

# Consumers, producers and practices: understanding the invention and reinvention of Nordic Walking

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## Abstract

The idea that artifacts are acquired and used in the course of accomplishing social practices has important implications for theories of consumption and innovation. From this point of view, it is not enough to show that goods are symbolically and materially positioned, mediated and filtered through existing cultures and conventions. Twisting the problem around, the further challenge is to explain how practices change and with what consequence for the forms of consumption they entail. In this article we suggest that new practices like Nordic Walking, a form of 'speed walking' with two sticks, arise through the active and ongoing integration of images, artifacts and forms of competence: a process in which consumers and producers are both involved. While it makes sense to see Nordic Walking as a situated social practice, such a view makes it difficult to explain its growing popularity in countries as varied as Japan, Norway and the USA. In addressing this issue we conclude that practices and associated cultures of consumption are always 'home grown'. Necessary and sometimes novel ingredients including images and artifacts may circulate widely but they are always pieced together in a manner that is informed by previous and related practice. What looks like the diffusion of Nordic Walking is therefore better understood as its successive but necessarily localised (re)invention. In developing this argument we explore some of the consequences of conceptualising consumption as the outcome of meaningful social practice.

Key words: consumption, practice, innovation, walking