologies are adopted (Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Valtonen and Närvänen, 2016; Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). Such a shift allows addressing not only lived experience but also wider structural influences of the market (Stevens *et al.*, 2019). Yet this research leans on a phenomenological inquiry into the lived experience of cold-water swimmers (Thompson *et al.*, 1989). Phenomenological inquiry is a well-fitting approach for this research as it aimed to uncover the essential features of the experience from the informants’ viewpoint – specifically how they reacted to, interacted with and learned in the extreme environment of

cold water. Focus on what informants say they do and feel, or in other words, the narrative representation of experience, also helped uncover the process through which consumers learned to temporarily slow down.

Nine interviews on the experiences of female cold-water swimmers served as a basis for this data set and were originally collected for a different research project. Those interviews were conducted in Finnish and later transcribed and translated into English by a research assistant. Even though in Finland, cold-water swimming is more popular among women (Lindfors, 2021; Humalajoki, 2021), to gain a holistic understanding of the experience, I further interviewed both female and male swimmers. At first, informants were recruited through social media, while at the later stages through the snowballing technique (Noy, 2008). I aimed for a variety in terms of age and level of experience to build understanding from multiple perspectives (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). Table 1 summarizes the informants’ details, including their pseudonyms, age, gender and the number of years pursuing cold-water swimming. Altogether data set consists of 20 interviews (11 women and 9 men) and includes informants of 23–66years old with experience in cold-water swimming ranging from 1 to over 30 years. Interviews lasted from 40 min to 1 h 20 min and were conducted at the places chosen by informants (e.g. cafes). Some interviews have been conducted via Zoom at the informants’ request due to health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. All interviews took place during the cold-water swimming season in Finland between September and February.

Following the guidelines of phenomenological interviews, the aim was to engage informants in open conversation and let them set a dialogue (Thompson *et al.*, 1989). Interviews had a semi-structured format and began with background questions. Afterward, informants were asked to focus on the cold-swimming experiences and practices. As the data collection progressed, the interview guide was modified to focus on temporal slow-downs and the comparisons between early and current embodied experiences.

Table 1. List of informants

Name	Gender	Age	Years in winter swimming
Emma	F	60	2
Olivia	F	37	3
Charlotte	F	37	1
Helena	F	58	10
Sofia	F	33	5
Amelia	F	26	4
Bella	F	51	9
Lorelei	F	52	20
Lily	F	46	4
Jasmin	F	40	3
Rosalie	F	66	31
Jack	M	38	6
John	M	62	20+
Lucas	M	23	1
Mark	M	37	6
Martin	M	36	4
Tomas	M	38	7
Nicolas	M	46	10
Daniel	M	40	13
Oliver	M	46	4

Source(s): Author’s own work

At the early stage of data analysis, I aimed to build familiarity with the data and background of all informants by reading transcripts independently. I then proceeded with open coding (Spiggle, 1994) using standard word processing software and developed code categories into emergent themes. Following the guidelines of hermeneutic analysis, I have iterated between units of analysis and made comparisons across age, gender, and level of experience in cold-water swimming to build a sense of a whole (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). Finally, I explored and refined emergent themes through an iterative review of data and relevant literature on consumer escapes as well as their temporal and embodied elements. Data analysis was supported by literature on embodied learning. Experiential learning theory (Kolb *et al.*, 2001; Kolb and Kolb, 2009) served as a framework for the interpretation of consumers' experiences and aided in outlining themes related to the learning process.

Findings

Findings reveal how consumers achieve temporal slow-down, calmness and stillness through engaging in embodied learning in an extremely uncomfortable environment. Findings begin with elaborating on the consumers' experiences of extreme discomfort and then detail the learning process through which consumers can seize control over their shocked bodies and experience a temporal slow-down. Furthermore, findings showcase how consumers use slow-down skills in their everyday lives.

Encountering extreme discomfort

Immediate body awareness. Cold water swimming is a temporarily condensed, extraordinary experience that involves submerging oneself in cold water for a short period of time. The temperature of the water during the cold swimming season varies anywhere from 0 to 15°C, resulting in extreme sensory overload (Stevens *et al.*, 2019) or a "haptic assault on one's senses" (Lindfors, 2021, p. 165) when the consumer enters the water. Informants often described their first cold swimming experiences as a "shock reaction for the body" (Emma), a "radical experience" (Olivia) or an "extreme ordeal for the body" (Charlotte), and unanimously recalled immediately feeling extreme pain and struggling to breathe. Daniel, a seasoned cold-water swimmer of 13 years, recounted his first experience in the following way:

I will always remember my first time. I went swimming with my dad. It was something like -25 °C outside. My dad had done it for one or two years by then, and when he got in the water and started swimming, I was like: "OK, that doesn't look so bad." But when I got in the water after him, I was like: "Oh, my God. No, no, no! I gotta get out, I gotta get out!" It felt like 1000 daggers punching your skin, or piranhas or something.

Daniel's account illustrates how the experience that seemed ordinary from the outsider's perspective turned out to be acutely painful and uncomfortable upon actual encounter. He became immediately aware of his entire body as it came into sharp focus in cold water. Daniel metaphorically refers to such immediate corporeal awareness as being punched by "1000 daggers." Previous research reminds us that people often utilize metaphors to refer to their embodied experiences (Stevens *et al.*, 2019).

Informants generally described the immediate body awareness as a major appeal of cold-water swimming. Helena recalled that such pursuit "gives me my body back" and allows "to feel your body more" especially in contrast to daily life where "I work with a computer, and I look like this all the time (*curves the back and brings shoulders forward*) and also [at] home [...] I sit down, I watch TV series, I don't move a lot." Previous research suggests that consumers are drawn to participate in extreme pursuits to rediscover their bodies and achieve

a higher level of body awareness, which is often lacking in their 9-to-5 jobs (Scott *et al.*, 2017; Cova *et al.*, 2018; Cova, 2021). Helena's explicit comparison between cold-water swimming, which "gives the body back," and sedentary working life characterized by "decorporealized existence" (Leder, 1990, p. 3; Scott *et al.*, 2017) supports this notion.

Presence in the moment. Another appeal of cold-water swimming lies in offering a break from everyday worries since cold water demands full attention from the mind (Søberg, 2022) toward the body in extreme discomfort. Consumers overwhelmed with work-related stress, family responsibilities and the pressure to catch up with ever-increasing demands were drawn to engage in such extreme pursuits in the hope of disconnecting from their hectic minds. Charlotte explained: "I always have a lot of projects and things in progress, and I'm a single parent, so there are a lot of things going on in my everyday life, so it's wonderful that [in the water] I don't think about any of that for a while." For Charlotte, the moment of submerging into the cold water is a moment when she simply cannot think of anything, which is a welcome break for her overworked mind. Helena similarly recounted that in the cold water, "you actually see what's around you and you're not in your own head, constantly thinking about issues." A sharp contrast between the ever-working mind in daily life and a present mind in the cold water was evoked by all informants. These findings echo surfers' accounts who similarly enjoyed the grounding in the present that water afforded (Canniford and Shankar, 2013). Mark even pointed out that the inability to be present in the moment is a feature of modernity that he sees as detrimental to mental well-being:

You're in your thoughts too much, or in your mind, you're lost. You're worrying about future events, anxious about future events, or depressed about something in the past [...] You're not in the present moment. So, cold swimming kind of takes you away from there and puts you in your life where you are in the present moment. What most people have is a monkey mind being loud from the moment they wake up until they go to bed. They don't have that moment of clarity. And surprise, surprise! Anxiety and depression seem to be a big issue because you're stuck in your head [...] Cold water stops you from overthinking.

Informants viewed cold-water swimming as a tool that helps to deal with the challenges of modernity (Pantzar, 2018) and as a mechanism that, albeit temporarily, brings mental clarity to their lives. In sum, the sensory overload and the immediate body awareness refocus consumers' attention and allow them to experience a full presence. This aligns with the previous findings on how embodied experiences draw a focus toward the body and allow consumers to clear their minds (Scott *et al.*, 2017; Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). However, the experience of being present in the cold water, especially for novice swimmers, is often connected with discomfort and entails pain, shortness of breath, and even panic. To embrace the present moment and fully enjoy it, cold-water swimmers had to learn to seize control over their shocked bodies. Noteworthy, none of the informants initially sought to pursue cold-water swimming to achieve mental clarity. Even though themes related to presence in the moment or temporal slow-down prevail in the data set, those were often discovered and achieved only after months or years of regular cold-water swimming. Initially, many informants were motivated by the potential health benefits and the opportunity to challenge themselves. Hence, temporal slow-down is an embodied skill that informants acquired unintentionally. I will elaborate on the learning process next.

Learning to control the body in discomfort

This section recounts how cold-water swimmers learn to control body reactions in extremely uncomfortable conditions. First, informants learned various body techniques and then extended successful practices over the whole temporal frame of the experience. They further engaged in experimentation and were finally able to discover stable embodied connections.

Both successful and failed experiments contributed to the creation of embodied knowledge. Figure 1 summarizes the learning process. While I describe this process as linear for analytical clarity, consumer experiences were often dynamic, and certain stages of the process were happening simultaneously, unfolding in an iterative way (Kolb *et al.*, 2001; Kolb and Kolb, 2009).

Learning body techniques. The body submerged in cold water enters a state of shock, the most prominent sign of which is shortness of breath. The body in extreme discomfort fights for every breath, which only intensifies the panic. To seize control over the shocked body, cold-water swimmers engaged in various breathing and movement techniques. Previous research reminds us that the ability to engage in novel body techniques is always subjective (Murphy *et al.*, 2019; Kuuru, 2022). Accordingly, informants discovered and adopted various body techniques differently. Some primarily concentrated on moving in a steady and repetitive manner in the cold water. For example, Lorelei recounted how at the beginning she was just swimming “a small distance and trying to my best ability to focus on the strokes I’m doing with my arms.” Jack similarly stated that initially, he just tried to concentrate on “counting the number of strokes” he could do in the cold water to distance himself from the overwhelming pain and shock. Other informants opted to control their shocked bodies by learning various breathing techniques. Some, like Amelia, simply focused on “trying to breathe as evenly and calmly as possible.” Others recalled deliberately searching for information on what types of breathing techniques exist and later trying them out one by one:

There are different breathing techniques like “pour in, pour out” or inhaling 8 parts, exhaling, and holding it for two parts [...] Then you can also calm down by breathing very slowly, like six or maybe even 4 times per minute. So, you need to inhale for 5 seconds and then exhale for 5 seconds. I didn’t really know what was gonna work for me, so I had to find out what suits me best. I still remember how I calmed my breathing for the first time. It was so cool! I mean, when you start [cold-water swimming], you just fight and gasp for air, but then I tried breathing techniques, and the feeling that you get [...] the fresh breath of air deep down in your lungs, that’s a really awesome sensation. Then, I really noticed that calming down effect (Martin).

Martin’s quote illustrates the stark difference between the sensation of gasping for air that was always present before he mastered breathing techniques and the state of having one’s lungs full of air, accompanied by an embodied sensation of calmness.

The body’s ability to learn certain techniques always depends on the level of prior knowledge and experience (Murphy *et al.*, 2019; Kuuru, 2022). Accordingly, some informants found themselves able to control their shocked bodies much faster since they already had a certain level of embodied knowledge related to breathing techniques from prior

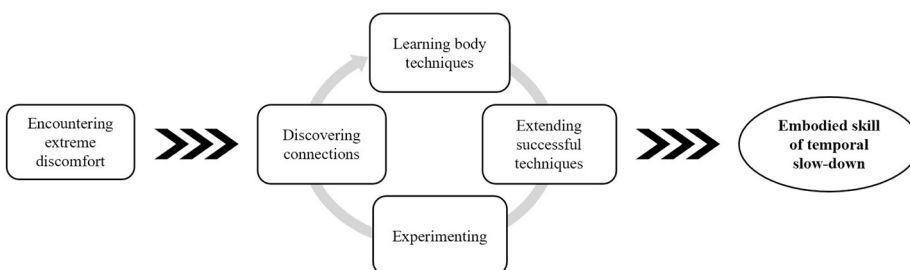


Figure 1. Development of temporal slow-down skill through embodied learning

Source: Author’s own work

engagement in other activities. For example, John, a yoga teacher of 20 years, admitted that at first, he didn't quite utilize his embodied knowledge from yoga in cold-water swimming pursuits. Instead, like many other informants, he just "jumped in and gasped and fought to stay there longer than a minute," but "then I realized that if I start breathing very, very slowly, with very, very long exhalations when I am in the cold water [...] it was much more endurable and much easier and relaxing." Once John applied breathing techniques he previously learned through yoga to cold-water swimming, he managed to extend the time he could spend in the water since he learned to relax his body and control the panic.

Extending successful techniques. Upon learning various breathing and movement techniques, cold-water swimmers start utilizing them both before and after submerging into the cold water, effectively extending the techniques over the whole experience. For instance, informants often recalled how they found themselves engaged in slow and deep breathing already while approaching the water, before the actual plunge. Emma provided a typical account:

At some point, I really started paying attention to my breathing, even before I went to the water. I just stand on the pier and breathe calmly, [take] deep breaths. And then when I'm going into the water, I'm blowing the air out, in a long, calm blow, and then I go swimming. I noticed that it's pretty amazing how well you can calm your body down with breathing [...] You know, before I just plunged and tried to focus on breathing. But when you start to breathe calmly already before the plunge, then the water doesn't even feel that cold anymore. It's incredible! Even if it's like 20 degrees below zero outside.

As Emma emphasized, exercising a particular way of breathing allows her to manage body reactions in an extreme environment more efficiently. By calming the body down already before the plunge, she minimizes the shock reaction or at least can manage it faster. John has provided a similar account, emphasizing how his preparation "for the cold by doing very slow exhalation exercises with long breath holds" allowed him to "feel warm in my face and my fingers already before I got into the water." He further described such engagement in specific breathing techniques before entering the water as a "personal turning point" in cold-water swimming. Not all informants could recall when and how they started to extend successful body techniques to the entirety of their swimming experiences. Previous research reminds us that embodied learning is at least partially an unconscious process, and thus, informants may not always be capable of recalling or reflecting on concrete steps in their learning process (Joy and Sherry, 2003; Murphy *et al.*, 2019). Yet, all informants recalled differences between body reactions and body movements at the very beginning of cold-water swimming pursuits and those they currently experience or engage in. In that vein, Tomas recounted how back in the day, he used to approach the water in a very fast manner, practically "running from the dressing room," whereas these days he is "walking there and going to the water just very slowly and in a relaxed pace." Oliver observed a similar shift after the swimming session was over: "the biggest difference is when I get out of the water. Before [...] when I got out of the water, I had sort of like a panic mode, and I had to put my clothes on really quickly. And then one day, I had no rush at all. I just took a minute or two and stood there after getting out of the water. That was quite a big difference." Oliver's account illustrates how an ability to calm down and be present in cold water eventually allowed him to control the panic that he regularly felt, even after the swimming experience. Overall, the informants' ability to extend successful body techniques over the whole temporal frame of the pursuit (pre-, during, and post-swimming) signifies the accumulation of embodied knowledge (Murphy *et al.*, 2019).

Experimenting. To achieve the sensation of calmness and stillness faster or to prolong it, cold-water swimmers often engaged in experimenting. Experimentation is a crucial step in

experiential learning (Kolb and Kolb, 2009) as it allows consumers to link “subjective feelings with emic knowledge” (Bhatnagar *et al.*, 2024, p. 1268). Overall, informants often acknowledged that cold-water swimming provides plenty of opportunities for experimentation. For instance, swimming itself could be pursued in a variety of settings, ranging from natural bodies of water to artificially cooled pools. Moreover, informants could freely choose how exactly to pursue the activity (e.g. swim laps/distance or just stand in the water with no movement) and how much time to spend in the water. Generally, each informant had their preference of when, with what equipment, and how to practice swimming. Oliver shared that cold-water swimming is the only physical pursuit where “there’s no one telling you how to do it. Everyone has their system; they have their own way...you just do it like you want to.” Helena similarly recounted that it is a rare activity where one can decide whether “to go and really push your limits” or “discover and push your limits very gently”. The absence of “rules of behavior” promoted experimentation and aided in learning to control the shocked body.

Cold-water swimmers primarily engaged in two types of experimentation:

- (1) related to the settings in which the swimming was taking place; and
- (2) related to the time spent in the water.

All informants regularly pursued cold-water swimming primarily in the lakes, rivers or the sea. Seasonal changes in water and air temperature, along with changing weather conditions such as wind, rain or snow, provided a fruitful ground for experiential learning. Emma’s more experienced friends suggested she start the season early to adapt to the gradually dropping water temperature. While that strategy proved to be useful, and Emma indeed enjoyed that “natural shift,” she was completely taken aback when found herself unable to control her breathing when the weather suddenly became extremely windy:

I didn’t quite expect that there’s a pretty big difference in terms of what kind of weather it is [...] It is so much harder when it’s windy, especially if there is a very strong and cold wind.

Similarly, a drastic drop in water temperature – “it was 7°C yesterday and suddenly it is zero” (Charlotte) – or even swimming in a different body of water – “I didn’t expect that the lake water would feel so much colder compared to the seawater” (Jasmin) – bound consumers to further test and adjust habituated body techniques.

Once cold-water swimmers became certain in their ability to control the body in extreme discomfort and experience calmness and stillness, they often tried to maximize the time spent in the water to prolong such a grounding experience. Tomas provided a typical account:

I remember that at some point, I actively tried to maximize my time in the water. But often, you do not really know when it is time to get out. Like I was there for too long a couple of times. You feel very relaxed in the water, but then after [...] you don’t get a good feeling. You get this deep-frozen feeling, which actually lasts for hours. I remember that one time I was just shaking and shivering for many hours. I went home, I put on every piece of clothing that I had, and I went under the blanket, and still [...] it wasn’t going away. That’s why I’m not trying to maximize my time anymore.

Tomas’s account illustrates an unpleasant physical reaction to staying in uncomfortable conditions for too long. His lack of embodied understanding of when “it’s time to get out” leads to daring consequences, which Tomas interprets as a signal to stop time maximization. Many informants recalled similar bodily reactions to prolonged stay in the cold water. Lucas admitted that after staying in the water that was 3 degrees colder than he was used to, his “body was in some kind of bad aftershock”. What Lucas and Tomas describe are failures in

embodied learning. In ELT, failures are seen as fruitful avenues for new knowledge generation (Kolb *et al.*, 2001). Such failures eventually helped informants learn when they should get out of the cold water.

While swimmers cannot always avoid the adverse consequences of failed experiments, some informants attempted to at least mitigate them. For example, informants admitted deliberately rescheduling their regular swimming sessions to be better equipped to deal with unpleasant aftershocks. In this vein, Sofia explained that she no longer goes swimming in the morning “because in case I stay too long in the water and then I have to go to the office [...] I’d just feel super cold, and it would be annoying. So, I only go swimming if I know that I can then go home and be under a blanket or drink hot tea. It needs to be a situation where I can mitigate the coldness.” Despite occasional unpleasantness, cold-water swimmers viewed the opportunities to experiment with varying natural conditions and time spent in the water as aiding in discovering embodied connections and deepening their embodied knowledge. I turn to elaborate on that next.

Discovering embodied connections. Learning to control their shocked bodies in different conditions eventually helped cold-water swimmers better understand subjective body sensations and link them to various past happenings or future courses of action through active reflection (Kolb *et al.*, 2001). Accordingly, some informants gained an accurate embodied understanding of when one should exit the water to avoid unpleasant body reactions. Nicolas, who has been an avid cold-water swimmer for a decade, admitted that he even stopped using equipment such as cold-water swimming gloves or shoes since nowadays he “can feel in the fingers and on the skin when it’s time to, you know, get out of the water.” What Nicolas describes is an embodied knowledge that accumulated over the years: when he detects a particular sensation, it is time to leave, and staying longer could result in unpleasant consequences. Helena’s understanding was even more nuanced. Similarly to Nicolas, she admitted that with time she became “more conscious” and “more concentrated on physical feelings.” However, she is not only aware of a “certain limit that I can spend in the water” but also of how long she’d suffer from unpleasant consequences if she ignores the body sensation:

I start feeling it in my arms, they are becoming a little bit numb and then I know that this is a moment when I can still stay in the water for a minute or so. If I stay longer, I will feel cold for the next 3–4 hours.

Other informants were able to connect their body experiences in the water with certain events that happened in their daily lives. Mark recalled how the increased level of stress always makes it harder for him to relax in the cold water:

Let’s say if I feel extremely stressed, I have a hard time, like a lot of work going on and a lot of traveling and a lot of hotels and being jetlagged, then I know that the swimming would be more painful. I have to focus a lot more, and it takes longer to relax. But if I have a regular week with no extreme stress, I can enjoy the water right away. It’s literally like 5 seconds when my breath gets calm and I kind of just lose myself in a positive way.

Consequently, regular plunging into the cold water not only enabled swimmers to gain a deeper understanding of body sensations but also helped develop practical know-how that guides their experience.

Experiencing temporal slow-down and calmness

As previously mentioned, the sensory overload and the immediate body presence enabled by the cold water refocus consumers’ attention and provide an opportunity to be fully present in

the moment and disconnect from daily worries. Once such an acute presence is free of panic and discomfort, consumers start perceiving time as passing more slowly. The temporality of consumption experiences is “always modulated by the body” (Woermann and Rokka, 2015, p. 1496). Hence, upon learning how to seize control over their shocked bodies in the cold water, consumers can temporarily slow down. Informants unanimously recounted how different their perception of time is in the water compared to regular daily life. For instance, Olivia explained that her daily life often feels rushed, like a “kind of tight headband around your head.” Once she submerges in the cold water and breathes calmly, “time is somehow stopping” and the “headband is completely gone.” Through the headband metaphor, Olivia refers to her daily time as “tight” and rushed, while the time in the water is slow and free of that tightness. Similarly, Nicolas admitted that his everyday life is “hectic” and governed by work-related schedules, while during cold-water swimming, he feels like there is “no clock ticking” and it is “peaceful.” Moreover, informants often used concrete chronological time comparisons to accentuate the perceived slowness. For instance, Jack noted that in the cold water he might feel like: “Oh, I’ve been here for a minute,” but in fact, “you’re in for like 7 seconds.” Jack’s account reminds of comparisons made by experienced skiers in Woermann and Rokka’s (2015) study, whose advanced bodily skills allowed them to experience slowness. Skillful body adaptation similarly transformed the hectic encounter into a calm moment during which time passes more slowly for informants in this research.

The experience of slowing down is often associated with calmness, stillness and unhurriedness (Honoré, 2005; Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). Informants unanimously emphasized that even a very short time spent in the water had an overwhelmingly calming and relaxing effect. They often referred to such an extreme activity as “therapeutic” (Daniel, Nicolas), “meditative” (Sofia, Lily) and “mentally boosting” (Jack). Previous research similarly acknowledges that cold-water swimming is often promoted as a radical therapeutic practice (Lindfors, 2021). John, a yoga teacher who is also coaching others to get comfortable in the cold water, compared the effects of engagement in such distinct practices:

For me, staying 10 minutes in the ice hole is like doing a longer meditation retreat. And I have a comparison [...] we’ve done a Vipassana for ten days. Which is the kind of meditation [...] the ultimate hardcore. When you stay long enough [in the water], it’s like the experience of: “Wow, I remember I felt like this last time after a 10-day retreat”. 10 days turned into 10 minutes.

According to John, the feelings he encountered after spending the whole 10 days meditating in the ashram are similar to those he experienced just after 10 minutes of cold-water swimming. John’s comparison emphasizes not only intensity but also efficiency. Instead of taking a long time off and traveling to a remote location, John simply incorporates a 10-minute swim into his everyday schedule. Most informants accentuated such efficiency by comparing cold-water swimming with other activities that are often marketed as beneficial for mental health. For instance, Olivia claimed that she could get a similar calmness and stillness by taking “a walk in the woods for an hour,” yet “somehow in today’s society you need to choose what’s more efficient, and with winter swimming I get the effects faster.” Mark explicitly compared swimming with a therapy session, stating that “instead of having like an hour or 90-minute conversation with the therapist, I’m having a similar experience in minutes.” Evidently, time-pressured informants are so accustomed to the “hurry sickness” (Parkins and Craig, 2006, p. 1) that efficiency and speed guide their choice of activities that promise temporal slow-down and calmness. Previous research on temporal slow-down suggests that consumers struggle with the accelerated rhythm of everyday activities related to well-being (e.g. meditation) as they fail to fully relax and restore in a short time (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). Informants in this research could achieve slowness and

calmness efficiently as they developed the embodied skill of controlling and relaxing the stressed body.

Upon learning to slow down and relax in extremely uncomfortable conditions, many informants acknowledged that their reactions to stress in everyday life changed as well. For example, Emma recalled that after engaging in cold-water swimming, she is capable of “approach[ing] demands of my job and many other things more calmly” and now sees this activity as a tool that “protects my mind from stress.” John, while reflecting on the benefits of cold-water swimming, explicitly described how his body’s response to stress has changed:

I think that fear is a common factor behind all kinds of emotional tensions, anxiety, and stress. Fear is the emotion that makes you gasp, it makes you breathe very fast, makes your heart rate go up [...] it does all the same things that happen when you jump into cold water [...] So, the thing is to learn how to encounter this phenomenon in a way that you can turn those reactions off as soon as they hit you. And then you practice that in the cold water, and that kind of flows over into any other situation in your life. For me, mastering being in the cold and getting into a relaxed state was kind of a turning point in life. The fear factor in my life went down. The tension and stress went really down.

John’s account aptly illustrates how learning to encounter cold and relax in an extremely uncomfortable environment enabled him to deal with stress more easily. His narrative points to the embodied nature of such skill. None of the informants consciously noticed engaging in breathing or movement techniques associated with slowing down outside of the cold water. Yet, their reflections on changes in reaction to stress and tension indicate that embodied knowledge of slow-down became a part of their corporeal memory (Kuuru, 2022).

Discussion

Previous research on consumer escapes conceptualizes such experiences as driven by the desire to escape hectic and rushed contemporary life (Cova *et al.*, 2018). Escape episodes allow consumers to break away from the fast temporality of daily life and transport into the slower time (Canniford and Shankar, 2013; Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). Furthermore, prior research acknowledges that body skills are crucial in facilitating such temporal escapes (Woermann and Rokka, 2015; Cova, 2021). This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on temporality and embodiment in escapes by conceptualizing temporal slow-down as an embodied skill that consumers acquire through active engagement in embodied learning. Moreover, by utilizing an experiential learning theory (Kolb and Kolb, 2009), this research showcases the process through which consumers learn to temporarily slow down. Consequently, this study highlights that temporal slow-down is not only something that stems solely from the perfect alignment of practice elements during activity engagement (Woermann and Rokka, 2015) or from immersing into slower temporal logic in the oasis of deceleration (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019), but also a skill that can be acquired via an active engagement in embodied learning.

This study suggests that temporal slow-down may also be seen as an unintended learning outcome of activity participation. None of the research informants deliberately engaged in cold-water swimming to achieve a temporal slow-down. However, hooked by the experience of mental clarity and presence in the moment, they engaged in learning various body techniques and actively experimented to achieve stillness and calmness in an extreme environment. Prior research reminds us that the phenomenal field in which the activity is taking place evokes a “tuned” temporal experience of the body (Woermann and Rokka, 2015, p. 1493). An extreme and dynamic environment of the cold water naturally evokes a rush experience for consumers. Yet, through engaging in embodied learning, consumers can transform their experienced temporality – through the development of body skills, the setting

that initially brought hecticness and panic starts bringing stillness and calmness. Since the acquired skill is embodied, consumers are able to utilize it outside of the context of the activity (Kuuru, 2022). Hence, the embodied skill of temporal slow-down enables consumers to react differently in stressful situations, as those entail reactions similar to the acute rush when submerging in cold water. These findings further re-emphasize the notion that experienced temporality plays a significant role in consumer well-being (Woermann and Rokka, 2015).

Previous research on temporal slow-down suggests that consumers may achieve it only by spending a long time at the oasis of deceleration since “slower” territorial niches help consumers to resynchronize with the accelerated temporality of daily life (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). On the contrary, this research highlights that consumers can learn to slow down in familiar settings of everyday life within a short period of time via the development of an embodied skill. Informants in this study have never escaped the socially accelerated life. Moreover, the opportunity to slow down efficiently was one of the major draws of the activity as it could easily fit into consumers’ busy schedules.

Furthermore, this study illuminates the importance of providing consumers with opportunities to engage in embodied learning. The findings of this research suggest that experiences with a promise of temporal escape provide opportunities to learn the skill of slowing down, primarily when such experiences are:

- emergent rather than tightly controlled; and
- offer a degree of autonomy for consumers.

Previous studies emphasize that experiences that offer transportation from one temporality to another are always heavily mediated by the market (Bradford and Sherry, 2024; Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). Moreover, most escape experiences take place in settings that are strictly controlled by service providers. For instance, river rafters are carefully supervised by guides to ensure that engagement in rituals will result in magical and transcendent experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993). On the contrary, informants in this research could freely explore their body reactions and experiment in a dynamic and unpredictable environment, which provided fruitful opportunities for engagement in embodied learning related to temporal slow-down. This notion provides alternative explanations to prior research. Perhaps, pilgrims in Husemann and Eckhardt’s (2019) research could not successfully utilize their deceleration experience in everyday life because they experienced a slow-down in a setting that was specifically designed to support it and was fully controlled by the marketers. After all, the rules and restrictions established during pilgrimage clearly emphasized slowness and punished fastness. Thus, once consumers returned to a socially accelerated daily life that encourages fastness, their skills could not be adequately transferred. Consequently, escape experiences that are tightly controlled and prefabricated by marketers do not provide sufficient opportunities to engage in, develop, or successfully transfer the skills of embodied slow-down to a different contextual setting. These findings concur with prior scholarship that conceptualized fixed rules and tightly controlled environments as unfavorable for producing unintended learning outcomes (Murphy *et al.*, 2019; Canniford and Shankar, 2013).

Furthermore, this study suggests that unintended learning outcomes emerge when consumers have a degree of autonomy in an experiential setting, or put differently, can freely decide when, where, and how to engage in an experience. Autonomy in the learning process encourages exploration, facilitates self-discovery and offers experimentation opportunities (Griffiths and Campbell, 2009). For informants in this study, the absence of strict rules and norms provided space for self-discovery and aided in learning how to slow down. This also

aligns with the recent findings that consumers' sense of autonomy and control are crucial for successful everyday escape (Preece and Skandalis, 2024).

To sum up, this study primarily contributes to consumer research on temporality and embodiment by conceptualizing temporal slow-down as a body skill that consumers develop through engagement in embodied learning. Such skill can be transferred to other contextual settings and thus can help to achieve a slow-down in familiar everyday settings. Furthermore, emergent experiences that offer a degree of consumer autonomy facilitate skill development related to temporal slow-down.

Practical implications

This study offers several practical implications at the individual, managerial and societal levels. Since temporal slow-down is an embodied skill consumers can learn, at the individual level, consumers may benefit from engagement in activities that foreground body awareness and presence in the moment, to develop a slow-down skill and enhance resilience in everyday life. Moreover, individuals would benefit from exploring various physical pursuits in self-directed ways that embrace autonomy.

From the managerial perspective, findings highlight the importance of designing escape experiences that encourage embodied learning. Hence, service providers and managers (e.g. wellness and leisure marketers) should consider moving beyond overly curated experiences to provide consumers with opportunities for exploration and experimentation. Moreover, managers should prioritize designing escape experiences that easily fit into consumers' everyday schedules.

At the societal level, findings encourage a rethinking of how well-being can be cultivated within the contemporary socially accelerated life. For example, when promoting various embodied activities, public institutions may emphasize an opportunity to develop coping skills that allow achieving mental clarity and calmness in daily life, instead of focusing on simple claims of physical fitness. Finally, public discourse can benefit from recognizing that full withdrawal from fast-paced life is not necessarily required to achieve an enhanced well-being, since people can also learn how to slow down within the very settings of socially accelerated life.

Future research directions and limitations

This study offers several directions for future research. First, consumer researchers should further explore the dynamics between the extreme and non-extreme elements in embodied experiences that offer escapes and temporal transportation. Prior studies primarily focused on consumer participation in extremely intense physical pursuits that are purposely constructed to entail pain and even suffering (Scott *et al.*, 2017; Dawson, 2017; Cova, 2021). This research points out the therapeutic potential of intense physical experiences and highlights how learning to control body reactions may lead to a slower perception of time. In other words, when consumers are autonomous with respect to exploring and learning from their body reactions, they are more likely to discover experiential outcomes beyond the complete disconnect from the saturated self (Cova, 2021). Hence, future research could further investigate when or how intense pain works as a vehicle for complete self-shattering (Scott *et al.*, 2017) and when it becomes a vehicle for potential therapeutic renewal (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019). This dynamic might be especially potent when it comes to scaling up the extreme and extraordinary experiences, since service providers often struggle with how to make intense physical pursuits more hospitable to attract new customers without losing the extreme appeal for seasoned activity enthusiasts. Relatedly, future research could

further explore the emotional trajectories in the warlike escapes (Cova *et al.*, 2018) or other escape experiences that primarily involve the body.

Furthermore, this study illuminates the individualistic nature of consumer escapes. Informants in this research often enjoyed cold-water swimming on their own, which contradicts previous studies that primarily framed escapes as communal and collaborative (Arnould and Price, 1993; Goulding *et al.*, 2009). Perhaps, solitariness aided in the informants' learning process and provided an autonomous space for experimentation without the potential judgment from others. Future research should explore communal and solitary escape experiences in terms of their potential for incidental learning and investigate whether collective escapes exert homogenizing pressure that impedes learning.

In addition, findings of this research suggest that consumer can successfully transfer their slow-down skills to everyday life and can cope better in stressful situations. However, it remains unclear whether these skills would fade over time, especially if consumers stop their participation in the intense activities where the skill was acquired in the first place. Finally, this research was interview-based and utilized a phenomenological approach to understand the lived aspects of the experience. Future research could study embodied slow-down with ethnographic methods or through the lens of practice theory.

This study has certain contextual limitations. All the informants practiced cold water swimming in Finland, where such a pursuit is socially and culturally acceptable. Generally, this outdoor activity is extensively covered and promoted by both domestic and foreign media (Rellihan, 2019; Maksimainen, 2020), especially during the cold-water swimming season, and is actively supported by the public institutions. Moreover, most informants first encountered cold-water swimming during childhood or adolescence, together with parents or friends, and thus were familiar with the pursuit before serious engagement. Findings will likely differ in other cultural contexts or in contexts where intense physical activities are less acceptable or marginalized.

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