Who am I without my stuff?

Loss of possessions & acculturation of migrant consumers

by

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Abstract

In a world where migration has dramatically increased over the last 30 years, migrant consumers have become an important market actor. When migrant consumers geographically relocate they potentially experience changes in their identity, while different factors influence their acculturation to the host culture. Consumer acculturation literature within Consumer Culture Theory has studied this topic from different angles but one that has not been deeply analyzed is related to the loss of possessions migrants experience when they relocate. They cannot take all their belongings with them, having to choose and carry just a few of the most significant ones. Previous literature has studied how losing possessions is like losing a part of the self. For migrants, the loss of belongings leads to experiencing grief that, even though influences every person to a different extent, has one thing in common: it could potentially affect their identity. Therefore, this research analyses how the loss of possessions influences acculturation. Specifically, our findings highlight three ways in which this influence is present: the loss of possessions causes loss of identity projects, it causes the maintenance of hobbies and routines to recover familiarity, and it increases the self-awareness of migrant consumers. We conclude by presenting how these three ways also influence their consumption choices, we bring to the table the concept of nostalgia, linking value, and global consumer culture.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

People move to new places all the time, and due to this, their identity and consumption habits change. Many decades ago, someone thinking about leaving their home country to establish a life thousands of kilometers away was not as common as today. As years pass by, however, migration is a phenomenon that continues to grow (International Organization for Migration, 2022). People move to another country for different reasons: seeking new jobs and studies, political conflicts, family, and more; while globalization and technology has made relocation easier. Today, migrant consumers can be found everywhere. Only in Sweden, the number of immigrants was over 82 000 in 2020, reaching its high in the mid 2010s with over 160 000 immigrants arriving per year (Statistics Sweden, 2021).

According to the World Migration Report (International Organization for Migration, 2022), while in 1990 there were 128 million immigrants, by 2020 the numbers were over 281 million, which represents 3,6% of the world's population. This means that in every 30 people, one lives in a country different from their birth country. These numbers highlight that studying migration has become increasingly important because as the number of immigrants continues to grow, new consumer perspectives can emerge.

When moving from one country to another, there are many things that get lost on the way: not only the belongings people cannot take with them, but among others, the places they used to go and the brands they used to consume. Within the field of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), researchers have studied how consumers adapt to a new culture and to geographically different environments through the concept of consumer acculturation. One of the most known definitions for this phenomenon is from Peñaloza (1994), describing it as "the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country" (p.33).

According to Giesler & Veresiu (2018), consumer acculturation involves "different processes of compromising among different cultures through individual consumption choices" (p. 553).

In other words, this phenomenon describes how consumers adapt to a new environment through their different consumption practices. It is a socio-cultural adaptation where migrant consumers use the available marketplace (Giesler & Veresiu, 2018). This new environment they need to adapt to is to be understood not only as a different geographic location, but also a different culture.

According to consumer acculturation scholars (Luedicke, 2011; Üstuner & Holt, 2007), migrant consumers do not consume nor behave in the same way as local consumers; in fact, they create new consumption patterns. They can devise different strategies to deal with the change of culture (Peñaloza, 1994), and what strategy they choose will be primordial to determine if the process will cause stress or it will be seen as a positive experience (Berry, 2001). Either way, in most cases, their identity is affected and they could implement new practices, habits and preferences. In this way, as the number of migrants globally has increased dramatically in the last 30 years, the research on consumer acculturation has continued gaining relevance.

No group of consumers is identical to the other, and both the host culture and the original culture play an important role in the acculturation process and identity formation of these consumers (Üstuner & Holt, 2007). In this sense, extending knowledge on consumer acculturation represents an important opportunity for marketers and consumer culture researchers, in order to understand more about migrant consumer identity, new ways of consumption, new multicultural marketplaces, how to approach migrant consumers, and how to develop products and services that can fulfill their needs. However, this topic is also important at a societal level, as gaining a better understanding of migrants can lead to the enactment of better public policies for them that address the needs of the different segments within a country's population.

When migrant consumers geographically relocate they can potentially experience changes in their identity. According to Schau (2018), there are four constructs that help a person to create their identity: self-concept, self-presentation, self-esteem, and identity projects. Identity projects refer to the different roles a person has created for themselves. Each role has a set of behaviors, clothing, vocabulary, and more, that enables identity projects to be performed daily in a social context. People move from one identity project to the other on a daily basis: from

new dad to gamer to dedicated accountant. These projects evolve over time, as so does one's identity. In their research, Üstuner & Holt (2007) highlighted that people carry out their identity projects not in an individual way but also by relating to others, and that social class has an influence on them.

However, the social environment is not the only thing that influences how migrants – or people, in general – carry out their identity projects. According to many authors (Belk, 1988; Wallendorf & Arnold, 1988; Schau, 2018), when creating and setting up these roles, an element of great importance is possessions. A portrait, a hoodie, a basketball, or a bracelet – these objects play a key role throughout our lives, and their meaning goes beyond their utility. CCT researchers show how the objects we call "ours" play a role in the creation of self-image (Schau, 2018). Those objects become relevant parts of who we are, how we perceive ourselves and how we present ourselves to others; they help individuals to construct their identity in a powerful way. Such is the degree of importance we give to possessions that the terminology "extended self" has been created to talk about how we see our belongings not only as "ours" but as "us", as an extension of ourselves (Belk, 1988). We cling to those objects and assign them meaning regardless of their utilitarian properties, physical characteristics, or monetary value (Ferraro, Edson & Bettman, 2010; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988; Belk, 1988).

One of the main research conducted about this perspective was developed by Rusell Belk (1988), who analyzed the relationship between possessions and the perception of the self. He stated that meaning is given to objects during different stages of life, and they help to represent both individual and collective identity. In this sense, our possessions remind us and confirm our identity, becoming reflectors of it and making it possible for us to develop and act our "self". In Belk's (1988) words: "In claiming that something is mine, we also come to believe that the object is me" (p. 141).

Nonetheless, according to Belk (1988), when discussing the role of possessions in identity formation, one aspect that is of interest is what happens when people lose those objects and how this influences their identity and notion of self. This can also be observed in migrant consumers, as they also experience the loss of possessions when moving from one country to another. They cannot take all their belongings with them, which requires them to choose and carry just a few (Mehta & Belk, 1991). This loss leads to them experiencing grief that, even

though influences every person to a different extent, has one thing in common: it could potentially affect their identity. Therefore, this research attempts to understand more about how migrant consumers are influenced by the loss of their possessions and what strategies are used to cope with it.

1.2 Problematization

Within consumer acculturation literature, scholars have placed identity formation and adaptation among the most important aspects to understand consumers (Peñaloza, 1994; Giesler & Veresiu, 2018). However, authors have studied identity formation of migrant consumers through different perspectives, among others for example: how migrant consumers' identity is affected by the individuals' background and the host culture (Peñaloza, 1994); the creation of hybrid identities (Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005); the influence of cultural, social, and economic factors on the identity of migrants (Üstuner & Holt, 2007); the influence of different agents such as institutions, market and governments in the shaping of the new migrant consumer identity (Giesler & Veresiu, 2018); how identity transition is eased by the ownership of possessions (Mehta & Belk, 1991).

Overall, according to the consumer acculturation literature, the identity of migrant consumers is influenced by the new host culture, creating an integrative identity, mixing the home culture with the host culture, making it a complex process (Peñaloza, 1994; Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005; Üstuner & Holt, 2007). Even if two people come from the same country, their experience could be different because of their background, context, identity, and prior habits. In this way, migration can be seen as both a challenge and as an opportunity for identity formation (Mehta & Belk, 1991).

When studying the identity of migrant consumers, it has been shown that possessions also have a special role because they help consumers to deal with their identity transition. Migration can be seen as a stressful and uncertain period in the life of a person, due to this possessions are more charged with emotional value (Mehta & Belk, 1991). Consumer acculturation literature has researched this aspect through a few studies (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Belk, 1992a). According to these authors, migrants' belongings can play the role of "security blankets". Some act as reminders of important people in their lives or of past experiences, while others can represent religious or ethnic identity. These are called transitional objects which provide tangible

manifestations that help migrants to maintain parts of the identity they had back in their home country.

In the same line, when discussing the loss of possessions in consumer identity, authors have approached the phenomenon from different angles. Victims of natural disasters lamented more the loss of stuffed animals than the loss of a car (Archibold & Moore, 2007). And victims of burglaries recalled feeling "violated" as a consequence of losing their belongings (Belk, 1988). However, according to Ferraro, Edson & Bettman (2010) not all possessions cause a sense of grief when lost, but only those with a deep connection to the owner. The loss of belongings has also been analyzed in geographic relocation of particular minorities (Belk, 1992a). Recently, the loss of digital possessions was also a subject of research. Israeli (2020) analyzed how employees of a company perceived the loss of their information as the loss of an arm.

Migrant consumers experience the loss of possessions when moving from one country to another. Most of the time, they cannot take all their belongings with them, having to choose and carry just a significant but minimum amount of them. This loss also influences the acculturation process. However, only a few studies on consumer acculturation have looked into the study of possessions as part of the migrant consumer's identity (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Belk, 1992a). Therefore, there is a research gap within consumer acculturation literature about the identity of migrant consumers in relation to the loss of possessions, thus this research attempts to address it.

This study aims to answer the question: **How does the loss of possessions influence the acculturation of migrant consumers?**

1.3 Research aim

In this research we aim to contribute to the literature streams of consumer acculturation and consumer identity, within the field of Consumer Culture Theory, by expanding our understanding on how the loss of their belongings can influence the way migrants feel, think, and even behave. Moreover, we aim to gain knowledge on how during moving the loss of possessions might change the way migrants perceive themselves, and present themselves to members of the host culture.

Migration is a global phenomenon that has grown over the last decades; however, nowadays new nationalist movements, right wing ideologies, and authoritarian governments have emerged, resulting in rejection of migrants, the development of counter-democracies and the rising up of conflicts (Ulver, 2021), leading to a potentially more polarized future. Therefore, the research on consumer acculturation is now more important than ever. Gaining a deeper understanding of migrant consumers' identity is relevant for brands, marketers and researchers, as they prepare to operate in a marketplace that becomes more and more multi-ethnic, polarized, and conflict driven (Ulver, 2021).

Moreover, this research also has implications for societies. A better understanding of migrant consumers will lead to the creation of better public policies, to gain new perspectives on how to solve conflicts, and it will help policymakers to understand more about the needs of immigrants. Furthermore, this research also aims to expand our understanding of the extended self within migrant consumers.

1.4 Research purpose

Even though there are many potential groups of migrant consumers whose knowledge and experience could help the authors answer their research question, we selected the group of international students at Lund University, and we intentionally focused on immigrants from non-EU or non-EEA countries. It is important to highlight that all of the participants of this study are migrants who moved to Sweden recently to the study; therefore, all interviewees are in the beginning phases of the acculturation process and changing identities.

There are three reasons for our selection of international students to study this phenomenon. Firstly, it has been suggested that younger people might acculturate more easily into a new cultural environment by being more open to changing their habits and welcoming new elements into their value system (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Peñaloza, 1994). By studying at one of the most international universities in Sweden, with 23% of its students being international students (Lund University, 2022), conducting the study at this institution provides an opportunity to study young migrants. After moving, these individuals find themselves in a multicultural environment, where among many acculturation outcomes they can embrace a new Swedish identity, enact the identity of a global citizen, or even preserve and embrace their own national

culture by seeking the company of individuals who came from the same country or region as they are. Therefore, by focusing on the international students of Lund University many different types of identity formation and adaptation strategies could be studied.

Secondly, by focusing on students whoes country of origin is a non-EU and non-EEA country is important because these migrants oftentimes have to face far more complicated situations than their peers from the EU or EEA (e.g. obtaining visa, traveling long-distance etc.). Mehta and Belk (1991) argue that the greater the distance of the moving the stronger the feelings of estrangement and grief will be. The cause of this is manyfold. These individuals have limited ways to move (e.g. mostly they can not move by car) and the cost of bringing more of their possessions increases by the amount of packages they bring. Moreover, visits to the home country are also more costly and difficult.

Lastly, the international environment at Lund University offers an opportunity to study the experiences of people from vastly different cultures. This way the authors have the opportunity to uncover experiences that are specific to a certain geographic area and those that are common in all of the participants regardless of the country of origin. As it has been mentioned before, conducting the study in Sweden is beneficial, because the country welcomes a rather high number of immigrants each year. In 2020 more than 88,000 people were granted residence permit (11,57% being refugees), over 43,000 of them were seeking jobs or studies (Migrationsverket, 2022).

To answer the research question, this thesis includes the following sections: A literature review that focuses on two literature streams, namely, consumer acculturation and consumer identity. In both literature reviews theories were chosen according to the research question of the study. Then, we detail the methodology of our research, its background, and its quality. After that, the analysis part contains all the findings of the primary research. In the discussion we engage with previous studies and theories, and show how we expand the conversion by highlighting the findings of this research. Lastly, in the conclusion chapter limitations of the current study and suggestions for further research are presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To gain a better understanding of how people construct and communicate their identity with the use of possessions, we turned to the field of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). The field of CCT places individual consumers into context and studies their decisions on a broader scale. It also allows us to explore product symbolism and the consumer culture enacted by these symbols (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

To lay the foundation of this research, two main literary streams within CCT will be reviewed: consumer acculturation and consumer identity. In order to gain a holistic understanding of consumer acculturation, the assimilation strategies identified by Berry (2001) are considered. However due to the limitations of Berry's work, this study mainly focuses on postassimilation models and ideas based on the work of Peñaloza (1994). Since consumer acculturation is a rather complex process that can lead to many different outcomes depending on the environment and the individual, some important factors are talked about in more detail, such as the impact of globalization or nostalgia. This study will look at an early assimilation model, then it will examine one of the most important studies in the field of customer acculturation, namely, Peñaloza's work of the postassimilation model and other authors who further developed this concept (Üstümer & Holt, 2007, Oswald, 1999; Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005). Lastly, it will discuss global consumer culture's influence on acculturation.

Within consumer identity, one of its main elements that is reviewed is identity projects, how and why these are formed, what factors (internal and external) influence it, and how they evolve during a person's life. However, in this literature stream, the main aspect this research will focus on relies on possessions and how they play a key role in identity formation and in the performance of the identity projects. This is done through the theoretical lens of Belk's (1988) research. At the same time, talking about possessions leads to the final topic that is relevant for this research, the loss of possessions: what it involves, its different contexts, and how this phenomenon affects a person's identity.

To answer "How does the loss of possessions influence the acculturation of migrant consumers" it is important to dive into both literature streams. They are interconnected as they can influence each other. Identity represents what a person is and how they see themselves

(Arnold & Thompson, 2005), and acculturation involves how this identity adapts to the new culture (Mehta & Belk, 1991). At the same time, identity (values, attitudes, and self concept) has an influence on the outcome of the acculturation process (Peñaloza, 1994). Therefore, the literature streams of consumer acculturation and consumer identity provide an appropriate theoretical lens through which we evaluate the findings of this research.

2.1 Consumer acculturation

The research of consumer acculturation within CCT has developed over decades. Authors have analyzed how individuals adapt to a different culture through different perspectives, starting with the assimilation models. As years have passed, they have also included additional factors that can determine the outcomes of the process, creating postassimilationist models. This thesis, that specifically focuses on the changing habits and identities of migrant consumers, consumer acculturation literature aids the understanding of such processes caused by moving from their country of origin to another country, economy, and cultural environment.

Understanding identity adaptation and changing consumption behaviors is possible by examining the process of individuals migrating and adapting to a new consumer environment. According to Peñaloza (1994, p. 52) "consumer acculturation is a phenomenon that occurs over time and spans two nations". In this sense, during the process of acculturation changes are apparent in both the dominant (i.e. the culture migrants have to adapt to) and nondominant (i.e. culture of immigrants) culture; however, individuals of the non-dominant culture experience a greater level of transformation (Berry, 2001). Nowadays self is often communicated through consumption patterns, therefore the process of adaptation to a new social context and the level of integration depends, among other factors, on the consumption choices of the migrant consumer. The fragmentation of traditional groups such as families, and on a more extreme level, society, image formation by consumption is more important then even for acculturation studies (Oswald, 1999). However, consumer acculturation considers other components of an individual as well, e.g. attitudes prior to moving, or encounters with members of the host culture (Peñaloza, 1994; Leudicke, 2011; Berry, 2001).

2.1.1 Early assimilation model

John W. Berry's (2001) assimilation model is considered to be one of the main studies within assimilation. This model is not part of consumer culture studies, however it is an important study that researchers of the field built on. According to the author when migrants move to a new location they get immersed in the local culture. The way they adapt to a new cultural environment depends on intercultural contact with members of the host culture and the degree to which they want to stay connected to their original culture (Berry, 2001). Since the intercultural strategy adapted by an immigrant group does not only rely on the behaviors of migrants, the attitudes of the host culture is just as important in the process of adaptation. For example, if encounters with the dominant culture are mainly negative and invasive it is more likely that individuals who wish to assimilate change their strategy. In the acculturation process both cultures change, therefore Berry (1974, in Berry 2001) argues that a third dimension is needed, namely the power role that the dominant group practices which eventually determines the way of acculturation. Since this paper mainly focuses on people who are trying to adapt to a dominant culture, the possible strategies of such individuals should be explored in detail. As it has been mentioned before, different acculturation strategies depend on the level of desire to maintain heritage culture and the interaction seeking with the host culture.

Berry's model (2001) identifies four strategies that migrants utilize in order to acculturate. Namely these are: assimilation, integration, adaption, and marginalization. Assimilation and integration are usually prefered by both majority and minority groups (Brown et al., 2016 in Lutterbach & Beelmann, 2021). When people do not wish to maintain their native culture, but they actively seek out interaction with the members of the other culture they adapt the (1) assimilation strategy. When individuals want to hold on to their original culture while at the same time they engage in daily interactions with others, we speak of the (2) integration strategy. This strategy is positively connected to both psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Abu-Rayya & Sam, 2016 in Lutterbach & Beelmann, 2021). The adoption of (3) separation strategy occurs when people stay away from daily interactions with the host culture while trying to hold onto their own culture. Lastly, when individuals do not wish to hold on to their original culture and at the same time they do not seek out interaction with the host culture we can speak of (3) marginalization (Berry, 2001).

The model devised by Berry offers a structured and solid understanding of the process of acculturation; however, many argue that adaptation to a dominant culture is a much more complex transformation than the bidimensional model presented above (Ludicke, 2011; Üstüner & Holt, 2007; Peñaloza, 1994; Oswald, 1999; Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005). This implies that regardless of the efforts of the individual, assimilation does not always play out as desired. The above-mentioned power of the host culture and other external and internal factors inhibit migrants from adapting to a new culture the way they intended (Ludicke, 2011; Berry, 2001). While some (mostly first-generation migrants) can improve and shape their original culture by adapting it to the new cultural settings, others fail to maintain their desired way of acculturation, which eventually can lead to shattered identity projects (Üstüner & Holt, 2007). Overall, to broaden the scope of the discussion, different sociocultural structures need to be studied, and these have been incorporated in what have been denominated as postassimilationist models.

2.1.2 Postassimilation models

Previous studies mainly focused on the degree of acculturation, however Peñaloza (1994) focused on the post assimilation consumption practices migrants have. She argues that the degree and way of acculturation is highly dependent on individual differences and on demographic differences. Peñaloza (1994) devised a novel model of consumer acculturation that incorporated more factors than that of previous researcher, such as Berry.

As previously mentioned, Peñaloza (1994) included individual differences as a main element of her model. (1) demographic variables, (2) consumer acculturation agents, (3) the acculturation process itself, and (4) its different outcomes. Demographic variables, such as age or gender could determine the ease, and later, the degree of acculturation. For example Peñaloza (1994) found that younger migrants adapted more easily to a new culture than older individuals who already had well-established routines and practices, however such variables do not determine the degree of acculturation in every instance (Urbiola et al., 2021). Moreover, the languages spoken and the level of education also play an important role. It is likely if a migrant speaks the language of the host country they might assimilate more easily. Furthermore, as it has been highlighted before, the level of cultural capital can play an important role in the process also (Üstüner & Holt, 2007).

The process of acculturation is not carried out in a vacuum, but is influenced by many exogenous factors. One of these factors highlighted by Peñaloza (1994) are acculturation agents, who act as a source of information and an example for migrants how to behave (Peñaloza, 1989 in Ludicke, 2011). Such agents can have a direct connection to the individual such as a family member or a friend, but migrants can also have indirect contacts, e.g. mass media, companies, markets, or even churches. Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard (2005 in Ludicke, 2011) identified a third type of agent, that is the transnational consumer culture that acts as a socio-cultural guide. Regardless of the type of the agents, they impact how migrants conceive themselves and their relationships to their peers (Ludicke, 2011). The model of Peñaloza (1994) can be extended by the addition of non-agentic influences that affect the process of acculturation. Such influences could be occupational opportunities, status and mobility opportunities, gender ideals, or brand specific consumption practices. These factors might act in a different manner and be weaker than agents like family or friends; however, their effects can not be left deemphasized (Ludicke, 2011).

The acculturation process is the third aspect of the model of Peñaloza (1994). On arrival to the new environment individuals can face a plethora of difficulties that stem from that prior skills and knowledge is not, or only to a limited extent can be utilized in the new environment. In these instances translation skills are needed in order to devise new cultural exchange systems that act as links between the two cultures. The adaptation process mostly relies on a trial-and-error type of learning (Peñaloza, 1994).

According to Peñaloza's model, there are four outcomes to consumer acculturation. (1) Assimilation happens when a person acquires many products, services and practices of the host culture. (2) Maintenance is when the migrant individual adapts some elements of the new culture, while maintaining some of the aspects of their original culture, e.g. certain rituals. (3) Resistance toward a culture can arise when people feel a pressure to change while not being content with the values of the dominant culture. Peñaloza (1994) argues that resistance can also be targeted toward the original culture at the same time. In these situations people might leave out certain elements of both cultures during the process of assimilation. The last possible

outcome is (4) segregation, when migrants are isolated from the dominant culture and live in closed communities (Peñaloza, 1994).

Üstüner and Holt (2007) developed a postmodern acculturation model that considers how social structures (i.e. social class position, consumer culture, and ideology) are central to acculturation. They identified three that are particularly important in these situations. People who wish to adapt to a dominant culture, especially to Western societies, have to internalize the practices and ideas of postmodern consumer culture if they do not want to get annihilated from the rest of society. The ideologies of postmodern consumer culture can dramatically differ or in instances even collide with the values of one's original culture. This is a conflict that the individual has to resolve on their own.

Social class can play a major role determining the success of the acculturation process. Capital is strongly connected to social class, they define both economic and noneconomic positions (Weber, 1978 in Holt, 1998). Economic capital is necessary but not sufficient to successful adaptation. As the study of Holt (1998) highlights, even if individuals hold the same level of economic capital they can not attain the same social position as others because of the lack of cultural capital. Üstüner and Holt (2007) argues that a high level of cultural capital causes cultural flexibility, therefore it makes acculturation easier for the individual. Moreover, being aware of one's social class can assist setting boundaries and form group identity among immigrants (Horowitz, 1975 in Oswald, 1999).

Cultural capital affects the way one consumes, therefore the way identity is constructed (Holt, 1998; Oswald, 1999). However, modern day migrants often do not abandon their original culture in favor of a new one, nor do they adapt to the dominant culture fully. Oswald (1999) argues that in order to find balance between cultures immigrants often switch between cultural codes, therefore pleasing both cultures. By culture swapping one can show many different elements of many different cultures they see themselves belonging to. For example in the study of Oswald (1999) a participant expresses their belonging to American, French, and Haitian culture by serving a traditional French dish at a Thanksgiving dinner. Rather than adapting a universal way of consumption and rituals honoring only one of the cultures, by being able to mix different elements of each culture and utilize whichever is appropriate in a certain setting,

migrants can adapt to a dominant culture while maintaining their original one as well. Each product consumed and ritual adapted act as a symbol for others, showing what the individual values (Schau, 2018; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979 in Oswald, 1999). On the other hand, however, culture swapping can also have negative effects on individuals. Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard (2005) argue that such practices can evoke anxiety by not providing authentic experiences. Moreover, culture swapping could result in confused identities and blurred cultural boundaries for the individual.

Unlike the previous studies that have been presented, Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard (2005) examined transnational consumer culture as an acculturation agent. They argue that the way individuals acculturate is not necessarily a conscious, tactical choice. The identity of migrants is an outcome of the consumption choices they make based on specific situations. Identity conflict might arise from seeing consumption as a way of expressing ethnicity (Bouchet, 1995 in Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005). While researching the acculturation process of Greenlandic individuals, four different possible identity positions can be reached: (1) Hyperculture, (2) Assimilation, (3) Integration, and (4) Pendulism.

Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard (2005) found that oftentimes migrants started to form a closer relationship to their culture than they claimed prior to moving. The strengthening of cultural ties are most often achieved through consumption. This way ethnicity and culture is commodified. Products and services specially created for cultural validation can aid the preservation of one's original culture in a new cultural environment. This way, through appropriate marketing strategies companies can assist the progress of acculturation. Once migrants are immersed in the host culture, they go through a reappreciation for their original culture and romanticize their national heritage, this leads them to consume according to it, achieving a (1) hypercultural position. This is a position achieved by consumption choices, not by rituals or other strong cultural ties (Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005; Peñaloza, 1994). When one gains the identity position of (2) assimilation, they embrace the host culture and all the elements that come with it. Often this could mean that they get detached from their original culture. However, one might embrace both cultures at the same time, hence reaching the identity position of (3) integration. For these individuals the identity position is much more fluid and open-ended. Lastly, the (4) pendulum position refers to an identity position where

individuals experience the positives and negatives of both cultures. They might start to idealize their original culture when they experienced too much of the host culture (Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005).

According to Emontspool & Kjeldgaard (2012), during or after moving some immigrants feel that they have to reconsider their original culture in context of the host culture, this process cultivates cultural reflexivity, that on the personal level can enforce cultural affiliation, however goods moving across borders can disrupt their original meaning, therefore there is an instability of cultural meaning. The renewed appreciation for the original culture studied by Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard (2005) could be further studied by examining the importance of nostalgia, and therefore nostalgic consumption. According to Emontspool & Kjeldgaard (2012) migrants from various cultural backgrounds could develop "nostalgic consumption narratives". Consumption of products or traditions from one's original culture can reconnect migrants with their home culture (Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005). However, Wilk (2009 in Emontspool & Kjeldgaard, 2012) argues that one can develop nostalgic consumption habits to another glocal consumptionscape as well.

The studies of Oswald (1999), Peñaloza (1994), and Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard (2005) demonstrate that the process of consumer acculturation does not necessarily lead to assimilation (i.e. complete immersion), but it allows bringing together different cultural identities. By integration and negative encounters the achieved outcome of the consumer assimilation process, and the attained identity position can change over time (Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005).

2.1.3 Global consumer culture

In countries with highly globalized markets and a western consumer culture, such as Sweden, the influence of globalization has to be further examined. Migrants do not only face the challenges of adopting to the host culture, but oftentimes they have to adapt to the global consumer culture as well by adopting novel ways of behavior and skills (Durvasula & Lysonski, 2016). Global consumer culture can be understood as a collection of symbols that are recognized by people across the globe (Akaka & Alden, 2010, p. 37). Cleveland and

Laroche (2007, p. 249) argue that this evolved by the blurring of boundaries between national cultures and economies. However, the increased mobility of individuals worldwide would not necessarily lead to a homogenous global culture where consumption practices are similar due to standardization of products, and cultures. According to Sever (2018), the global consumer culture might encourage individuals to preserve their original culture.

More often than not, people adopt elements of the global consumer culture, while simultaneously embracing parts of the original culture (Sever, 2018). Acculturation to the host consumer culture does not necessarily cause one to abandon their original culture, in fact the two cultures can complement each other (Cleveland et al., 2016). With global media, individuals can implement the symbols and images of global consumer culture, therefore creating a sense of belonging to a vast group of people. But, consuming such global symbols does not lead to homogenization, because each culture gives them a slightly different meaning, creating a sense of cultural difference even among the biggest brands and symbols around the globe (Ruževičiūtė & Ruževičius, 2011). In conclusion, some individuals could potentially maintain elements of their original culture and values while adapting to the elements of the host culture that help them connect to more people. This mix of the two cultures can create cultural diversity and multi-ethnic society (Cleveland et al., 2016; Sever, 2018).

By understanding the concepts of consumer acculturation we can get an insight on what it means for people to leave their home country and how they cope with the hardships of moving to a new cultural environment. The outcome of the acculturation process can affect how they behave, consume and to what extent they get immersed in the host culture, hence they could adopt new identity positions. Gaining an understanding of this is valuable for this research as it allows us to dig deeper into the migrant consumers' identity and all the factors that affect them.

2.2 Consumer identity

Studies about identity have been developed over many decades and by different areas. Researchers in not only psychology or social sciences, but also within CCT have focused heavily on it. In CCT, identity is reviewed in relation to consumers, as one of the most important factors that determines their behavior, the way they see the world, and how they

present themselves to others (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Üstuner & Holt, 2010; Belk, 1992a; Belk, 1992b). Through the study of the consumer identity it has been possible to gain an understanding of the market and the symbols society grants to each market action. What and in what manner people consume is not only a way of communication towards others but it is also a way of establishing one's own self concept.

2.2.1 Identity projects

Identity is a phenomenon that encompasses several elements, among them: self-concept, personality, identity projects and self-presentation (Schau, 2018). By itself, identity refers to the way people see themselves, and to the different characteristics, constructs and roles that build who they are. For a long time, consumers have been seen as identity seekers, wanting to find freedom through their choices and pursuing different ways to 'become' (Larsen & Patterson, 2018), and this has not changed in the post-postmodern society, which is why identity projects are perhaps one of the central constructs researchers have focused on (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Larsen & Patterson 2018; Belk, 1988; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Schau, 2018).

Identity projects describe the different roles people perform for themselves and for others, and how these roles are enabled by the resources of the marketplace. In order to create and shape these images and visions of the self, consumers use products and brands. In this way, the marketplace is seen as a "source of meaning creation" (Jafari & Goulding, 2008). This happens to such a degree that nowadays, it is seemingly impossible to mediate who we are without using the symbolic resources of the marketplace. Identity is enacted through the use of symbols, products and specific practices (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This is not an accidental process or readily handed to consumers, but the result of a selection they carefully carry out with the help of the market (Schau, 2018). One person can have several social roles to live up to (e.g. father, husband, colleague, gamer), and each one involves, among others, different sets of behaviors, norms, obligations, and beliefs. In their daily lives, people move from one role to another, depending on the situation and even the time of the day.

Just as a person goes through different stages of life, identity also evolves, meaning that the identity projects continue to change. Every stage of life brings new challenges and learnings, leading to new roles to fulfill. In this way, an adult does not have the exact same identity

projects he had when he was a teenager. It is an "on-going creation of narratives of self identity" (Schau, 2018, p. 27). People build what they want to be and how they want to achieve it, having an image of their present and different ideas and aspirations about their future selves. As time passes, however, "they selectively update their narratives as they interpret and incorporate the real twists and turns as their lives progress" (Üstuner and Holt, 2007, p. 51).

Nevertheless, through all these changes, the one thing that remains the same is where they get all the elements to perform their identity projects from: the marketplace. The marketplace is the main source where all the symbols and elements that people need to create their identity projects reside. These symbols and meanings are encoded in brands, advertisements, material goods, and services. Consumers actively seek these and even transform them to make them part of their own identity projects. In this sense, consumers will change their consumption modes, but will continue to consume to create their identity, not only for them, but for others (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Overall, this is one of the reasons why authors refer to consumption as a symbolic and even experiential phenomenon, instead of a mainly rational or functional one (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Ekström, Ottosson & Parment, 2017; Belk, 1988).

However, consumption is not to be seen as an individual process only. On the contrary, when consumers have the agency to choose between thousands of choices to construct and reshape their identities, they do so with the influence of their social groups. Identity is also constructed in a community (Kozinets, 2001), and this is why identity projects enact social roles: because they are performed with and to others. Nuclear family, friends, neighbors, teachers and so on, they all have an impact on the way consumers see themselves and therefore, the choices they will make in the market.

Since this paper is mainly concerned with individuals moving from one country to another, consequently, from one culture to another, it is also important to emphasize the effect one's national identity has on identity formation and consumer behavior. Oftentimes national identity is one of the only things that remains of one's identity after moving. National identity can be understood as a way of thinking, feeling, and acting. These components stem from the values of a certain society (Nakata & Sivakumar, 2001 in Cleveland et al., 2016, p.1091). Values and social norms influence how one sees themselves and their environment. It plays a major role

in how people carry out their identity projects, what elements they incorporate and what they leave out. The degree of engagement towards national identity is not the same for each individual (Sobol, Cleveland & Laroche, 2018). This can cause some to adapt to a novel cultural environment more easily than others, even though they come from the same country, or even from the same region and city. The degree of connectedness and the strength of one's national identity could influence the process of acculturation.

All migrant consumers create certain identity projects that identify and define them while they live in their home country; after the moving, however, several changes are experienced: new environment, new culture, new rules, and less familiarity. This leads to a disruption in the way they see and present their identity, to themselves and to others. Oftentimes that disruption has to do with the fact that their old environment, which is made out of their possessions and objects they deeply valued, is mostly gone.

2.2.2 Possessions and the self

According to Belk (1988), one of the main elements that help to create identity projects are possessions. Through the ownership of symbolic products a person can express and become their desired self, not only for them, but for others too. In his groundbreaking study "Possessions and the extended self", Belk (1988) argued that people, sometimes without knowing it, see their belongings as part of their own self. He stated that via ownership certain objects can become a part of one's identity. Possessions help people to perform their different roles, leading to the idea that they are what they own. In this way, possessions become an extension of oneself (Belk, 1988).

Possessions are a reflection of an individual's identity. Through the extended self a person is able to communicate a wide range of personal traits, such as beliefs, personal values, social status, and identity itself. But it goes even further than that: Through possessions a person also communicates their past, present and future (Belk, 1992b). Belongings play a key role when convincing others – and ourselves – that we are what they represent, i.e. a trophy or a medal reminding us that we were and are capable of achieving greatness. In their study about favorite possessions, Wallendorf & Arnould (1988) argued that we are who we are: "We see objects as

markers to denote our characters for others; we also use objects as markers to remind ourselves of who we are. In this sense, we derive our self-concept from objects" (p. 531).

Objects that are deeply linked to a person carry a value that goes beyond their utility. People do not value certain possessions only for their functionality. But these objects are filled with an individual's memories, feelings, culture, and more (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). The nature of the object is of no matter (i.e it can be either a photograph or a blanket), what they hold in common is that they are personal warehouses of a person's essence and they play a key role in the identity of a person within contemporary consumer culture (Belk, 1992a; Belk, 1988; Ahuvia, 2005). In his research, Ahuvia (2005) used the concept of "love" to extend the research of attachment, possessions and extended self. Participants were asked about the objects they loved, and the findings were consistent with Belk's (1988) that is, objects helped not only in the construction of one's identity but also in resolving internal conflicts. "Love objects serve as indexical mementos of key events or relationships in the life narrative, help resolve identity conflicts, and tend to be tightly embedded in a rich symbolic network of associations" (Ahuvia, 2005, p. 179).

This incorporation of possessions into the self is developed during different stages of life. But, is there a limitation on the type of objects that can become or be perceived as part of the extended self? Belk (1988; 1992b) summarized the main categories as: body parts, internal processes, ideas, experiences, and persons, places and things to feel attached to. But he also talks about special cases of extended self, such as collections, where the feeling of control is enhanced. "We may not be able to control much of the world about us, but the collection, whether of dolls, 'depression glass', or automobiles, allows us total control of a 'little world'" (p. 154). Other special cases are pets as extended self, other people, and vicarious consumption. In this sense, there is a wide variety of things that can be perceived as part of the self, and it varies from person to person. However, when referring to these special cases, it is noted that they all have pathologies associated when they're taken to the extreme.

To understand how an object becomes part of the extended self, Belk (1988) proposes three methods of incorporation: (1) creation of an object, (2) knowing an object passionately, and (3) through contamination through proximity or getting used to that object (habituation). But the

way they are incorporated into the self does not have an influence on how much value the object will have for the person; on the contrary, elements perceived as part of the self are all seen as worth taking care of and people invest time on them.

However, as the years have passed and the world has evolved, more elements have entered the picture and today it is possible to also refer to digital possessions when discussing identity and the extended self. In today's world digitalization plays a major role in people's lives, and many of the things that used to be physical, are now digital. The acquisition of virtual goods is something that has become part of daily life. Therefore, it is also relevant to elaborate on digital possessions. Research has found that both forms of possession can become part of the extended-self and nowadays it is impossible to talk about the extended-self without considering digital possessions (Belk, 2014; Israeli, 2020). According to Israeli (2020), digital possessions create a mentally extended self, and also help to create and confirm a person's identity. People keep them with different objectives, such as reminders of their past or their relations with others, reinforces self-esteem, and more.

Regarding digital possessions, Schau (2018) mentions that possessions are the materialization of identity and they can both be physical and purely digital. However, Belk (2014) also argues that solely digital possessions (e.g. blogs, avatars, photos, etc.) are not as impactful as their tangible counterparts, because the interaction with them is often broken. Nevertheless, their impact should not be downplayed, as one of their main characteristics is that digital possessions can be easily shared, which fosters a sense of imaginate community and enhances the aggregate self. In the same line, Petrelli & Whittaker (2010) analyzed family mementos and found that there was a stronger link to physical mementos for families than to the digital ones. They were perceived as more personal and worthy to be passed from one generation to another, which did not happen for the digital mementos. Even though families did have attachment to the digital items, initially they were not considered as important as the physical mementos. Physical possessions still play the major role when being perceived as part of a person's identity.

For migrant consumers physical possessions are also valuable. According to Bardhi, Eckhardt & Arnould (2012), these "become visible markers of the migrants' belonging to two worlds, the country of origin and the host country" (p. 512). As they leave their country and enter a

new one, possessions continue to play an important role for their identity, just like they did prior to their moving.

2.2.3 The loss of possessions

If possessions act as reminders and embodiments of who we are to ourselves and to others, it logically follows that if they are lost, something changes inside the person. The loss of possessions – either given up, stolen or lost – evoke a feeling of grief similar to the one that is experienced when a loved one dies; however, it can also destabilize the notion and concept a person has about themselves, provoking a wide range of negative emotions (Belk, 1988; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988; Belk, 1992a). Wallendorf & Arnould (1988) refer to the loss of possessions as something that is experienced as a tragedy and something that "can change the meaning of life for individuals" (p. 532). This is especially true because of the meanings that are associated with possessions. If a belonging provides a sense of security and safety, when it is lost, the person also loses that sense, leading to feelings of insecurity that also affect their everyday routines, and attitudes. After all, if we are what we have, who am I if I lose my most important belongings?

In his research, Belk (1988) interviewed 20 burglary victims about how they felt towards the loss they suffered. The reactions that caught the most attentions were the ones related to feeling invaded, violated, or raped. The loss is followed by a diminished sense of the self, especially because in this case it was a non-voluntary loss, forced upon people. Regretting the loss goes beyond the utilitarian value of the object. It has to do with the object's meaning and losing part of what makes you, you. In other words, losing one of the building blocks of one's identity.

Another case where the loss of possessions is present is when entering totalizing institutions such as mental hospitals or prisons. Goffman (1961, cited in Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988) described the "stripping process" that is produced when entering the mentioned places. Once the individual arrives, everything he or she owns is taken away, making the feeling of "ownership" disappear. They are not owners anymore, they are just dependent on what the institutions want to give them. Mental patients and prisoners try to recover their sense of self by claiming ownership of objects that can be considered useless –the only items they can find in the space they occupy– but that hold a different meaning to them. This shows their intent to

restore the sense of self. "In practice, institutionalized persons find it difficult to claim or reclaim their 'normalcy'" (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988, p. 532).

When moving to another place (i.e. geographical relocation), there will always be possessions that will be left behind. According to Belk (1992a), people need to make choices about what to take with them, and many of those are based on which objects will give a sense of security when entering a new and unknown environment, but also objects that remind us about our past, our identity and our connections to others. However, these choices are restricted by space and cost, which makes it even harder for the individual.

And just like the importance of digital possessions was discussed, the loss of these ones can also lead to experiencing negative feelings and a sense of grief. Even though people interact in different forms with their digital possessions, when these are lost it translates into losing a part of one's identity. According to Israeli's (2020) research, employees from a company that suffered the loss of information, recalled feeling like they lost a body part. Additionally, they saw the loss of their information as something that damaged their professional identity, i.e. their work-related identity project. They used expressions that went from "Losing information is like losing an arm", to "losing myself", or "losing your life" (p. 1303).

Some possessions can be restored and eventually help people to recover the sense of self, however, Belk (1988) argues that even when that happens, there will still be a less unique self, meaning that the loss is never fully restored. "Furthermore, the individual typically becomes a user of these new objects rather than an owner of them" (p. 142). The context of an object's acquisition and its symbolic meaning can make it non-fungible or harder to replace, meaning that sentimental value can not be replaced and it causes a significant feeling of loss (McGraw, Tetlock & Kristel, 2003; Berry, 2012).

Migrant consumers go through the experience of losing their possessions in a voluntary way, as they move to another country to pursue different opportunities; regardless of this, it is still perceived as a loss that evokes negative emotions and influences their perception of the self.

2.3 Possessions & acculturation

One of the main studies that reviews possessions in the context of consumer acculturation, and therefore is relevant to this research, is the one by Mehta & Belk (1991). In this study, the authors review the favorite possessions of Indians and Indian immigrants to the United States. Belk has focused most of his research in the role that possessions play in identity, creating the concept of the "extended self" and exploring how these become part of a person, being aware of it or not. In the same sense, this study explores the role of possessions in the context of identity transitions such as geographical relocation (i.e. moving), being related in this way to consumer acculturation.

According to the authors (Mehta & Belk, 1991), possessions normally carry an emotional meaning, but during geographical relocation, this emotional charge increases. In this way, they allow the individual to "transport part of their former identities to a new place" (p. 399) and provide comfort in the midst of identity transition. Migrants experience a new culture, deal with new rules and are faced with different ways of seeing the world. All of this makes moving a stressful period in the life of migrants, as possessions act as reminders of their loved ones and past experiences that made them feel good (Mehta & Belk, 1991). As the authors expressed it: "possessions would be called on to fulfill roles that family, friends, and familiar environment once performed for the emigrant." (p. 398). Another point that was discussed by this study was that, for migrant consumers, possessions from their home country play the role of 'transitional objects' or 'security blankets', helping them to ease the transition to a new environment. The authors also mentioned that for migrants, those objects were a source of cultural identity that was not present when they were living in their home country, and it might have been even taken for granted there (Mehta & Belk, 1991). At the same time, possessions allow immigrants to continue with behaviors that were familiar in their past lives and reproduce familiarity.

A second study that explores the concept of possessions in the context of acculturation was conducted by Belk (1992a) where he analyzed the permanent movement of possessions due to geographical relocation, focusing on personal documents of the Mormon Migration. According to the author, in permanent movings, possessions must be carefully chosen due to the constraints of space and cost of transporting them to the new place; when this happens, the objects that were chosen carry a deep meaning of the parts of the past that migrants want to

remember and that will help them to enter their the future. Some of the possessions chosen might also indicate functional selection; however, they carry a meaning, as they provide feelings of self-worth to the migrants when the activity is performed. Belk (1992a) mentions that they play an important part "not only in mastering the challenges of their new environment but just as importantly in mastering themselves" (p. 349).

Even though these studies (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Belk, 1992a) focus on different groups of migrants and different contexts; their findings align in stating that possessions not only have a transitional or reminder role, but also they act as aid in the reconstruction of the self when immerse in a new environment.

2.4 Summary

To understand more how the acculturation of migrant consumers is influenced by the loss of possessions when moving to another environment, the literature streams of consumer acculturation and consumer identity were closely examined. Through the lens of consumer acculturation it is possible to gain an understanding of the different challenges that migrant consumers face when establishing life in a new country, and how consumer acculturation does not always lead to assimilation (Peñaloza, 1994; Üstümer & Holt, 2007, Oswald, 1999; Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005). This also helps to understand how other aspects influence the process of acculturation, such as social class (Üstuner & Holt, 2007), natural and global culture, and the expectations, attitudes, and personal rituals and habits of the individual.

At the same time, the literature stream of consumer identity approaches how consumers build different identity projects as a way to understand and present themselves to others (Schau, 2018; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Kozinets, 2001). These projects require different elements, being possessions the one that this research is focused on. By understanding the role that possessions play in the creation of identity and how they are understood as a part of the self (Belk, 1988; Belk, 1991; Ahuvia, 2005), it is possible to find out more about what the loss means for an individual, and how it is also present during geographical relocation, meaning when migrant consumers are created. Overall, to answer the research question it is necessary to gain an understanding of how losing these possessions influences acculturation. This requires not only to go through different aspects of consumer acculturation but also to look into the "old life" of

consumers, their hobbies, consumption patterns, and more, which is why both literature streams are reviewed for this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, we will discuss the technicalities of the research, namely, research approach, data collection method (i.e. sampling and access, conducting the interviews, and evolution of the interview guide), research quality (i.e. validity, reliability, and generalizability) and research ethics. Overall, this section is important in order to understand how the research was conducted, how limitations were overcome, and how we strived to maintain the quality of the research.

This research follows an ontology of relativism, meaning that our main view about the nature of reality is that there is not one single truth, but it depends on the view of the different parties involved. As Easterby-Smith, Jespersen, Thorpe & Valizade (2021) mention: "There is not a single reality that can somehow be discovered but there are many perspectives on the issue" (p. 74). We strive to appreciate the different meanings migrant consumers assign to their experiences and how they socially construct their reality. Building on that, the study will use an epistemology linked to social constructionism, meaning that the way to gain knowledge will be based on understanding how the participants construct different "truths" and views of reality.

3.1. Research Approach

We do not consider that there is only one explanation related to how the loss of possessions is perceived by international students or that this is an objective and external phenomenon. On the contrary, we believe that in order to answer our research question it is necessary to consider the different backgrounds and personal contexts of the participants and how these have an effect on how they perceive that loss, and the strategies they create to face it. Accordingly, we follow an engaged-constructionist research style, as it is described by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021, p. 87). As we are both international students, we are immersed within the topic of our research. We have had first-hand experience with the situation of losing possessions and

moving to another country, and we consider this is a strength as it has helped us to design the questions and at the same time to empathize with the participants. In alignment to our ontology, epistemology, and research approach,, the design of this research is based on qualitative methodology, and to answer the research question we chose to collect qualitative data through interviews.

3.2 Data Collection Method

The chosen method to collect the data was in-depth interviews. Interviews are one of the most used techniques within qualitative studies, allowing researchers to obtain information about their topic in a deep manner. "Interviews enable researchers to access information in context, and to learn about phenomena that are otherwise difficult or impossible to observe." (Esterby-Smith et al., 2021, p. 195). We choose this technique taking different aspects of the research question into consideration. Firstly, one of the most important things to consider is that knowing more about migrant consumers involves getting to know more about their personality, lifestyle and preferences. This information would be best gathered through qualitative techniques such as an interview, because it allows the participants to talk without limitations and without having to share their time with others.

Secondly, it would be necessary to inquire about their feelings regarding their moving to Sweden and the different challenges they experienced. This is a personal matter and it can be considered by some participants as a sensitive topic, which is why it was important that the interviews were developed individually. A third reason to choose individual interviews as the main instrument was related to the need to establish a certain level of trust with the participants in order to obtain the highest level of honesty that was possible. Conducting individual interviews represented the most probable way of achieving that goal. In this sense, we also aimed to create an intimate and safe environment, where we could focus on one person at a time and where the participants did not feel judged, but heard.

Sampling and access

The sample of this research was constituted with 20 participants between the age of 21 and 35, with 12 female and 8 male participants. Aiming to answer the research question, twenty individual in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted between the 1st of April and the 10th

of May, 2022. The participants were chosen by considering two characteristics. First, they should be international students at Lund University who are willing to stay in Sweden for a minimum of twelve months. This decision was made considering the time of separation the participants will experience from their possessions. The second determinative factor to choose the participants was their home country. This study specifically focuses on individuals coming from countries outside the EU and EEA. The reason for this was that these students usually have more limited opportunities in the sense of how much and what types of possessions they can pack. The mode of travel (especially air travel) is a major limiting factor to these individuals. In the same sense, the distance to their home country is greater than students within Europe, which, as explained in the research purpose section, leads to experiencing a greater feeling of loss.

The participants were chosen following two methods of sampling: snowball sampling and purposive sampling. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021, p. 118-119) these are non-probability sampling methods, meaning that not each member of the population we are researching has the same probability to be included in the sample. In order to minimize bias and to be able to reprezent international students at Lund first we utilized purposive sampling. In order to obtain unbiased data we looked for participants that were not related to us. In this sense, we asked our acquaintances to connect us with international students in their own communities who would fit the criterias of this study. This is the part where snowball sampling was utilized. We opted for this sampling method not because the right individuals were hard to find, but to produce valid, reliable, and unbiased answers.

Moreover, snowballing sampling is beneficial due to the nature and topic of this study. Oftentimes the interviewees had to talk about deeply personal experiences and feelings, therefore getting in touch with them through individuals they trusted created a sense of trust from the side of the participants. After exchanging some basic information about the research, the date for the interviews were set.

Name	Country of origin	Age	Date of migration	Situation before migration
Eric	Hong Kong	25	August 2020	He was working while living with his parents.
Stephany	Guatemala	28	August 2021	She was working, while leaving with her parents.
Palm	Thailand	28	August 2021	She was a freelancer, while leaving with her parents.
Amanda	Brazil	35	August 2021	She had a job, and lived with her partner.
Gustavo	Mexico	27	August 2021	He was studying while living with his girlfriend.
Atika	Indonesia	33	August 2020	She was working, while living in a city different from her family.
Alena	Russia	22	August 2021	Just finished university while living with her parents.
Suzu	Japan	23	August 2021	Just finished her Bachelors while living with her parents.
Janette	Mexico	27	August 2021	She had a job in a city different from her hometown and lived with her coworkers.
Kadin	USA	21	July 2019	He just finished high school. He lived with his parents.
Yi	China	23	August 2021	She was working while living with her girlfriend

Matheus	Brazil	33	August 2020	He was working and lived alone.
Xiaoxuan	China	22	August 2021	Just finished university while living with her parents
Tom	Canada	27	August 2021	He lived and worked in Korea
Rajeev	India	29	August 2020	He was working and living in a city different from this hometown.
Vanja	USA	24	August 2021	She was doing remote work and living with her boyfriend.
Valeria	Ecuador	24	August 2021	She was doing her Bachelors in South Korea.
Touk	Laos	32	August 2021	She was working and living alone.
Bharat	India	25	August 2020	He lived and worked in a different city than his family
Enver	Singapore	21	August 2021	He was working before moving while living with his family

Table 1.: List of participants of the study

Conducting the interviews

When conducting the interviews, in all cases we created a free-flowing dynamic, meaning that the structure was modified depending on the answers the participants gave and the topics these were related to. We made the decision to conduct the interviews in this way because some participants were already answering some of the upcoming questions without knowing it, and because repeating the exact same information sometimes can cause a sense of not being heard or not being paid attention to. The free-flowing dynamics of the interviews allowed us to dig deeper in certain aspects when some participants presented interesting conclusions about certain topics. Overall, however, all the interviews touched on the main topics.

The structure for the interviews was the following: Every meeting started with general questions about their background and lifestyle in their home country. During this part the participants would comment on the routines they maintained, the things they did during their free time, and they would name their three favorite possessions. The goal of this first part was to contextualize the conversation and create a comfortable environment, before entering more personal and deep questions that involved discussing their feelings, fears and expectations. The second part was composed of questions related to their packing process. It started with questions that were more objective, and with the following inquiries we dug deeper into the possessions they could not bring with them, the belongings they missed the most and what kinds of feelings this evoked in them. The final part of the interview was related to their thoughts and plans for their future, and whether they saw Sweden as a long-term destination.

One of the main challenges we experienced with the interviews was related to what we denominated the "absent participants". We used this term to refer to participants that were previously contacted and that accepted and scheduled an interview; however, on the day of the appointment they did not show up or answer our messages. To overcome this situation we decided to send reminders a couple of days before the interview; additionally, we scheduled and sent an invitation via email, which guaranteed that they would have the appointment in their mobile calendars. However, it was also the case of participants that did not answer to the reminders or to the possibility of rescheduling the interviews. In this case, our best solution was to aim for more participants than the number needed so we would be able to fulfill the requirements.

Evolution of the interview guide

The first aspect that influenced the interview guide (see Appendix A) was our previous pilot study that was developed around the loss of possessions. This pilot study was conducted as part of the course "Qualitative Research Methods", with the participation of five international students who were interviewed. From their answers we were able to establish certain categories and we decided to take those into consideration when preparing this research's interview guide, in order to see if the findings were consistent within these other groups of international students.

The interview guide also evolved during the phase of data collection. As we started to conduct the interviews, we realized certain patterns in the participants related to their reactions to the questions and misunderstanding regarding what they were being asked. This showed us that the way some questions were phrased were not as clear as it was intended; therefore, we revised the questions and changed the words or the order. On the other hand, it was also evident that some questions were causing confusion for being too broad. In this case, we opted for articulating the question in a way that was more specific. Immediately after doing that change, we saw participants asking that question with less doubts and faster.

3.3 Research quality

Validity

Validity refers to the "extent to which measures and research findings provide an accurate representation of the things they are supposed to be describing" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021, p.108). This study follows a constructionist research design, meaning that the authors does not believe in one single truth, but in many different truths that are dependent on different interpretations. Because of the nature of such a research, Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) argue that in order to gain validity and to present convincing data three criteria need to be kept in mind: Authenticity, plausibility, and criticality.

Firstly, authenticity refers to the depth of understanding of the field in general and to the ability of the researchers to represent the data that has been gathered. Authenticity requires the researches to be present during the data collection, to have first-hand experience regarding the topic that is being researched. In order to present data in a genuine manner, the researchers have to have a good understanding of the topic and have to be able to view it from different viewpoints and through the many different experiences of the participants (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). In order to achieve authenticity we strived to conduct as many interviews in person as possible to be able to examine both verbal and non-verbal communication cues. Moreover, both authors were present during all of the interviews to be able to write a holistic analysis of the data that is based on personal experiences.

Secondly, plausibility refers to the ability to connect the data to existing streams of literature. The text has to be able to be connected to previous studies and theories and at the same time

its own unique contribution has to shine through as well (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). In order to achieve plausibility we contemplated several literature streams and theories that can be connected to the research question of this study. After deciding to build on the literature of consumer acculturation and consumer identity, we researched these fields thoroughly to identify the research gap where this study can contribute to the existing knowledge of the field.

Thirdly, criticality refers to being able to adapt critical thinking when analyzing data and challenging taken-for-granted ideas, thus creating the opportunity to uncover novel findings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). Throughout this study we aimed to devise the research question and the process of data collection based on well-established theories, but when we encountered something during the interviews that seemingly did not fit these studies, we inquired more about it with the participants, in order to get more data, and we also explored additional literature that could bring forth new findings.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the data. Meaning, whether the same conclusion would have been reached by other researchers as well (Easterby-Smith et al., p.120, 146). To ensure reliability we conducted twenty individual interviews. During these interviews we were able to recognize similarities and patterns that appear in many of the interviews. If we were not able to find such patterns more interviews would have been conducted to identify similarities or to prove the lack of similarities all together. However, the answer to the research question of this study is highly dependent on the context, namely the culture, geographical location, origin, occupation, future plans etc.

Generalizability

Generalizability is concerned with whether a research conducted on the same topic, but in a different context or in a larger population would still produce similar findings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021, p.141). Qualitative studies can not be generalizable in the traditional sense due to them not being representative, however it does not mean that qualitative data can not be generalizable. In these instances each participant is selected based on a quota and researchers strive to collect data about all the possible scenarios that theories have explored (Morse, 1999).

We are aware that the scope of this study inhibits us from creating a generalizable study, however several aspects were kept in mind during the writing of this paper. Firstly, the two main theoretical streams were thoroughly studied in order to get a holistic understanding of how people experience moving to a new cultural environment and losing their possessions either permanently, or temporarily. Secondly, the interviewees were chosen by a quota, in order to ensure that all the data will be relevant to this study and its research question. We did not limit ourselves to a handful of countries, but strived to represent as many cultures as possible to see how people experience moving to Sweden from all over the globe. It is important to mention that the small number of samples this study is working with (i.e. 20) is not sufficient to reveal a pattern among different continents, or cultures, that could be applied other studies, but we are able to make assumptions based on this, that could serve as basis for further research.

This paper studies international students moving to Sweden, however the findings could be applied to immigrants in other contexts as well. As it was mentioned before this study was conducted in Sweden, but the findings might be similar in other European countries as well, which have the similar level of development, economic system, and cultural fluidity.

Moreover, the authors focused on the experiences of non-EU and non-EEA students, because their moving process, presumably, is more difficult than that of someone who moved inside the EU. Therefore, we believe that the finding of this study could not be directly applied to individuals moving to Sweden from an EU or EEA country due to the lack of bureaucratic processes, or great distances that have to be tacked by airplane travels.

3.4 Research ethics

Research ethics is concerned with both the integrity of the research community and the protection of participants of a study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In order to protect the integrity of Lund University, Lund University School of Economics and Management (LUSEM), and the research community in general the authors stived for complying with best practices of research, and for conducting this study in a transparent manner. For sake of documentation and the ease of analysis we made voice recordings of all the interviews and asked participants to sign a consent form as well. By this we aimed for transparency and credibility in terms of data collection.

For the protection of the participants of this study, as we mentioned before, a consent form has been created according to the recommendations of LUSEM (see Appendix B). In this form interviewees stated that they are participating voluntarily and are aware of the fact that the data will be used for research purposes. The consent form gave some information about the topic and nature of the study that was supplemented by a more detailed verbal reaffirmation, to ensure the participants had an overall idea what the interview will be about.

Moreover, participants were informed that they can withdraw the data collected about them any time after the interview if they decide to do so. The topic of the study can be sensitive to some people and could evoke a feeling of vulnerability, therefore, to protect the dignity and privacy of the respondents the interviews were conducted only between them and the two researchers, no other people were involved in the process of data collection. In terms of data protection, the voice recordings, transcriptions, and notes were not shared with anyone.

4. ANALYSIS

This section focuses on the findings of the 20 interviews that were conducted in order to answer "How does the loss of possessions influence the acculturation of migrant consumers". The first part is related to the findings, where three main themes were identified. The second part is the discussion, where we engage with previous literature and show how findings contribute to the two main literature streams of this study, namely, consumer identity and consumer acculturation.

4.1 Findings

We organized the findings into three main categories that helped answer the research question. First, loss of possessions and identity, where it is discussed how participants reacted to the loss of their belongings and how it forced them to modify their identity. Second, hobbies, routines and consumption, where it is found how respondents longed to keep their old routines to bring familiarity into their relocation and also how this influenced their consumption choices. The third and last one, possessions and perception of the self, to show how participants reorganized their priorities after being aware of how important their possessions were to them.

4.1.1 LOSS OF POSSESSIONS AND IDENTITY

The first category that was identified helps to answer the research question by showing that the loss of possessions causes the loss of identity projects, and that this produces a wide variety of negative emotions in migrants. The first subsection "lost identity projects" analyzes the different identities that the participants claim to have lost after their moving to Sweden due to the loss of their possessions. The second subsection "negative feelings due to the loss" depicts the emotions caused by the loss, most often, frustration, incompleteness and longing.

Lost identity projects

Authors identify the loss of possessions with the loss of the self (Belk, 1988; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988; Belk, 1992a). Losing your belongings leads to feeling like you lost a part of yourself. However, the self can be seen as a collection of identity projects that are interconnected with each other; in other words, every person's identity contains different roles that are performed at different moments of life and are related to one another. In this sense, the loss of a single possession will affect one identity project, and not all projects at the same time. During the interviews, the participants mentioned they felt like some of the roles they used to perform in their home countries were impossible to be reenacted within the host culture because they did not have their old belongings. This explains that the loss of possessions can be directly connected to the loss of identity projects.

Prior research on consumer acculturation and migrant consumers has discussed the concept of "shattered identity projects" (Üstüner & Holt, 2007). In their research, the authors highlighted how poor women gave up on the identity projects they tried to pursue when they first moved into a Turkish squatter and started to relate to a new culture. However, it refers mostly to how they were affected by economic, social and cultural barriers, and there is no clear link to the loss of possessions as one of the main causes.

Steffany, from Guatemala, finds her identity project of feminine professional woman to be completely absent since she arrived in Sweden, due to the fact that she was not able to fit all her professional clothing in her suitcases:

"Now that I'm here, I miss so much to dress as I did before. Right now, I'm always dressed in basically jeans and a T-shirt. So I miss so much my clothes. Like to be kind of... not sexy, but feeling prettier. [...] Like a skirt and yeah, like different blouses, more formal blouses"

To execute an identity project, consumers look for necessary elements in order to deploy the role. Then, it is like performing a ritual. Eric, from Hong Kong, is an amateur photographer. Back in his home country, he planned special trips with the main purpose of taking pictures. He took his tripod, camera and different lenses with him. Since he moved to Sweden however, he stopped doing photography, since he didn't have all the equipment.

Eric: It's like you plan a trip to achieve the goal of getting a nice picture.

Interviewer: And then have you done that here?

Eric: No.

Interviewer: Have you used your camera?

Eric: Yes, for daily life things, like taking a picture of a friend.

Interviewer: But do you miss planning those trips to just get a picture?

Eric: Definitely. I miss it very much.

The same is true for Amanda, a lawyer from Brazil, who before moving to Sweden had a "colorful, but formal" style, but could not afford to bring her clothing with her, causing her to change the way she dresses and losing her "colorful-formal dressing female lawyer" role. *"Of course you can find clothes here, but I was attached to my formal style. [...] I miss the stuff that I used there. I felt like I was leaving my life behind."* - Amanda

Valeria, from Ecuador, lived in South Korea for four years before moving to Sweden. There, she was able to adopt a new identity project as a young woman that cared for her skin and clothing. She followed a thorough routine to take care of her skin and appearance. After moving to Sweden, however, she has not been able to continue with it, because she could not bring her beauty products and all her clothing with her.

"It's like, wow. I felt empty many times. I was like, where are my things? You know, I wanted to use this as I was very used to do my skincare routine and I didn't have

all the things and I'm like, okay, I'm going to get some. But it's not the same actually.
- Valeria

When analyzing the loss of identity projects of the interviewees, something that was apparent among female participants, that the identity projects that were lost after the moving to Sweden were mostly related to their clothing style. Most of them mentioned they used clothing to share a certain image of themselves with others. They were used to project that impression and to fulfill the whole role; therefore, not having those items with them felt equal to losing their style and the way to express themselves through their clothing.

Touk, from Laos, used to drive her car as her main way of transport. She used it to go to work, have dinner with friends at a restaurant, and more. When asked about the thing she misses the most, without hesitation she mentioned: *"My car. I miss driving."* Since she got to Sweden, her identity project as an independent driving woman has been left behind. During the interview she mentioned how walking was a good exercise, but still repeated how much she missed driving and knowing she was making the most out of her time.

Participants of the research showed that many of their identity projects were paused or disappeared once they moved and lost some of their possessions. This makes the process of getting used to their new place – i.e. acculturation – more complicated, as it means there is another thing they need to deal with.

Negative feelings due to the loss
The sense of losing their identity projects due to the loss of their possessions evokes a feeling of frustration and incompleteness in our participants. According to Belk (1988), the loss of possessions causes a feeling of grief, similar to losing a loved one. He also mentions that it can be perceived as a feeling of being incomplete, because something that was part of you now is gone. All interviewees claimed to experience a feeling of not being complete and a sensation of frustration, especially when they saw other people performing activities they could not (e.g. wearing different outfits to every party or getting their hair done in a special way every day). It was a common feeling that something is missing.

Suzu, from Japan, had a bike that she personalized herself and she planned to bring to Sweden. The bike was packed in a box and was ready to be shipped, but it got rejected right at the post office because it was seven centimeters larger than what is allowed. Even though she got a new bike in Sweden, it does not feel like her old one.

> *Suzu: Oh, it was terrible. [...] It was really sad. [...] I really liked my bike in Japan because it, like, really fits me. Size wise. And also, like, the color and like the handle, I kind of customize there. So it's really colorful and I really like that. But now, I mean, I like the bike that I have now as well, but it just feels different.*
>
> *Interviewer: So the other one feels more…*
>
> *Suzu: [like it is made] for me.*

Eric from Hong Kong claimed not feeling like a complete person since he arrived in Sweden, because he did not feel like he could do what he wanted in the way he wanted, because of not having all his possessions with him. For him, not having all his photography equipment means that the experience is not complete and therefore it is not worth carrying out. At the same time, this leads to being frustrated again, in what is portrayed as a vicious circle:

> *[I]n Sweden, I have to compromise because I couldn't take the picture I [wanted]. For example, when you want to go to see the northern lights, and then you want to take a picture of them, you can never do it with the film camera. You need your digital camera and then like the function[s] inside [...]. [Y]ou have to compromise so it doesn't feel good. It's like, it holds me back from going to Kiruna […] I want to go there, but when I know I don't have the gear, I say, 'okay then maybe next time'." – Eric*

The negative emotions regarding the loss of their possessions were constant among the participants, regardless of the number and value of the objects that were left behind. Their possessions were not considered a part of their life because of how much they paid for them, but because of the meaning they assigned to them. Xiaoxuan from China, recognizes herself as an Ironman fan and the owner of a collection made out of different items she has acquired over time. When it was time to move to Sweden, even though she could bring some small items, she

had to leave the biggest and most important behind: a stuffed Ironman figure she refers to as "her son". In her case, the anticipation of the loss was such that she made a goodbye video:

> *"I was sad, totally devastated. I filmed a video saying goodbye to it. I filmed him and said 'sorry, I have to leave you behind'. [...] I really love it. I'm used to having it in my life. My life would be so empty if I didn't have part of my collection. [...] I know I need this in my life. It feels like home" - Xiaoxuan*

People do not want to continuously deal with the sensation of loss or being incomplete, therefore, they look for different ways to cope with these emotions. Most of the participants that mentioned having feelings of loss and other negative related emotions, expressed that they looked for comfort in different ways. One of the answers had to do with convincing themselves that being without their possessions was a good idea. When discussing clothing, interviewees that mentioned missing items also mentioned that they repeated to themselves phrases such as *"Either way, I am not going to use it"*, *"people here do not use those items and I want to blend in, so I repeat myself that"*.

Janette from Mexico, used her clothes to express herself. Through her unique sweaters and Vans shoes of different colors, she showed her style and made an effort to stand out. When coming to Sweden, she was not able to bring all her clothes, which has caused her to feel like she is not able to express herself anymore. However, during the interview, Janette repeated different phrases that helped to convince herself that her new imposed style was something good for her. Even though she feels the change and misses her items, she tries to not think much about that as a way of reducing her frustration and negative emotions. *"I still can show my own style, but I feel more boring here. [...] I'm just going to embrace it." – Janette*

However, the answer that was repeated by the majority of the participants was about convincing themselves that being without their belongings was a temporary situation, instead of something that would last forever. They mentioned that in order to deal with their situation, it was important to recognize that they would be like this only for a while, because they would go back for their possessions. This way of reacting to their loss was common for both respondents that were thinking about staying in Sweden on a long-term basis and the ones that were planning to go back to their country. For people that are only away for a short period it

represents a logical way of seeing their situation; however, people that were not planning to go back to their countries also took that approach.

In this case, despite knowing they will stay in Sweden indefinitely, they still think about getting their possessions back eventually. They do not know when, but they have certainty about the fact that they want to recover them. This shows that even though they are starting a new life in another continent, they refuse to say goodbye to their possessions; for them, a definitive separation is not a possibility, and they want to get them back eventually. This desire of recovering their belongings leads them to make consumption choices in order to achieve it, such as looking for airplane tickets, planning a trip, and more. Once again is shown how the loss of possessions also influences the consumption decisions of the individuals.

Stephany knows she is going back to Guatemala after her studies at Lund University, and she is very eager to get a hold of her possessions again.

> *"I'm able to live this life because I know that it's only 10 months and I'm here just for this and this one time, right? So I feel like that helps me look to be able to deal with this." – Stephany*

On the other hand, Gustavo, from Mexico, moved to Sweden and plans to stay in Europe indefinitely. When he talks about the books he had to leave behind before moving to Sweden, he talks about how he chose which ones to bring with him and which ones to leave. The only way he could complete the task was to create the mental image that he would go back for them in the future.

> *[The books I am leaving behind are] for my future self, so this is for my now self. [...] Whatever was bought for the future self, let's leave it behind and we'll just come back to it later on. [...] I do want to go back for them – Gustavo*

Respondents do not have their future completely defined, but they do have certainty about some aspects: They know whether they are going back to their home country or not, and they know that leaving their possessions was not a final goodbye, because they will recover them at a certain point. By being so sure about it, once again they reaffirm how important these things are for them.

4.1.2 HOBBIES, ROUTINES AND CONSUMPTION

The second category identified helps to answer "How does the loss of possessions influence the acculturation of migrant consumers" by showing that the loss fosters the maintenance of routines and hobbies in migrant consumers as a way of reproducing familiarity while adapting to a new environment, and that this can also lead to making related consumption choices. The first subsection "hobbies and routines to reproduce familiarity" discusses the importance of one's hobbies and routines and their role in the acculturation process. The second subsection "change in consumption patterns" discusses how the consumption patterns of our respondents change after moving. We make a connection between hobbies, routines and consumptions by examining the emotions that such activities evoke and how these require the consumption of specific products.

Hobbies and routines to reproduce familiarity

According to Bardhi, Ludicke and Sharifonnasabi (2018), mobile global consumers often have less sentimental possessions than those who are permanently settled. This does not necessarily mean that they are less connected to their belongings, but they often rely on hobbies and well-established routines to aid the process of acculturation and to help cope with the loss of their possessions. Some hobbies and routines are easier to reestablish than others, and some can not be continued at all after geographical relocation. Many hobbies require physical objects to perform them with, while activities such as sports, or socializing, in theory, would be easier to enact in a new environment; however these can still involve psychological and personal hindrances.

Established routines and hobbies can create a sense of familiarity, therefore, could ease the plethora of emotions one faces when moving to a new environment (Bardhi, Luedicke & Sharifonnasabi, 2018). Many of the respondents mentioned that their free time activities help them to cope with stress and to escape the struggles of reality, even if only for a short amount of time.

> *"[Cooking] helps me [to] distract my mind for a little while." – Valeria*

"[A]fter having a long week of work or you know, when you're stressed, finally
you find some time to cook [...] it makes me very happy" – Rajeev

Hobbies and routines can help individuals who feel uncomfortable in new situations build a "safe space" for them to help ease uneasiness and find a community. For example, Kadin, from the USA, who has social anxiety, has found that his hobbies enable him to find balance and face stressful situations.

"I think it's just a way for me to de-stress a bit and, you know, do something with
my hands. When I'm at home and don't have anything else to do and take a break
from whatever else. But [for me] that's really important to have." – Kadin

According to this we can assume that for these individuals it is crucial to be able to continue with their hobbies because they do not only function as a way to spend their free time, but in fact they have an important purpose, i.e. coping with stress and so on. However, due to economic, space, or time constraints, some of our participants were not able to get back to their hobbies and routines as soon as they arrived in Sweden. Some started to practice them right away as a way of going back to their own self, but some decided to wait and prioritize getting used to the new environment. The time individuals spend without performing their hobbies can vary. Some need to get familiar with the new environment to an extent in order to start practicing their hobbies.

Interviewer: Did you get a chance to do any of these activities now [in Malmö]?
Eric: Yeah. After I moved in, maybe I would say this half of the year [interviewed
in April, 2022].
Interviewer: You got here [in] August 2020?
Eric: Yes [...] [A]fter a period of time, you get used to the life here. OK, maybe I
can develop some of my hobbies here in Sweden. – Eric

Others set up their hobbies and routines as soon as possible in order to comfort themselves in their novel environment. In this way they were able to soothe themselves and cope with the hardships of the moving process.

Interviewer: [W]hen did you [buy a new guitar]?

Atika: Within August. [...] I want to set all the things for my daily activities before school started. That's why I came earlier. Like three weeks [earlier].

Interviewer: Why did you want to have that done [so early], as soon as you got to Sweden?

Atika: Because it makes me feel good. And I pretty much got my confidence charge through all my hobbies. It's like giving me another thing to hold on [to]. [...] I need to refresh my mind, I need to refresh my interest. And by having two or three different interests, it will balance my mind. [...] The thing is, [these] hobbies [are] me. It helps me to stay being me. So it helps me to not [get] lost in the new environment, in the new establishment. – Atika

An item that is connected to a specific interest and hobby of an individual could also be a sentimental item at the same time. This adds value to its use and the object itself could evoke positive emotions that could ease the hardships of the acculturation process. Janette loves to solve the Rubik's Cube in her free time. She has several different cubes in Mexico, but she only brought two to Sweden. She plays with these, but also uses them as decoration.

"They help me to release some stress, but also [I like them because] of the good memories, because my dad and my brother taught me to solve it." – Janette

We found that an object that is associated with a certain hobby could ease the acculturation process even if the individual does not, or can not use it on a regular basis. The fact that they have the opportunity to use it could be enough to ease their anxiety. Due to their sentimental value, these objects would be difficult, or even impossible to replace by purchasing a new one, even if they would be an exact replica.

In some cases even hobbies that do not require any special objects can take time to reestablish. In Alena's case this is represented by her love for working out. She used to go to the gym regularly back in her home country, however, in Sweden it took her approximately half a year to get a membership at a local gym. In her case this was not a result of lack of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Most likely Alena's case is similar to that of Eric's, namely, as she had to get used to the new environment and cope with her emotions before she could perform her hobby again.

*"I was really stressed back home, [so] I started to go to gym [...] I just recently
started [going to the gym again in March] [...] [First] I thought that, 'Oh, if I
[don't] practice for this time in Sweden, I will be fine'." – Alena*

During this time of uncertainty and frustration some of our respondents were able to find new
activities to cope with such emotions and others were unable to find a way to deal with these
feelings. Some of the participants decided to spend their free time and cope with their emotions
in a new way, trying out new activities that they never did before. For example, Valeria did not
ride a bicycle on a daily basis. However, after moving to Sweden she fell in love with biking.
Now she considers it to be a significant part of her life that she would not give up in the future.

*"I would like to take [the bicycle] with me, I really like my bike. I would like to take
it with me anywhere if it was that easy [...] I want to live in a place where I can do
that" – Valeria*

However, others might be unable to find such new ways to cope with feelings of loss. This
could stem from the fact that they see their current position as temporary and they merely try
to avoid negative emotions for as long as they can. Many of the participants simply do not
have a strategy to cope with stress, anxiety, and other negative feelings after the move. *"[Now]
I do not deal with [stress and anxiety] properly." – Suzu*

While others might opt for even more negative ways of soothing themselves.

" Interviewer: How are you dealing with stress here?
*Tom: [I'm] not dealing with stress, I don't think. Also, I stopped drinking because
that was a bad way of dealing with stress." – Tom*

Change in consumption patterns
Many hobbies and routines require physical objects to perform them, for example music or
photography, while others are not constrained by such physical limits. When moving to a new
country, people leave behind the majority of their possessions. This is especially true in the
case of fragile objects, like a musical instrument or a camera. This can cause feelings of loss,
devastation, frustration, and other strong negative emotions that could affect the future
purchasing decisions of the individual (Belk, 1988; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). The

interviewees of this study are all students who arrived in Sweden just before their studies started and are currently living in student accommodations. This means that after obtaining their diploma most of them have to move once again, either back to their home countries or to another place in Sweden. In some cases this temporary life they experience during their studies encourages them to become more mindful about their purchasing decisions. This deliberate way of buying is economic, practical and emotional.

Most of the time the participants did not replace complex items just to perform their hobbies. This has multiple motives. Firstly, the interviewees have a student budget, so they are purchasing less due to the lack of spendable income. They were all non-EU citizens, therefore if they want to continue to live in Sweden after finishing their studies they need to attain a permit and go through other bureaucratic processes that require a considerable amount of economic capital. The majority of interviewees were very conscious about their spendings, which mostly resulted in a decreased amount of money spent on non-functional products and activities.

> *"I prefer not to buy. Because of course, it's expensive and I have things at home. And how I will bring them back if I don't have the space, the luggage is a big limitation. But when I go and see all [these] place[s they] really [makes you want] to buy clothes [...]" – Stephany*

The second main limiting factor of acquiring new objects were space constraints. Student accommodations are often small, sometimes without any additional storage space, therefore students have to consider each purchase from a practical point of view. The participants were all concerned about moving out of their current housing. They did not want to acquire lots of new possessions because they are afraid that they will not be able to move all of them, especially if they would like to move to a different country. Thirdly, the interviewees are more conscious about their purchasing habits because not long ago they experienced a major loss of possessions and identity. Presumably they do not want to go through this process again in the near future, therefore they are limiting their current self. Since all of the participants see their current situation as temporary they are well aware that no matter what the future will bring they have to leave their current position soon. Until they settle at a long-term position they are not purchasing as much physical possessions as they might otherwise.

"[I need to be] thinking logistically. I have limited space for me to bring things back. So I try to limit what I do need to bring back." – Vanja

On the other hand, some participants did purchase objects they need to have in order to perform their hobbies and feel comfortable in their new environment. Many of our interviewees purchased several new items when moving to Sweden, however most of them were functional products that served as a replacement for non-sentimental everyday items. These purchases are important from an economic point of view, but also these purchases are more or less predictable, however purchases that are connected to hobbies are not always foreseeable.

"I found a music store in Malmö, went there and asked them about pianos. And then I think the next day [I bought it] [...] It [was] like 5000 SEK. [...] I wanted to get a good one because, you know, definitely it lasts a long time." – Kadin

Atika knew that her hobbies are important for her and help her to cope with challenging situations, therefore she prepared multiple activities that she can do after arriving in Sweden. She decided to buy a new guitar.

"I already planned it. I was buying a second hand guitar [...] I even got the better guitar that I had [back home]." – Atika

Buying things second hand was a very popular option among our interviewees. These products often have lower prices and since there are a lot of migrants who move to the Malmö-Lund area temporarily, they were able to find second hand items in good condition. Besides specific second hand stores, people can find such goods online as well. In conclusion, we found that hobbies can play an important role in the acculturation process by creating a sense of familiarity. While performing such activities the participants were able to relax and not worry about all the hardships that arose from the moving process. Some were able to purchase products that were crucial to their hobbies, while others had to cope in a different way due to economic, or space constraints.

4.1.3 LOSS OF POSSESSIONS AND PERCEPTION OF THE SELF

The third and final category contributes to answering the research question by showing that the loss of possessions causes an increased self-awareness among migrant consumers, which leads them to change their behavior and consumption choices. In the first subsection, "being unaware of the link to their possessions" it is discussed how oftentimes people are unaware of the importance of their belongings or have negative preconceptions about attachment to objects, causing them to part ways with sentimental items. The second subsection "realizing the link to their possessions" discusses how after going through the loss of sentimental possessions individuals become more aware of the connection between their identity and their extended self.

Being unaware of the link to their possessions

According to Belk (1988), people sometimes are not aware of how important possessions are to them, especially when referring to items that might seem worthless or insignificant to the general eyes. When talking about how they packed their belongings, participants mentioned following different criteria, but all of them had as a priority to consider functional objects or the ones they will use the most in their everyday lives.

When Atika was preparing to travel from Indonesia to Sweden, her criteria was based on being practical and making the best she could out of the space she had.

> *"I was thinking particularly about the practicality. Because whatever I can get in Sweden, I don't need to bring it from home. That's my first principle, because I only had 40 kilograms of luggage."*

For Yi, from China, however, the reasoning was different. She still focused on things she would use, but mostly thinking about the money she will save by bringing those things to Sweden instead of buying them.

> *"The first thing I thought about is [economic] value, like how much I pay for [it] in dollars. [Also] how new is something, like if it's something that I bought recently, I have to bring it because I haven't used [it]." – Yi*

For some of them, the first thing that came to ther mind when trying to pack their belongings was weather conditions and the kind of clothing they would need. This is the case of Matheus, who mentioned that, as a Brazilian who is used to very hot weather, this had major importance.

> *"[T]he cold temperatures are a little bit scary for [me] especially for a Brazilian. Yeah. You know, so my jackets for the first thing that I thought, okay, I need some jackets. [And] of course, my computer [was] my main plan. I needed to, because I knew that it would be quite expensive to buy a new one here. [...] I just brought useful things."*

Many of the participants did not think about sentimental objects being important, but more as an additional thing or luxury due to the limited number of baggage they brought, and the weight limit of airlines. Oftentimes participants only packed such items if they had some space left, because the priority was given to objects that could make their life "easier" and give them more comfort. However, once they settled in Sweden, they realized how much they regretted not bringing any or more special belongings. This could mostly be caused by the degree of embeddedness of these objects in their lives. As mentioned above, the importance of sentimental objects, or objects of the extended self, is not always recognized. It is only after facing the loss of these items that strong negative emotions surface and make people aware of this. For most of the participants, a stressful situation, such as being away from home, was an added component that made them even more conflicted about not having certain items in their life anymore.

Another aspect that made evident their lack of awareness of the importance of possessions. Many did not consider themselves as "a material person" when asked about their favorite objects or the stuff they missed the most. People might not think about objects as a part of themselves or about how the lack of them could make them feel incomplete, because this is associated with negative characteristics such as being materialistic, frivolous and even selfish. For some, it might be a sign of being weak or not knowing how to really "live life" by feeling attached to possessions. According to Belk (1992b), being able to define ourselves through possessions can make us feel superficial.

Matheus, from Brazil, stated: *"I'm not a material person. I don't I don't get attached to objects in general"*. Similarly, Enver from Singapore, recognized that even though he had accumulated

a lot of things during his life, he does not feel attached to them and mentions that he has no problem with letting them go.

> *"I'm not really someone that gets attached to things too much. I'll try to forget about it and just continue life. [...] I feel like experiences in life are more meaningful than being attached to an object. I don't really know why, but I've kind of developed this thought." – Enver*

Stephany, on the other hand, said at the beginning of the interview: *"I don't have a lot of things that I'm attached to."* However, after inquiring more about how she felt in Sweden and what she missed about home, she admitted how much she missed her clothes and beauty products.

> *"I realized maybe one month and a half ago that I miss so bad to dress [up] completely [...] I want to have all my things with me. I really I really want all my things with me."*

Overall, most participants do not talk about missing their belongings. When thinking about what they miss from their country, they mention family and food, in some cases because being attached to physical objects is connected to something negative, making it even harder for them to be aware of the connection to their extended self. It is only after asking more about their feelings that they start to think about other situations and realize they long to have their non-functional possessions with them, and the important role these play in their lives.

Realizing the link to their possessions

After the moving participants discovered that some possessions were more important to them than they initially thought. The interviewees of this research tackled this situation in different ways. Some participants got an opportunity to visit their country after moving. For them it felt like having a second chance regarding packing, therefore this time they mainly packed sentimental objects, because they have already experienced what it felt to be without them in their new environment. Amanda, from Brazil, flew to her country during the holidays and had the chance to do things differently than her first time, when she only packed following a rational criteria.

"[The first time I packed] I didn't think about emotional stuff. [...] When I got here, I missed stuff that was sentimental. [But] now I brought some photos and a little music box from my brother." – Amanda

Some were determined to get their belongings back even though they themselves did not have the opportunity to visit their home country; they asked their loved ones to bring their possessions to Sweden. Bharat, from India, knows that he is attached to his belongings, and this was his first time leaving the country. He is a collector of headphones and even though he does not use all of them in his new home, he likes the idea of having his collection with him. His mother mailed it to his friend who lives in another Indian city, and his friend brought it to Sweden. He was willing to go through a somewhat complicated and expensive process in order to get his headphones back, even though he knew he would not use them frequently or at all. After a year of being separated from his headphones, the package arrived in Sweden.

"But I missed them. I don't know why, [...] but I want it to be there. It should be there. I use [the headphone] little, because I have [the other ones] here, but I want them to be there [pointing at his room]." – Bharat

Other participants did not get a chance to go back to their countries. They used different strategies to deal with the loss, as mentioned in prior sections. Some of them look for ways to get their belongings to Sweden after their moving, but could not find a proper service that was aligned with their budget, which also led to more frustration. In this way, they looked to the marketplace to find a solution, but could not find one that fit within their boundaries. By understanding the feelings and the types of possessions migrants often have to leave behind, companies can create appropriate offers for these customers to fill the void that the moving created.

"[W]hen I was in Korea, I thought of sending boxes to Italy because I have a family in Italy. So that I could bring my things to Sweden, but [it] was also quite pricey to send them a box [...] [It would be nice if] there was maybe a service, I don't know, that you could share [with other people who] want to save a couple of bucks [by sending a parcel to the] same place cheaper or something like that." – Valeria

On the other hand, because some participants realized the importance of their possessions only after leaving them behind, some of them wanted to recreate them here in Sweden. This led them to look for special objects within the marketplace that could help them somehow reduce the feeling of loss and help them to deal with their homesickness and instability. Rajeev, from India, defines himself as 'not a material person'. He was never attached to his belongings, and he brought very little to Sweden; hence, he did not think about packing any sentimental objects. However, over time he realized that he missed some of his possessions. To cope with the feeling of loss he recreated some of the items that were easy to mimic. He made physical photo albums in which he placed pictures of his loved ones and bought posters to decorate his dormitory with. Rajeev felt that those small changes had a positive impact on his mood, because they helped him to cope with an environment that was very different from India.

> *"I created that [photo] album after coming here. I printed it [...] And now that is a special object [...] maybe I would have brought it, but at that time, when I was coming here, I didn't feel the need [for] it [...] My lifestyle has changed. My interactions with people are different now. [...] to overcome that feeling and to feel a little bit home, I had to create all these [sentimental items]." – Rajeev*

This change of priorities also meant a new way of thinking about their most recently acquired possessions. Many of them bought products after moving to Sweden and found themselves unwilling to leave them behind if they move to another place. Now they are aware of the importance that sentimental possessions have on their identity and their new "self", therefore they want to keep them to avoid going through feelings of loss again. During their next relocation, either to a new house, new city or even new country, they will take into consideration what they have discovered about themselves when preparing their bags: the importance of sentimental possessions over functional objects.

> *"I want to take [the things bought in Sweden] with me [...] I'm probably going to bring everything [...] I don't even know how to carry [everything] with me" – Palm*

For some participants, the change of priorities came after going through several relocation experiences, instead of one long distance one, such as moving to Sweden. In their case, after traveling for a long time, they now have come to the realization that they want and need to settle down for the feeling of belonging and owning. Tom from Canada lived for 2 years in

South Korea before his most recent relocation to Sweden. He is tired of constant movement, of not having a home where he can stay for the long-term and to be always ready to leave with one small bag. According to Tom he always felt like an outsider in Korea. It is important to highlight that this feeling is highly dependent on the host culture. This is well represented in Tom's case as well. In Korea he never felt accepted, however in Sweden he has no such feelings. After his international experiences, he is sure about wanting to settle down. One of the main reasons for that is, he wants to have more possessions than he has now, or had in the past couple of years after leaving Canada.

> *"I want to settle down. Now I'm done traveling [from] one place to another. It really gets tiring. I want to have things, possessions that are now not just lost in traveling." – Tom*

This part showed us that going through the loss of their possessions made the interviewees realize the importance of sentimental items and the link they had with them. The participants of the study experienced a shift in priorities when it comes to their belongings, meaning that after moving they valued their sentimental object more than functional products.

4.2 Discussion

The identity of migrant consumers has been studied from different angles throughout the years (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Üstuner & Holt, 2007; Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, 2005) however, an aspect of the literature that has not received much attention is related to the loss of possessions they experience during their geographical relocation, and how this influences their acculturation process and their identity. This research allowed us to analyze both literature streams –consumer acculturation and consumer identity–, and obtain relevant findings that both confirm and challenge the current literature.

The term consumer acculturation describes the process of getting used to a new culture and environment, full of different characteristics such as economic system, institutions, and more. Migrant consumers are the ones navigating this process, which can be influenced by different factors as stated by previous literature (Peñaloza; 1994; Üstuner & Holt, 2007; Ludicke, 2011), and all consumers see their identity modified in some way. The objective of this research was

to analyze how the loss of possessions can influence the acculturation of migrant consumers. This was done through 20 individual interviews.

In this section we present the main themes that help to answer the research question and at the same time help to broaden the knowledge of migrant consumers. The first theme is "a different approach to 'shattered identity projects'", related to how the loss of possessions causes the loss of identity projects by referring to the term installed by Üstuner & Holt (2007). The second theme presented, "hobbies, routines and acculturation" discusses how the loss of possessions encourages the maintenance of hobbies and routines in migrants. The third is "neglecting negative emotions in order to acculturate" and it refers to how neglecting negative emotions evoked by the loss of possessions are used to prevent othering. The fourth and final "nostalgic consumption and consumer acculturation" describes how immigrants relate to their original and host culture after the moving. All of them help to answer the research question by showing different aspects of how the acculturation of migrant consumers is influenced by the loss of their possessions.

4.2.1 A different approach to "shattered identity projects"

In 2007, Üstuner & Holt analyzed the situation of migrant mothers and daughters from Romania in a Turkish environment. The research found that most of the daughters did not continue their identity projects after arriving at the new place, but abandoned them due to several external factors related to cultural barriers. The authors referred to this situation by using the term "shattered identity projects". They mentioned how both mothers and daughters adapted and updated their identity projects according to the twists their lives were taking. The mothers adapted certain aspects of their identity projects in order to preserve them; however, the term is used to refer specifically to the daughters as their situation was different. They had given up completely on their old identity projects, and some of them felt depressed about it.

Fifteen years after that study, one of the findings of our research is the loss of identity projects as a consequence of the loss of possessions. In this sense, we found that participants face the loss of their old identity projects due to the actual loss of their belongings in their moving process. Once they are in the new environment, they realize they do not have the objects needed to perform that role, and this leads to feeling incomplete, frustrated and uncomfortable, because

they need to stop carrying out their identity project. They do not feel comfortable doing this and they miss it deeply, but it is what they face due to their relocation. In this way, we contribute to Üstuner & Holt (2007) by drawing a parallel to the term "shattered identity projects" and looking at it from a different angle. While the previously mentioned authors used the term to refer to the loss of identity projects due to cultural and economic constraints, in this research, we use it by focusing specifically on the loss of their possessions, as it was found that our participants faced similar negative emotions as the Romanian women mentioned by Üstuner & Holt (2007).

Wallendorf & Arnould (1988) mention that people use objects to remind them of who they are. In addition to the understanding of these authors, we found that to our participants, possessions not only acted as a remembrance of their personality, but also as instruments which made it possible for them to become and fulfill a specific part of their 'self'. At the same time, through the interviews it was shown that the sense of frustration and incompleteness due to the accumulated loss was a common feeling among migrant consumers. This aligns with what Peñaloza (1994) stated, that acculturation by itself is already a complex process that involves a high emotional charge for migrants, and this research shows that this is only amplified by the loss of their possessions. They not only need to deal with being in a new environment and facing a new system and culture, but they also need to cope with the fact that, in a certain way, they need to reinvent themselves, as their old identity projects are difficult to be performed in their new home.

According to Belk (1988), when the loss of the possessions is forced upon people due to different circumstances they cannot control, there will be sorrow. This research agrees with those statements as it is expressed by the participants that they wanted to bring more of their possessions with them. It was due to constraints of space and costs that this was impossible, leaving them with no choice but to choose what to bring and what to dispose of and say goodbye to. This explains why all of them mentioned feeling sad, frustrated and even incomplete when starting their new life in Sweden. For them, even though they were the ones choosing to travel to study abroad, the loss of their possessions was imposed, because they had no other option. However, when Mehta & Belk (1991) analyze the role of possessions in the context of migrants, they found that people can also see the loss of identity-related possessions as

something positive, specially when it is related to opportunities to the development of the self, such as a new job, new studies, and so on. In this way, our research found that the findings of the above mentioned studies can be combined, by showing that despite suffering because of the loss of their belongings, participants will overall make a positive evaluation of their current situation. They showed mixed feelings, mourning the loss but still treasuring their experience and not letting this be the defining aspect of it.

This first theme starts to answer the research question by highlighting that the loss of possessions influences the acculturation of migrant consumers by causing the loss of identity projects, and increasing the emergence of negative emotions, which overall makes their acculturation to the new culture more difficult.

4.2.2 Hobbies, routines and acculturation

It became evident during the development of this research that the literature of consumer acculturation rarely talks about hobbies and routines as a factor that can influence acculturation. This topic is more often discussed within the literature of consumer identity (Cova & Avi Shankar, 2018; Epp & Thomas, 2018). We came across the connection between hobbies and routines and acculturation by wanting to know more about the identity of the participants. We found that having hobbies and established routines could aid the acculturation process by creating a familiar and therefore comfortable feeling. The importance of hobbies in one's life has been studied before (Harari, 2019; Panigrahi, 2017). From these studies we know that hobbies and routines help structure the lives of individuals, therefore they can be very useful in stressful situations like moving to a completely different environment. Due to this we applied theories outside of the acculturation literature to understand the position of migrant consumers.

Participants of this research have acquired hobbies and routines in their home country with the influence of their family, friends, and social circle. Wilk (2009) argues that life without any habits and routines can become unsustainable by constantly being in a stressful situation of decision making. Our study uses these findings to answer the research question by showing that when our participants moved, they faced stressful situations in which the negative emotions were amplified by the loss of their possessions. To deal with this, they looked for ways to reproduce a sense of familiarity, which led them to focus on maintaining the same

routines and hobbies that they performed regularly back in their home country. By applying Wilk's (2009) work to acculturation we found that hobbies could serve as a form of relaxation and stress relief, that aids the acculturation process and the negative feelings produced by the loss of their possessions, by evoking feelings of familiarity and stillness.

Cova (1997) argues that nowadays goods and services are often consumed for their linking value, meaning that their social aspect is more important than their functionality. This study contributes to the findings of Cova (1997) by applying the concept of the linking value to the context of consumer acculturation. For some of our respondents, practicing their hobbies was a gateway to a community, to form new relationships and to start experiencing their new environment as a home alongside people who enjoyed the same activities as them. According to Cova (1997), people will make consumption choices based on linking value. We agree with the author as we found that our participants desire to preserve their hobbies (and the entrance ticket to a community that comes with it) led them to make consumption choices and to look in the marketplace for the appropriate resources and elements to perform it.

4.2.3 Neglecting negative emotions in order to acculturate

Different individuals have different attitudes towards the host culture and about the level of acculturation they want to achieve, sometimes even before moving. Someone might try to fully assimilate while others seek familiar communities whose culture and rituals are similar to that of the home country (Peñaloza, 1994; Oswald, 1999). Since humans have an innate need for belonging and acceptance it is important to examine the need of migrant consumers to blend into their new environment. Culture is multilayered and it can be understood as a vast global phenomena or a small one of the individual. Nevertheless each culture has visible elements and deep taken-for-granted beliefs (Mădălina, 2020). In the early days of the moving, individuals can easily adapt the visual, observable elements of the host culture, e.g. clothing. And as time passes and they learn about the novel cultural environment, they can get immersed on a deeper level, e.g. adapt to social norms.

We noticed that for participants oftentimes the motivation for blending in was to not stand out from the crowd and to not be seen an foreign, or different. Bright, colorful clothes are rarely worn in the streets of Sweden, or that is how some of our interviewees see it. Therefore, they

started to opt for more basic, neutral clothing items in order to become just like the people around them. Humans have an innate need for belonging to a community, hence it is understandable that people who move to Sweden from a (visually) vastly different culture thrive for gaining acceptance by members of society (Schau, 2018). On the other hand, these findings agree with Veresiu and Gieseler (2018) when saying that the host culture and immigrants are perceived in the market as not equal consumers because "immigrant-receiving cultures fetishize strangers and their strangeness in their commodification of differences" (p.554). This shows another reason for which respondents have the need to blend in, because they do not want to be perceived as exotic or peculiar. Overall, this need of avoiding the "othering" also led them to make consumption choices that were atypical to them, as a way of adapting to their new environment.

According to Belk (1988), one of the primary reactions to the loss of possessions is self-restoration. People look for ways to reestablish what was lost in order to feel 'whole' or 'themselves' again. However, the findings of this research contradict the mentioned conclusions. We found that some migrants do not look to restore the possessions they lost because these objects would make their acculturation process more difficult, by forcing them to stand out or it would give room for them to get fetishized. In the case of migrant consumers, this can happen when the lost possessions affect how the members of the host culture perceive them (e.g. a special but colorful scarf or a traditional dress). Migrants will not necessarily restore such belongings, but will see the loss as an opportunity for creating an image that will fit in, hence they could avoid othering. This finding not only expands Belk's (1988) arguments by positioning them in the context of migrant consumers, but it also aligns with the findings of Genova (2017) about migrants using different strategies to avoid 'othering', in this case showing that one of those strategies is choosing not to restore their possessions.

This theme answers the research question "how does the loss of possessions influence the acculturation of migrant consumers" by showing that, in some cases, this loss is seen as an opportunity to acculturate more easily. This outcome could result in two different behaviors: some migrants would look to replace the possessions with other products that will help them acculturate, while others would not restore them at all.

4.2.4 Nostalgic consumption and consumer acculturation

Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard, (2005) examined that some individuals become more connected to their original culture once they move to a different country and cultural environment. We agree with these findings and at the same time introduce to the conversation that the loss of possessions could cause heightened awareness towards their original culture as a way to reproduce familiarity. In many cases during the interviews, we found the same exact phenomena: While living in their home country participants did not realize the importance of their home culture, potentially because of being in a comfortable environment. After arriving in Sweden, they found themselves in a new context, having to face different challenges without the people they love and the possessions they treasure. A way to deal with the stress produced by this situation is looking for comfort in their original culture and finding ways to reproduce it by consuming their local food, and looking for ingredients to reproduce traditional dishes.

These above mentioned behaviors can also be understood as nostalgic consumption. The concept of nostalgia and how it leads to making consumption choices is important when studying migrant consumers. Through nostalgic consumption consumers can reinvigorate times of their lives when they felt content and happy. Moreover, such products help consumers idealize the past and therefore, making the present more delightful (Havlena & Holak, 1991; Emontspool & Kjeldgaard, 2012). The participants of this study missed the dishes of their home country in almost all cases. Foods that evoke the strongest feelings of nostalgia are the ones that people consumed during their childhood, and in their homes with friends and family (Zhou et al., 2019). This feeling of longing for the past was what led them to look to the marketplace in order to fulfill this desire. It was not just about eating a familiar food because of the flavors but about all the memories that it could evoke.

According to Emontspool and Kjeldgaard (2012), migrants are often eager to share and introduce their culture to their new environment in order to fit into a new ethnic community, and one rather popular way of doing this is food sharing. This study agrees with the above mentioned statements as we found that many of the participants see food and cooking as a communal activity through which they can socialize and share their culture with their new acquaintances. Oswald (1999) introduced the concept of culture swapping as a common practice among migrant consumers. Our findings support Oswald's theory, which suggested

that migrants can be flexible in a new cultural environment by mixing the elements of their original culture and the host culture. Many of our participants mixed and swapped cultures on a regular basis when participating in different communal events, and gatherings. Through these affairs people are able to introduce others to their home culture but at the same time are able to relive idealized memories from their home country.

These findings help answer the research question by highlighting how experiencing the loss of possessions due to a geographical relocation causes migrants to be more aware of what is important to them, not only relating to their belongings but also reconsidering the connectedness to their original culture. As seen before, when migrants experience the loss of their possessions, they look for ways to recover familiarity. One way is through hobbies and routines and these findings implicate another coping strategy i.e making nostalgic consumption choices. Therefore, the loss of possessions and being removed from a well known community can evoke feelings of loss and grief, but through nostalgic consumption one can start to ease these negative feelings.

5. CONCLUSION

This research attempted to answer the question "How does the loss of possessions influence the acculturation of migrant consumers?". We identified three main ways in which this loss influences migrants' acculturation. First, the loss of possessions causes the loss of identities. Second, the loss of possessions causes migrants to maintain their hobbies and routines to reproduce familiarity. Third, the loss of possessions increases their self awareness.

The first way the loss of possessions influences the acculturation of migrant consumers is by causing the loss of identity projects in migrant consumers, which at the same time adds emotional intensity to their acculturation. They have to let go of some of their former identity projects, because they do not have the elements to perform them anymore, and in some cases they did not want to replace them. Overall, these generate feelings of frustration and incompleteness in them. They not only have to deal with a new environment, culture and system, but they face it while feeling incomplete, because they miss the possessions from their

old life. To illustrate this, we draw a parallel to the term "shattered identity projects", created by Üstuner & Holt (2007), now focusing directly on the loss of possessions.

The second way the loss of possessions influences the acculturation of migrant consumers is by causing migrants to look for ways to restore familiarity. In this sense, after losing sentimental belongings, they turned to their well established routines and hobbies in order to deal with feelings of loss, reduce stress and anxiety, and retrieve from the hardships of acculturation for a short period of time. In addition, for many of our participants, hobbies served as a gateway to new communities and therefore to new acquaintances. Moreover, because some hobbies can require specific products or services, migrants potentially have to make consumption choices in the marketplace. Since not a lot of research conducted in consumer acculturation examines the connection between hobbies and acculturation, we applied theories outside of the literature stream of acculturation to explain our findings.

The third way the loss of possessions influences the acculturation of migrant consumers is by increasing their self awareness and making them realize the importance of the sentimental items. After participants came to the realization of the bond they had with their possessions and how deeply they felt the loss, they were able to look for different strategies to cope with their negative emotions. One of the main ways was related to going back to their countries to recover their objects; the other strategy was focused on reproducing elements of their original culture, often through traditional dishes. One final coping strategy that we found was related to not restoring the lost possessions at all. This helped them to both deal with their negative emotions and at the same time to acculturate more easily to the host culture.

5.1 Implications

The findings of this research help to broaden the understanding of migrant consumers: their identity, struggles, and needs. This is valuable for different actors and in this section we highlight some of the practical implications of this study. First, policymakers can benefit from our findings by understanding the factors that influence acculturation. With immigration becoming a more and more polarizing topic within societies, knowing how different factors influence the acculturation of immigrants to the host culture can aid policymakers to devise regulations, laws and solutions that benefit migrants without alienating them from members of

the host culture. This study is also beneficial to community leaders that directly or indirectly work with immigrants, as this research introduces them to the topics of acculturation and othering, by showing how migrants sometimes look to avoid standing out and how they can feel affected by it.

This research is also valuable for market actors by broadening their understanding of migrant consumers profiles, and also during the creation of campaigns about migration. Understanding more about how migrants see themselves, especially during their first years in a new country, will help them to devise messages that are not only politically correct but that address their pain points. Moreover, this study helps understand the needs of migrant consumers by presenting what types of products and services they seek out after moving to a new cultural environment.

5.2 Limitations

One of the biggest limitations of this study is that we only focused on a small, specific group of immigrants, namely, international students at Lund University, excluding people who arrived in Sweden by different motivations, goals, and backgrounds. We are aware that including a different group could significantly vary the answers obtained by the research. However, in the introduction chapter several counter arguments to why this group was chosen.

Another limitation is related to the background of the interviewees. By choosing to interview people from different continents, one of the main concerns was that both the background and culture of the participants influence the view they have about their possessions and how important these are to them. We recognize that culture is important when deciding what is significant to an individual and what is not; at the same time, we believe that having students from different continents and cultural backgrounds is also a strength. This is because despite them all perceiving it in a different way, they still experience loss. The small sample size hinders us from calling our study generalizable, however, we were able to uncover similarities between the experiences of the interviewees.

The scope and the time constraints of the research only allowed us to interview a limited number of people. More interviews could have led to a deeper understanding of the topic or to

novel findings even. The last five interviews that have been conducted revealed little to no new information, rather they aligned with data from previous interviews. However, during the analysis we established several different categories for the collected data, but eventually had to focus on the three main biggest sections. With more interviews conducted we could have confirmed, or denied the importance of the other sections that were created.

5.3 Further research

Firstly, we suggest that further research on this topic could be conducted by focusing on gender as one of the elements that could potentially influence the perception of lost identity projects in migrants. This is due to our experiences of female participants focusing more on their style than men, when it came to presenting themselves to others. A study focused on this topic could help to understand in detail how migrant men and women perceive the loss of their possessions in a different manner. Secondly, it can also be researched how the loss of possessions is perceived over time, by conducting a longitudinal study instead of a cross sectional one. Interviewing the same migrants after a certain period of time, when they are already embedded in the host culture. This is due to the fact that the participants of this research were in the first, second, or third year of their moving, therefore their coping strategies are not fully developed, and their acculturation process is still in its beginner phases.

Thirdly, further studies could also focus on one specific country or region to discover possible regional differences in thinking, attitudes, and strategies of coping that are influenced by the original culture. We suggest this because among our participants we noticed that East Asian individuals were more utilitarian, while South Americans were somewhat more emotional towards their belongings. Further research could agree with this difference, or could conclude that this was only an outcome of the specific people we interviewed.

Finally, further research can also be done about the loss of possessions in mobile consumers. We found that, in many cases, the participants with previous international experiences looked at their possessions in a different way and felt more prepared to face the feelings of loss and the negative emotions that arise because of it. Authors (Bardhi, Ludicke & Sharifonnasabi, 2018; Bardhi, Eckhardt & Arnould, 2012) identify these individuals as "mobile consumers" and say that for them possessions can be a burden or problematic, causing them to establish

"liquid relationships" to their belongings. However, we found that not all of the so-called mobile consumers are satisfied with this "liquid relationship" and want to settle down and go back to having more possessions. Therefore, there is an opportunity to focus on how this specific group of people would be influenced by the loss of their possessions.

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APPENDIX A

Interview guide

Introduction, ice breaker questions

- Can you tell us a bit about yourself (where are you from, what are you studying, how long you're planning to stay)?
- Tell us a bit about your life back in your country and your family
- Do you have any hobbies? What do you like to do in your free time?
- Can you tell us about your move to Sweden?
    - What was the most challenging part?
- What are your 3 favorite things? (objects, hobbies, etc.)

Key questions about the topic

- Can you describe the packing process » How did you decide what to bring with you? (not clothes and essentials, but those items that you like not necessarily because they are useful?)
- What about special objects (meaningful), did you bring any of those?
- Was there something you wanted to bring with you but you couldn't?
    - what was this item?
    - Why did you want to bring this item with you? (emotional values?)
    - How did you feel leaving this item behind?
    - In the process of getting rid of your possessions, did you give them away or what did you do?
- Was there something that you packed, but eventually had to leave out due to space constraints?
- What do you miss the most?
- Is there anything that you've regretted not bringing? Something you've realized missing only after moving?
- If someone from your country would visit you right now what would you ask them to bring?
- Did you replace any of the items you miss?

- Do you have routines or hobbies that you've had at home that you follow even here in Lund?
    - Why are these routines important to you?
    - Did you implement them right after moving?
    - How do you feel when performing these routines here in Sweden?
    - If they do not have such routines/hobbies here that they had at home, why not? Is there something stopping them from doing it? (inhibitors)
    - Do you have any new hobbies since moving?

- How do you see the culture of Sweden?
    - what was the most difficult thing you had to cope with

Closing questions
- Do you think in the future will you have a hard time getting rid of some of your current stuff? What things? Why?
- Next time you move, would you follow the same criteria to pack, or would it change in some way?
- Would you be willing to go through this moving process again? Why or why not?
- Are you planning to go back home or will you stay here in Sweden (or abroad in general)?

APPENDIX B

Interview consent form

LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

Loss of Possessions & Identity of Migrant Consumers

Johanna Bernuy and Dóra Nagy

Interview Consent Form.

I have been given information about 'Loss of Possessions & Identity of Migrant Consumers' and discussed the research project with Johanna Bernuy and Dóra Nagy who are conducting this research as a part of a Master's in International Marketing and Brand Management supervised by Hossain Shahriar

I understand that, if I consent to participate in this project I will be asked to give the researcher a duration of approximately 60 minutes of my time to participate in the process.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time.

By signing below I am indicating my consent to participate in the research as it has been described to me. I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for thesis and journal publications, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Name: …………………………………………………………………………….

Email: ………………………………………………………………….

Telephone: ………………………………………………………….

Signed: ………………………………………………………………………..