**Title:**

**Mobilising the walking-with technique to explore mundane consumption practices: practical and theoretical reflections.**

**Purpose -** Consumer studies drawing on interpretative approaches have tended to rely on sedentary interviews, which we argue are ill-equipped to capture the embodied, tacit and pre-reflexive knowledge that conditions routinized practices. This paper aims to provide practical and theoretical framing of the walking-with technique, in particular, with reference to practice theories. Specifically, we draw on Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘habitus’ to illustrate the ‘workings’ of the habituated body in performing routine consumption.

**Design/methodology/approach -** We employed the walking-with technique to elicit ‘mobile stories’ with senior executives in Hong Kong. We explored how walking to and from work/lunch/dinner can open up culturally and historically embodied narratives that reflect evolving consumption practices throughout participants’ professional trajectories.

**Findings –** In this paper, we demonstratethe uses of the walking-with technique by illustrating how embodied narratives foreground the pre-reflexive practices of mundane consumption. We illustrate how walking as a ‘mobile mundane practice’ can expand a researcher’s horizon of understanding, enabling them to (1) *“fall into the routines of participants' life”, (2) “get into grips with participant’s temporal (time travel portal) and cultural conditioning” and (3) “co-experience and empathise with participants through bodily knowing”*. We argue that walking-*with* necessarily implies an intersubjective sharing of intermundane space between the researchers and the participants. Such a method is therefore conducive to engendering co-created embodied understanding-in-practice, which we argue is accomplished when there is a fusion-of-habituses. Future applications in other consumer contexts are also discussed.

**Practical implications –** The walking-with technique embeds data collection in the day-to-day routes taken by participants. This does not only ease the accessibility issue but also render real-life settings relevant to participants’ daily life.

**Originality** - Despite receiving growing attention in social science studies, the walking-with technique is under-used in consumer research. This paper calls for the need to mobilise walking-with as a method to uncover practical and theoretical consumer insights in a way that allows for embodied and performative knowledge (know-how) to emerge.

## Introduction

Interpretive studies in consumer research have conventionally adopted a sedentary form of interviewing to understand how consumption practices unfold and take shape in everyday life (Tian and Belk, 2005; Tsaousi, 2019; Hill and Lai, 2016). With the inception of the ‘cultural turn’ in consumer research, greater primacy has been accorded to theorising the ‘mundane’ and ‘routine’ in ordinary consumption (see Gronow and Warde, 2001; Halkier *et al.*, 2011). Despite this, consumer researchers continue to rely on ‘thick description’ of consumer’s retrospective account and/or researcher’s post-observation fieldnote (Geertz, 1994) to document quotidian consumption practices. While these accounts are valuable, they are nevertheless ‘disembodied’ in that the production of knowledge remains predicated on the researcher and participant’s ability to re-construct recollective consumption narratives away from the site of (routine) practice. Consequently, such narratives constitute an ineluctable ‘blind spot’ that gives precedence to explicit knowledge, thus failing to capture the implicit, tacit and pre-reflexive knowledge that conditions routinised practices (Reckwitz, 2002). In this paper, we seek to demonstrate how walking - as a mobile research practice - can be employed to ‘incorporate’ embodied data with retrospective accounts in a way that would facilitate the co-production of pre-reflexive knowledge between the researchers and participants. As Schatzki (1996, p. 89) argues, practices constitute a “nexus of doings and sayings”, thereby implying the need to attend to “practical activity and its representations” (Warde, 2005, p.134). As such, mobile interviewing makes tangible the pre-reflexive rhythms of bodily movements in everyday life (see Reckwitz, 2002) as participants and researchers jointly traverse the intermundane material environment (objects, consumption sites) conditioned by the specificity of time (historicity) and space (cultural conditions).

Although walking interviews or mobile approaches are gaining increasing attention in social studies, particularly in geography (Warren, 2017; Evans and Jones, 2011), psychogeography (Bonnett, 2017; Richardson, 2015), and health studies (Capstick, 2005; Carpiano, 2009; Miaux *et al*., 2010), it remains relatively overlooked in consumer research (with the exception of Hansson, 2015 and Brembeck *et al*, 2015). Meanwhile, social scientists are increasingly interested in exploring how the self and places are perceived through interactions between body, spatiality and subjectivity (Lee and Ingold, 2006; Crouch, 2003; Wylie, 2005). Studies exploring how mundane mobility reveals the relationship between self and possessions are also beginning to emerge (e.g. Bull, 2002; Calvignac and Cochoy, 2016). More recently, we witness a renewed interest in practice theory within the discipline, which has generated a corpus of work aiming at theorising ‘practice’ (see Warde, 2005). Yet, there has been relatively little discussion pertaining to the methodological implications for applying practice theory empirically (Halkier *et al.,* 2011).

Following Bourdieu, Reckwitz (2002, p.2) argues that there is a need for scholars of practice theory to employ methodology that would encapsulate the praxeological relationship between ‘bodies, agency, (tacit) knowledge and (practical) understanding’. In his earlier writings, Bourdieu (1972) emphasises ‘praxeology’ in *Outline of* *a* *Theory of Practice,* which later inspired the concept of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). For Bourdieu, the habitus constitutes bodily dispositions that pre-reflexively orient one’s habituated action, and in doing so, reproduces the social world one inhabits. As such, a methodology that would encapsulate such pre-reflexive embodied knowledge is warranted. In this paper, we argue that the walking-with technique constitutes one such methodology as it has the potential to draw on bodily knowledge in a way that reveals its practical interactions with the material environment (artefacts, space) and with other body-subjects, as well as their associated images and meanings (Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Reckwitz, 2002).

To illustrate how the walking-with technique can be operationalised, this paper will draw on the empirical findings of a larger project, which explores how consumption choices evolve with work identities over time as a form of self-construction practice. In addition to sedentary interviews, we conducted walking-with interviews and observations with senior executives in Hong Kong by accompanying them on their daily commute to/from work and during lunch/dinner breaks. We demonstrate that the mundane routes of daily life can be fruitful research sites as they reveal individuals’ habituated practices. Walking-*with* implies an intersubjective form of mobility, and as such, enables the researchers to share in the bodily practices of their participants as they navigate their everyday situations.

This paper focuses on reviewing the theoretical and practical potentials that the walking-with technique can bring to consumer research. We will first reflect on the theoretical underpinning of walking as a habitual everyday practice. We will then discuss the use of walking or mobile methods in social studies and the role of the physical environment in consumer research. We then explain in detail the processes involved in designing the walking-with technique. Based on our experience of developing and using the approach, we identify areas of beneficial insights that would be useful for future researchers. Lastly, we conclude with a review of the potential challenges this approach can generate and how they can be overcome. Future applications of the walking with methods for other consumption settings are also discussed.

## Walking as habitus-in-motion: A Theoretical Reflection on Practice

What is practice? In what way can we conceive of walking as a form of practice? From the perspective of practice theory, walking cannot simply be conceived of as a physical movement that transports the body from point A to point B. Rather, walking as a habituated practice is purposefully performed. More precisely, walking is a socially performative way of being-in-the-world. Here, we find Reckwitz’s definition of practice to be particularly useful:

“A practice is a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood…A practice is social, as it is a ‘type’ of behaving and understanding that appears at different locales and at different points of time and is carried out by different body/minds’ (Reckwitz, 2002, p.250).

As a habituated social practice, the ‘act’ of walking is necessarily pre-reflexive in that the walker possesses a bodily ‘know-how’ that enables him/her to navigate everyday spaces without resorting to conscious thinking. The habitual walker is well acquainted with his/her physical surroundings and routes as he/she skilfully ‘slips’ into bodily comportments and pacing that reflect the practical conditions of his/her everyday life. On an ‘uneventful’ routinised journey, the walker can be said to be ‘in the flow’ with his/her surroundings (Csikzentmihalyi, 2002). Only in such a pre-reflexive mode of being is one free to address the practicality of everyday life (Wilson, 2019). Indeed, the theorisation of pre-reflexive practicality can be traced to the hermeneutic-phenomenological writings of Martin Heidegger (1927/1962). For Heidegger, human existence necessarily involves an experiencing subject embodying a social world that is *always already there*. In other words, the body is experienced by us as ‘*ready-to-hand’* – i.e. ready for practical use to accomplish its purpose. By engaging in the act of walking, we are also tacitly engaging in a world of practice that has *always already been* socially and historically conditioned.

For instance, modern urban living is characterised by fast-paced mobility that prioritises productive time over leisure time (Bissell, 2007). City dwellers are thus conditioned to a hectic pace of living that would allow them to command and “take possession” of urban spaces (Shortell and Brown, 2016, p.3). Walking with participants can therefore reveal insights into the socio-cultural conditions that frame such a mundane practice. As de Certeau (1988, p. 97) asserts, “the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered”. Such an insight is particularly prevalent in our findings. Our executives possess a tacit *knowledge* for effective commuting, thus enabling them to participate in a productivist society. For example, the routes our participants pick reflect their desire to ‘take a short cut’ while the consumption practices they choose along the way (e.g. having lunch on the go) resonate with the rhythm of modernity that has become increasingly dominated by productive (work) time (Bissell 2007). As Wilson (2019, p. 297) contends, performative *know- how* (to commute) precedes the declarative *knowing that* (of the geographical knowledge of the city).

Walking is thus a bodily practice that has been habitually trained to reflect specific social and historical conditions. From a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective then, the walking body is a ‘knowing body’ – i.e. the body is both an agent and a carrier of habituated practice (Reckwitz 2002). Indeed, Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the habitus has been influenced by early hermeneutic writings (Susen, 2017) originated by Heidegger (1927/1962) and later, by Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002). According to Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990), habitus cannot be conceived of as an innately inherited entity. Rather, habitus is self-accrued in that it comes into being as a repetitive act of everyday performance (Skeggs, 2004). Over time, such a repetitive act hardened into habitus, which in turn reproduced the evolved knowledge in social practices that we take for granted (Reckwitz, 2002). One is said to ‘inhabit’ one’s habitus when the socially and historically trained body comes to be incorporated as ‘second nature’ without recourse to conscious thinking (Wilson, 2019). In other words, walking as a habituated practice involves the historic shaping of bodily comportments in a way that allows the walkers to competently participate in the world. In developing walking as a research method, we argue that it is imperative to adopt a processual approach to address the trajectory of practice (Warde, 2005). From this perspective, changes in walking-related practices (e.g. changing routes, changing pace) can uncover the historic shift in socio-cultural patterning. In our study with senior executives, we leverage related features of the walking-with technique to explore shifts in participants’ daily routes. This helps us uncover evolving patterns of consumption practices as our participants progress in their career trajectories. Such a processual approach allows us to understand the continual nature of how “practices emerge, develop and change” (Warde, 2005, p. 131). Walking, we argue, sheds light on our habitus-in-motion. In keeping with practice theory therefore, our research focuses on the cultural and historical “conditions surrounding the practical carrying of social life” (Halkier et al, 2011, p. 3).

By embodying habitus as a culturally and historically pre-disposed orientation, one also occupies what Gadamer (1975/2004) calls a ‘horizon of understanding’. In other words, our practical actions both shape and are shaped (or fore-structured) by the embodied horizon from which we situate (Wilson, 2012). Hence, the act of ‘walking *with’* others necessarily entails sharing in the intersubjective habituated space with another. On an axiology level, research involving a walking with method should aim at capturing shared “understanding-in-practice” (Wilson, 2019). When a researcher attempts to ‘walk in the shoe’ of his/her participant, he/she also shares and expands their respective horizons (Gadamer, 1975/2004). In Bourdieurian terms, understanding-in-practice is said to be achieved when there is a *fusion of habituses* between the researcher and the participants. On the contrary, when a researcher experiences a ‘jarring in habituses’ (e.g. failure to keep up to pace with participants), the experience of disjunctures should be treated as an equally valuable source of knowledge. This is because disjunctures foreground more sharply the differences in embodied competences. The ‘incompetent’ body comes to be experienced (by the researcher) as ‘*present-at-hand*’ (Heidegger, 1927/1962) – i.e. a state in which one’s body becomes alienated and at odds with one’s habituated space. By adopting a walking-with method, the researchers and participants are therefore assumed to be co-practitioners. As Wilson (2019, p. ix) noted “practices are *always already* tacitly emplacing horizons of understanding and cultural perspectives shaping their goals.”

In sum, ‘walking’ is a way of living, forming a genuine and mundane part of life that should be of interest to consumer researchers. *Walking* and *commuting* with participants on their everyday routes can foreground our understanding of participants’ daily practices more evidently. Researchers can better appreciate how knowledge continuously evolves, is consumed, produced, and integrated into people’s choices and uses of artefacts and material possessions (Warde, 2014).

## The use of walking or mobile approach in social studies

As discussed earlier, an increasing number of studies in the social sciences have used walking or mobile methods to understand how people make sense of their physical surroundings (e.g. Fincham *et al*., 2010; Hein *et al*. , 2008; Ingold and Lee, 2008; Jones *et al*., 2008; Richardson, 2015; Brembeck *et al*, 2015). Unlike sedentary interviews, by engaging with physical prompts in situ (Kusenbach, 2003), participants are more able to narrate their memories on the resonant relationship and meanings constructed with people and things along their acquainted routes (Evans and Jones, 2011). The technique gives greater access to participants’ corporeal perceptions as both the researcher and the participant are actively immersed in a multi-sensorial environment (Adams and Guy, 2007). This helps transport participants to their embodied past and reconnect them to the neighbourhoods they were previously acquainted with (Carpiano, 2009; Miaux *et al.*, 2010, Capstick, 2015).

In consumption studies, the physical landscape has been invoked to stimulate embodied narratives, ranging from accompanied shopping (King and Dennis, 2006; Lowrey et al., 2005) to retail ethnographies (Healy *et al*., 2007; Joy *et al*., 2014), home-based ethnographies (Coupland, 2005; Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003) and retail rhythms in the market space (Warnaby, 2013; Kärrholm, 2009). However, these studies have tended to focus on places of retail, home or leisure as a static space, disregarding the routes to and from these sites. As Shortell and Brown (2014) assert, “everyday mobility on the streets and public spaces of neighbourhoods is such a ubiquitous part of urban life and culture that it is often overlooked” (p.1). The ‘ordinariness’ of life should therefore be understood on a street-level (Cheng, 2014) through walking and immersion into its material surroundings. Surprisingly, little attempt in consumer studies has been made to explore mobile stories that emerge from the routes participants traverse nor have there been studies exploring how bodies shift and morph in relation to participants’ encounter with spaces. In this paper, we demonstrate how the walking-with method can be utilised to address this gap.

## The data collection technique of walking-with

In conjunction with conventional interviews, our study employed the ‘walking-with’ technique for two main purposes: First, it allows access to the everyday work-related environment our participants immerse in. The streets and malls, with shops, restaurants, boutiques, clubs and services our executives pass by every day, act as “catalysts for speech” (Miaux et al., 2010, p.1168) that highlight issues one might omit or fail to speak about in sit-down interviews (Vannini, 2016). Second, the walking and commuting process also provides *observable* and *moving* contexts that foreground bodily rhythms, moving paces, facial expression, use of limbs and gestures that generate rich embodied data that are complementary to verbal accounts. We can observe corporeal comportments – which include how working people dress up for work, patronise retail spaces, utilise spatial infrastructures such as pavements and walkways, employ material objects such as mobile phones on the go. Like Kusenbach’s (2003) ‘go-along’ approach, the walking-with technique is a mobile form of interviews involving verbal and non-verbal interactions between the participants and researchers. We immerse in a part of their daily life by considering their to-and-from work routes as an interconnecting space between their private and work lives. The chosen routes spanned all kinds of movement and activities, which included not only walking, but also the mobilisation of transportation (e.g. public transports or driving). The goal of the walking-with method is to “put research into motions” (Hein *et al.*, 2008, p. 1279) in the quotidian context of people’s life. In doing so, we are able to trace participants’ appropriation of time and space.

### Recruiting participants

Guided by the principle of theoretical saturation which applied generally to most interpretative studies (Saunders *et al.*, 2018), ten senior executives from Hong Kong were recruited. As we intended to build a rich biographical study on people’s careers, our participants came from a wide range of professions with over twenty years of working experience. They have undergone numerous rites of passage in their professional trajectories (Gennep, 1960; Tansley and Tietze, 2013), such as promotion, change of corporations, professions or even countries of work. This is in keeping with the need to adopt a processual perspective, which allows us to trace the historic shift in the habitus of our participants.

Like most interpretative approaches, the suggested sampling for the walking-with technique is to “start small and stay real” (Wells, 1993, p. 497). The technique emphasises thickness of data (Geertz, 1994) to prioritise in-depth understanding over generalisability. We strongly recommend that researchers follow up on the initial walking-with interviews by conducting further mobile interviews (Roulston and Choi, 2018). This can be accomplished by alternating different work/home/lunch/dinner routes for the same individuals. In this way, researchers are able to generate richer data and triangulate different sources of embodied data. In our study, most participants were interviewed on-the-go for a minimum duration of 1 hour and 15 minutes each. The forms of data collected include verbal exchanges between the researchers and the researched, embodied data and the photographs of the physical surroundings passed by (Jones et al., 2008). As a large corpus of data for analysis is expected, a manageable sample size is therefore recommended (Francis *et al.*, 2010; Mason, 2010).

To enhance the chances of recruiting participants and to build initial rapport, we explained our study in detail to ensure participants were well-informed of its purposes and the operational particulars (Nowak and Phelps, 1992). These were all outlined in the consent forms, and they were assured that all the conversations and personal particulars would be kept confidential and only pseudonyms would be used.

### Conducting walking-with interviews

Unlike sedentary interviews, we found rapport-building easier to achieve through the walking-with technique as the physical surroundings serve as an ice-breaking device, which facilitate a warming-up practice for our naturalistic interviews. This is exemplified in the narrative below with pictures taken en-route (Figure 1 to 4). These photographs also serve as complementary and resonant data to the verbatim.

* *“Do you usually take this route to and from the office? Do you like the surroundings here?”*
* *“Wow, there is quite a range of good shops here. How often do you visit them?”*
* *“How often do you pick this mall for lunch? Do you come with colleagues?”*

A group of buildings with trees in front of them

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Figure 1 Business cityscape provokes conversations on how work life and routes form parts of daily routines.

People walking in a shopping mall

Description automatically generated with low confidence

*A picture containing text, building

Description automatically generated*

*A picture containing text, building, outdoor, scene

Description automatically generated*

Figures 2, 3 and 4. Modern, renovated, and nostalgic shopping sites prompt narratives on mundane en-route consumption and evolution of practices.

When developing a topic guide for the walking-with method, it is imperative that it is designed with topics geared towards route-based and environment-driven explorations. The intention is to capitalise on the prompts and probes available in the surroundings (Evans and Jones, 2011; Kusenbach, 2003). Pre-walking over the routes suggested by participants is recommended to note possible probes and to allow researchers to reflect on their preconceptions and potential biases (Gadamer, 1975/2004). It is also crucial that the topic guide captures the immersive engagement between body and space (Crouch, 2003; Ingold, 2000). To capture such data, the interview and analysis should focus on revealing the socio-historical conditioning that shapes practical actions, and in doing so, unveil the processual and reproductive nature of practices (Warde, 2005; Reckwitz, 2002). For example, our participants’ chosen routes prompted us to generate questions that reflect their historical and affective engagement with space:

* *“As you pass by these areas almost every day, what do you see, feel, and do along the way? Any differences between the to-work and from-work routes?*
* *“Have you changed your choices of shops over the years?*
* *“Does the vicinity look the same throughout the years? Do they remind you of any part of your career or any people?”*
* *“Does this route and its surrounding differ much from those around your last job? Why is it so?”*
* *“How does your body feel when you are walking around here? Any difference from the past?”*

When appropriate, we also seek immediate evidence for explanation from the ‘*field*’ – ‘right here’ along the routes where the walking takes place. Unlike sit-down captive interviews, our participants are able to instantiate examples on site. These examples do not only provide a ‘visualise’ account of participants’ narrative, they also situate participants’ frame of reference within a particular ‘horizon of understanding’ (Gadamer, 1975/2004) that informs their workplace consumption. This demonstrates how the walking-with technique can capitalise routes as sites of manifesting knowing (Nicolini, 2011):

* *“Can you find examples around us that reflect what you said? Such as shop displays or working people walking around us.”*
* *“When you say you seldom visit the local café with your colleagues, do you mean ‘this’ type of dining venue? (pointing to a nearby café)”*

The conversations made during the walking-with were audio-taped using smartphones or audio recorders. Considering the noise and other disturbances of the cityscape and the body movement involved, the recording quality was not comparable to that made in room-based interviews. En-route reflections (audio-recorded during interviews), re-walking over the same routes and post-walking journals became important to help record and reflect on embodied data, and to recall on some ‘lost’ or ‘unclear’ conversation (Beach *et al.*, 2018). To avoid the issues further, transcription of almost all walking-with interviews were done in less than two weeks to capture the verbatims before researchers’ memories drifted away.

To capture non-verbal bodily data enabled by the walking-with technique, we also noted participants’ facial expressions, moving rhythms, walking gestures, changes happened alongside the conversation and the physical contours passed by (Evans and Jones, 2011). We also took complementary pictures of material objects and spatial infrastructures along the routes. These enrich the data collected and serve as resonant probes in follow-up dialogues. Like most interpretative analyses, constant comparison and contrasting of data should be conducted inductively to identify patterns of similarities and ‘disjunctures’ (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). As such, the analysis demonstrates the specific insights that the walking-with approach can bring to consumer studies.

The flow-chart below outlines the key steps involved in conducting the walking-with data collection technique:

A picture containing text, plaque, metal, screenshot

Description automatically generated

Figure 5. The process of walking-with data collection technique.

In the following sections, we will discuss the insights drawn from the walking-with technique, focusing on its benefits and potential challenges to elicit routine practices.

## Practical and theoretical benefits of the walking-with technique

Drawing on the findings generated during the walking-with interviews, three useful practical and theoretical insights are identified, which have particular implications for practice theories. The approach is found to be much more than a mere tangible stimulus to provoke more conversations. Its benefits include *“falling into the opportunistic routines of participants' life”, “a narrative time travel portal” and “co-experiencing and empathising bodily knowing”*.

### **Falling into the opportunistic routines of participants’ life**

The daily commuting and/or lunch routes are essential itineraries that highlight the everyday practices of executives and professionals. By embedding fieldwork into participants’ mundane work patterns, the walking-with approach can be conveniently arranged amidst their routine schedules. Unlike a sit-down interview - which usually occupies a participant exclusively for at least one to two hours, the walking-with technique is able to solicit participant’s co-operation since it falls into their everyday routines. An opportunistic approach (Buchanan *et al.*, 2014) was adopted in our study. Often, interviews were not formally set up since serendipitous arrangements can emerge due to the short routes to and from lunch/dinner. The walking-with interviews also serve as a desirable follow-up or complementary encounter, providing gaps for researchers to refresh and reflect on what has been left out or omitted in preceding narrative interviews (Lowrey *et al.*, 2005). Though traditional approaches can also be used as subsequent interviews, these often take the form of yet another sit-down dialogue session. This always undermines, if not deters, the willingness of participants to cooperate.

We also offered to wait for participants at their office lobbies or walked them back to office after lunch interviews. Such intentional arrangements created extra or longer routes and thus, creating more time for interactions and observations. In some instances, we also had a chance to briefly visit their workplaces and meet their co-workers, which helped prompt more relevant conversations. Furthermore, compared with participant observation in the physical sites of work, which necessitates workplace endorsement or even temporary employment, the walking-with technique is less obtrusive as the *to* and *from* work routes are considered private itineraries of participants. All in all, since the approach falls into the routines of participant’s daily life, it is less demanding of their time, thus easing the issue of ‘access’ for conducting research.

### **A narrative time travel portal**

The vicinities of the workplace, where participants pass by daily, are found to resemble a ‘narrative time travel portal’. As we walked through these vicinities with our participants, we are able to witness and be transported to transitional moments that mark the changes in a participant’s career life. The streets, the aisles, the subways, the malls and the footbridges we encountered on the walking-interviews forge the recollection of memories and ‘life history’ (Miaux *et al.*, 2010) that define our participant’s career turning points. As practices are characterized by procedures and engagement (Schau *et al.*, 2009) that built up through “routine reproduction”, people’s current practices are informed by previous related practices (Shove and Pantzar, 2005, p.44). The material environment and neighbourhood harbour stories of socio-historical conditioning, which frame our participant’s ‘horizon of understanding’ (Gadamer, 1975/2004). This encouraged them to generate embodied narratives, which reveal the processes contributing to the stability and ruptures in their professional lives.

In our study, the changes in the physical environment around one’s workplace are found to mirror the evolution of one’s career path and status change. This is reflected in a walking-with interview with Ricky, a senior executive who shared his nostalgic account of career development:

*“(Interviewer: How do you feel when you walk around here?)*

*There’s a big difference. The present company locates in an industrial area [guiding the researcher to look around] with a production line here. It’s very different from the C. Company I worked for before, which is a New York-listed company and located at A-grade commercial hub. Though my current package is not as good as an expatriate before, joining the present industry and working in this district is better for career development, as it is amongst the firms doing trendy things like robotic, big data, AI...” (Ricky, senior director of business development)*

The two locales where Ricky worked have not only triggered memories of his career trajectory, but also evoked an emotional connection as he prides himself for having transitioned into a ‘trendy’ industry. Such an affective frame of reference reflects broader cultural and economic shifts in Hong Kong as a developed country, where manufacturing gives way to artificial intelligence (‘trendy robotic’). The presence of production lines at the industrial district thus contrasts sharply with their material absence at the commercial hub, evoking for Ricky a sense of ‘progress’ that is in line with the city’s post-industrial vision. In another narrative, Peter identified how his career advancement has increased his ability to access luxurious consumption spaces that were previously inaccessible to him:

*“When I was young, I used to regard this restaurant as very luxury and was accessible only to high-rank executives. Now, it becomes my favourite place to dine with colleagues, clients and suppliers... I want to show my gratitude to them and how important they are to my corporation.” (Peter, vice-president of a regulatory body)*

Prompted by the eateries on our walking expedition, Peter poignantly reminisced the sense of alienation he once felt towards a particular restaurant. For Peter, the restaurant caters to the ‘taste of luxury’ (Bourdieu, 1984) of those who possess high cultural and economic capitals (i.e. high rank executives). As Peter advanced in his career, the once admired but unaffordable dining experience becomes ‘*attainable*’. Over time, his sense of alienation receded as the restaurant emerges as his favourite place. His historic regard of the restaurant as a ‘domain of luxury’ now serves as a symbolic gesture (gratitude) where Peter treats his work colleagues/clients/suppliers. In doing so, Peter demonstrates tacit insider knowledge of the city’s restaurant scene (Warde, 2014) owing to his accumulated cultural and economic capitals, afforded by his career advancement. One may argue that the intertwined symbolisms of the past and present expand Peter’s horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 1975/2004). In other words, Peter comes to inhabit a ‘habitus’ that is progressively oriented towards a ‘taste of luxury’ and away from the ‘taste of necessity’ that marked his humble beginnings (Bourdieu, 1984).

The participants in our study also draw on material prompts from boutiques and window displays to reminisce changing fashion trends, which define the construction of their career self over time. Like many male participants, Peter recalled the changes in commercial sartorial style when we passed by a series of boutiques:

*“The I-bank industry dressed down a lot towards the late 90s and I gave up ties. The IT look was the fashion, you remember?... But funny enough, now many American firms put on ties again!! Maybe it’s too casual before and can’t show their professionalism.” (Peter, vice-president of a regulatory body)*

As the city’s retail landscape mirrors shifting fashion trends, our participants are able to map their career trajectories against them. For instance, the closing of shops and opening of new ones; changes in infrastructures; renovation of malls; the shift in work routes due to change of job, etc. could evoke participant’s ‘critical nostalgia’ (Bonnett, 2015). Such nostalgia reflects ruptures and transformations brought about by career milestones like promotions, job changes, or the accomplishment of certain career stages. Strolling through a city’s evolving configurations simulates travelling through time, in which people can reflect on the past, review the present and envisage the future. The contours of the city provide strong retrospective prompts to help participants demarcate phases in their profession and evoke episodes that would otherwise become submerged in sit down interviews. The walking-with technique does not only offer a reflexive platform (Kusenbach, 2003) that reveal people’s life history, it also serves as a time-travelling portal that unveils how ‘requisite elements’ of practices (Shove and Pantzar, 2005) emerge and intertwine. Such a method allows us to capture changing ‘habits’, as people undergo ongoing socialisation of practices (Bouveresse, 1999). Specifically, it allows participants to articulate how they incrementally gain embodied ‘technique’ and ‘competence’. This constitutes a ‘performative knowing’ (Wilson 2019) that guides our participants to ‘intuitively’ use and not use particular ‘objects’ (e.g. ties in different eras or signs of dining choices) for self-construction (Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1984; Schatzki *et al.*, 2001). By collecting data along routine paths, the walking-with technique uncovers how accumulated habits and practices emerge, develop (Warde, 2005), reproduce (Reckwitz, 2002) and diffuse (Shove and Pantzar, 2005) over time. The habituated body thus, evolves historically and culturally.

### **Co-experiencing and empathising bodily knowing**

‘Body in motion’ has emerged as a core theme discussed in the use of walking or mobile approaches (Miaux *et al.*, 2010; Kusenbach, 2003). The main interest falls in the ability of such a method to reveal the corporeal and sensory experience of individuals in their engaged spaces. While sit-down interviews take place within confined arenas, the walking-with method generates bodily data in two ways: ‘*engendering participants’ bodily knowing*’ and *‘observing and co-creating bodily data’.*

#### Engendering participants’ bodily knowing

The walking-with approach generates bodily rhythms that spark a recollection of memories and associated feelings as it “awakens the senses when the body moves through space” (Miaux *et al.*, 2010, p. 1167). In a walking-with interview conducted with Jenny, the researcher (first author) found herself unable to keep up as the participant walked at a fast pace. The researcher experienced a disjuncture in her embodied comportment as her ‘talking’ became a bit hectic. Jenny apologized and explained her ‘*habitual*’ pace of hurrying:

*“I think I walked much faster than before. I just do not want to waste time but get to work earlier and finish earlier so that I can leave and get back home to see my kids. I also seldom do window-shopping after work now, which I used to do a lot.” (Jenny, financial controller)*

Jenny recognises the change in her hastened pace and rhythms since she became a mother. She gave up leisure window-shopping and instead frequently run errands for her family en-route rather than satisfying her personal needs. More interestingly, the walking-with method reveals habitual actions, as Jenny possesses the ‘bodily knowing’ of the city’s daily rhythms (e.g. rush hour), thus allowing her to efficiently manoeuvre her commuting practices (get to work early and leave early). Such realisation can only be felt and achieved through on-going moving and sensing of the body (Larssen *et al.*, 2007). This reflects Heidegger’s (1927/1962) view of the habituated body as ‘*ready to hand*’. It also resonates with Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the habitus wherein one’s body intuitively ‘feels for the game’ in a manner that is pre-objective (Bourdieu, 1990). Our ‘understanding-in-practice’ often goes beyond the process of human thinking and constitutes the “basic being-in-motion” (Gadamer, 2006, p. 39). As suggested in our findings, our movements make us realize our existence and the related changes. Changes in bodily tempo in daily itineraries reflect changes in the life cycle, lived experience and priorities.

#### Observing and co-creating bodily data

Apart from engaging participants in dialogues, researchers in walking-with interviews can also observe corresponding changes in participants’ facial expressions, gestures, bodily movement, the pace of moving and interaction with the environment and other people.

Fion, one of the participants in this study, has shown proficiency in locating a temporary ‘workspace’ en-route as she commutes using public transportation. As a mother with two young kids, Fion demonstrated efficient rhythms as she gets on the bus, moves herself skilfully on high-heels to the upper deck, and swiftly locating a ‘quiet’ double-seat for her and the first author. By commuting with Fion, the researcher is able to ‘slip’ into the participant’s habituated space, allowing respective fusion of habituses. The researcher witnessed how the formation of habitually emergent ‘space’ enabled her to accomplish different tasks en-route, and in turn, allowing her to ‘buy time’ while traversing between her work and family life. This temporary workspace hosts a myriad of activities such as reading work documents, doing on-line shopping, booking a weekend dinner table, confirming interest classes for kids, etc. By sharing in her daily practices, the researcher ‘senses’ her use of ‘speed.’ The researcher attempts to observe (and catch up to) her accumulated competence as she juggles different aspects of her life.

Meanwhile, we also observe how material objects can facilitate a continual working mode for some of our participants. On his routine commute home, we observe how Ricky continues to immerse in the digital environment afforded by his smartphone. For Ricky, his preoccupation with his smartphone is experienced as a form of pre-reflexive engagement. When prompted, Ricky admitted, explained and demonstrated how the smartphone expanded his spatial horizon as it constitutes and resonates with the digital society’s tendency to extend ‘work’ beyond the bounds of the office.

As exemplified in the two cases above, we demonstrate how walking-with interactions can facilitate the researcher’s ability to co-experience the evolved embodiment of our participants. Researchers and participants are thus ‘collaborative carriers’ of practical knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002). The accumulated ‘skills’ expand the horizon of understanding-in-practice (Gadamer, 1975/2004), enabling them to orchestrate artefacts and material objects (like electronic devices, handbags for documents, a quiet seat) and to negotiate the optimal use of intangible resources of time and space. As Schatzki identifies, practice is “a temporally unfolding and spatially disperse nexus of doing and sayings” (1996, p.89). Commuting with participants permits researchers to apprehend an important element of practices – the body – and its relationship with things and knowledge. The technique recognises “practical understanding” (Reckwitz, 2002, p.258) through which participants act as ‘performers’ of practices in situ. Unlike sit-down interviews, we can observe how participants use their bodies to demonstrate “the very existence of the relationship between knower and known” (Nicolini, 2011, p. 602) Participants and researchers are not merely passive ‘users’, rather they are “active and creative practitioners” (Shove and Pantzar, 2005, p. 45) who learn, adjust and reproduce social practices in everyday life. In other words, they do not simply possess a declarative ‘knowing that’ of an artefact, rather they embody a ‘knowing how’ of using it – a form of *performative knowledge* (Brown and Duguid, 2001; Ryle,1949). The walking-with technique, therefore, allows researchers to co-experience how practices present as a ‘site’ of manifesting knowledgeability (Nicolini, 2011), where people in spaces ‘perform’ their corporeal understanding (Crouch, 2003).

## Possible obstacles and challenges of the walking-with technique

Despite the potential values of the walking-with technique, the approach is not without challenges. Environmental factors such as the noise, pollution, busyness of the streets and weather conditions could impose obstacles. Nonetheless, as the virtue of the approach lies in its naturalistic setting, the disturbances should not be purposefully avoided or controlled since they are the genuine part of participants’ life. They are the authentic routines that constitute people’s overall lived experience. Researchers can instead leverage these environmental disturbances to prompt questions regarding feelings and sentiments towards the cityscape. As demonstrated above, probes derived from the material environment can provoke unexpected yet relevant data that are spatially and temporally situated (Jones *et al.*, 2008).

Prolonged walking may also lead to tiredness for both the participants and researchers. This sense of fatigue can be more acute when travelling on busy city routes at rush hours. However, such routes must be chosen to enable theorisation of specific practices, as indicated in this study on the working ‘self’. In addition, audio-recording during the walking-with routes may lead to unease on the part of the participants. It may also distort the natural ‘flow’ of conversation during walking. To address this issue, we recommend using smartphones as a recording device since holding a phone while walking has become a mundane part of modern living. Audio-recorders are also suggested as they are slim enough to be incorporated in the researcher’s palms and the recording quality tends to be better. Additionally, since the verbatim collected will not be as clear as those conducted in a captive indoor environment, we strongly suggest the writing of fieldnotes and transcription as soon as possible to ensure fresh recollections of the walking-with interviews. Writing post-walking reflexive journals is also crucial to capture observations and insights that emerged from the embodied data. This also allows the researchers to reflect on their pre-conceptions (conducted prior to the interviews) and to identify potential shifts in their horizon of understanding-in-practice (Gadamer, 1975/2004)

Given the potentials as well as constraints of the technique, a list of dos & don’ts is provided in the Appendix 1 for researchers’ reference.

## Conclusion and further applications

This paper explores the theoretical and practical values of the rather under-used walking-with technique for collecting bodily and narrative data for consumer studies. In particular, we see the efficacy of the technique in understanding mundane consumption that is in line with practice theories.

We illustrated three key areas of merit for using the walking-with technique, which are not readily found in traditional interpretative methods of data collection. Practically, the technique eases accessibility by embedding interviews within participants’ daily routines. Moreover, the contexts in transit are where participants interact with other people and things, and over time, acquired and embodied self-relevant meanings and cultural capital. The technique allows researchers to immerse themselves into the socio-cultural and historical conditioning that sheds light on participants’ performative knowledge. En-routes, researchers are able to co-experience how participants mobilise their horizon of embodied understanding by skilfully marking out their respective tastes and distinctions. Through habitus-in-motion, participants orient their bodies by practically appropriating material, temporal and spatial resources.

We consider the walking-with technique as capable of being operationalised as a stand-alone data collection method. Similarly, it can also be leveraged as a complementary tool to other interpretative methods. Data collected can be triangulated and contrasted to expand a researcher’s horizon of understanding. The technique has promising potential to be further applied to studies that explore consumption and identities in other social and mundane contexts. We can, for instance, walk with participants in the vicinities of their homes or commute with them to usual shopping and leisure sites to explore how domestic consumption, shopping and leisure choices are practised and generate meanings over time. Similarly, we can walk with students or overseas students in their to-and-from study routes as well as around their campuses to understand their study journey and adaptation process. Migration studies will see particular strengths in the method by walking through places people have been exposed to at different stages of cultural assimilation. In short, the technique would be suitable when we seek nostalgic dynamics and embodied data in everyday practices that resonate with people’s changing surroundings.

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## Appendix 1. Dos and Don'ts of using the walking-with technique.

