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"Where should I go next?"

A qualitative study about digital nomads' destination choice

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

Digital nomadism has been around for more than two decades. Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shift from traditional office work to remote work, which made the digital nomad lifestyle more accessible for a larger group of individuals. Digital nomads represent a great opportunity for destinations as they help boost the local economy. Therefore, it is important for destinations to get an understanding of how to attract digital nomads. Most previous studies, however, have solely investigated the work- and lifestyle aspects of digital nomadism. Thus, there is a lack of research about digital nomadism from a tourism angle. This study aims to fill this gap by examining what factors are considered important by digital nomads. Those are analyzed through consumer behavior theory, specifically the concepts of consumption values and the decision-making process. To investigate those factors, we conducted 17 qualitative interviews in order to get in-depth insights. Our findings demonstrate the importance of functional values in digital nomads' final decision-making stage. Among those functional values infrastructure and the cost of living have proven specifically important. The findings of this study contribute to the field of tourism by understanding digital nomads' consumer behavior.

Keywords: digital nomads, consumer behavior theory, consumption value theory, destination choice, qualitative, tourism

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, many workers and employers had to switch to remote work within a short time. Because working from home was relatively uncommon before COVID-19, many people experienced remote work for the first time (Bick et al., 2020). According to Galanti et al. (2021), numbers from April 2021 suggest that approximately 50% of all Europeans partially worked from home compared to 12% prior to the pandemic. One reason for such a low adoption of remote work was the assumption that workers tended to be less productive at home. The sudden shift to remote work, however, has normalized remote work. As a result, many organizations consider opting for remote work even after the pandemic, as it does not only save time but also costs (Bick et al., 2020). While working from home was new for a majority of people, there have been people who have adopted remote work earlier as part of their lifestyle, namely digital nomads.

There are numerous definitions of what digital nomads are. Reichenberger (2017, p. 364), for example, describes digital nomads as "young professionals working solely in an online environment while leading a location independent and often travel reliant lifestyle where the boundaries between work, leisure and travel appear blurred". Because they work remotely, digital nomads can sometimes be confused with business tourists (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet, 2021). Compared to business tourists, however, digital nomads travel for recreation as their work does not require them to travel (Reichenberger, 2017). Traditionally, digital nomads tended to be independent workers such as freelancers and contractors. Because working remotely has become normalized due to the pandemic, however, the increase in the number of digital nomads is mainly owed to people with traditional jobs. Digital nomads tend to be very well educated and often work in highly demanded fields such as programming and marketing.

According to survey results, there has been an 18% increase from 2019 to 2020 in Americans who want to become digital nomads within the next 2-3 years (Everson et al., 2021), and due to the increased number of remote workers, this number will even rise higher.

This leads to an opportunity for destinations to attract digital nomads as a type of tourist and to generate revenue, especially after the significant loss that the tourist industry has suffered due to COVID-19 (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet, 2021). In recent years, there have been several countries that have become known as "digital nomad hotspots". Among those destinations are Bali in Indonesia, Chang Mia in Thailand, Lisbon in Portugal, and Puerto Vallarta in Mexico. Those destinations have not only managed to attract a large number of digital nomads, but they also have helped them create a community (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet, 2021).

Throughout the pandemic, more and more countries have realized the potential of digital nomads as tourists. As a result, countries such as Estonia and Croatia, have launched a so-called digital nomad visa program, not only to attract them to the country but also to provide them with safe and legal options to work and travel at the same time (Karsten, 2022). Previously to COVID-19, digital nomads often had to work illegally on a regular tourist visa, which caused moral trouble. Another issue was that tourist visas usually expire after a maximum of three months. Digital nomad-, freelancer- or remote worker visas were considered as solutions, while also attracting foreigners to their countries. Even though the requirements and conditions of those visas vary, the majority of them are valid for up to one year and provide legal work conditions to location-independent digital workers (Karsten, 2022).

1.2 Problematization

While digital nomad literature is based on three components, namely lifestyle, work, and travel, most previous studies have solely focused on the lifestyle and work aspects of digital nomadism. Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet (2021) have raised the attention to focus on the travel component, hence acknowledging digital nomadism from a tourism point of view. Moreover, they emphasize the importance of understanding digital nomads' consumer behavior. They define digital nomads as "location-independent remote workers, who are simultaneously engaged in extensive leisure travel with no break from work" (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet, 2021, p. 3). While this definition is considered the starting point of acknowledging digital nomads within tourism studies, there has not been any further research investigating it from a tourism lens.

As described above, digital nomads can significantly contribute to the tourism sector, which is why it is important to get a better understanding of their consumer behavior. From a destination point of view, the most important question is how consumers choose their destination and how they arrived at their conclusion. Decision-making and choices are, in fact, some of the most researched concepts within consumer behavior in tourism (Cohen et al., 2013). Sirakaya and Woodside (2005, p .830) elaborate on this and explain that from their “perspective, travel marketers and destination developers must understand the tourist decision process, in order to develop effective marketing strategies, because decision behavior (buyer behavior) is the structure upon which marketing must hang”.

The destination decision-making process is a very complex phenomenon and different approaches and models have been used to understand mainstream consumer behavior. However, the majority of these studies examined the relationships between different variables, thus they primarily used a quantitative approach, which might lead to false causality (Cohen et al., 2013). To overcome this issue, this study intends to understand digital nomads' destination choices from a deeper level using a qualitative approach. Moreover, decision-making processes usually consist of different stages. Due to the qualitative nature of this research, we aim to only investigate the final stage of the process.

To understand the underlying causes of the final destination choice, values can serve as a way to get a better understanding of why consumers make certain choices and may choose one product over another (Sheth et al., 1991; Vinson et al., 1977). In the field of tourism, a destination could be viewed as a brand, and to create a successful brand of a destination, marketers must fulfill the needs and expectations of their targeted group which could be understood by their values (Çaliskan, 2018)

To sum up, this study is aiming to close this gap by providing an understanding of digital nomads' consumer behavior from a tourism point of view. As mentioned earlier, more and more destinations have realized the opportunity to attract digital nomads. To create a sufficient marketing strategy, it is important to investigate what drives them.

1.3 Aim and research question

In a broader sense, this study focuses on the consumer behavior of digital nomads from a tourism point of view. By using semi-structured interviews, we want to get an in-depth understanding of why digital nomads choose their final destinations and which factors they consider most important. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate digital nomads' values in order to better understand them and to see how they affect the final choice of a destination. One of the reasons why it is important to address this issue is that digital nomadism is an under-researched phenomenon, despite the rising community caused by the pandemic. Based on this, the following research question was formulated:

How do digital nomads choose their final destination?

1.4 Societal relevance

For the societal relevance of the study, a better understanding of the characteristics of digital nomads and the factors which influence their destination choice could be beneficial for the tourism industry, while also contributing to interpreting the social meaning of digital nomads. Even though previous research extensively conceptualized tourist values from different angles, digital nomads represent a different kind of segment, thus their needs are significantly different from classical leisure tourists (Chevtava and Denizci-Guillet, 2021). By understanding digital nomads' values, destinations could develop a more sufficient marketing strategy to attract digital nomads, while providing more customized services for them. Moreover, the phenomenon of digital nomadism is still quite ambiguous both in the academic and in the mainstream world, thus providing more in-depth knowledge about it could help to a better perception.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured into several different chapters. The second chapter is a literature review that introduces the phenomenon of digital nomadism. It does not only give insights into digital nomads' characteristics and motivations but also provides a chronological order of how digital nomadism has been conceptualized previously. The third chapter introduces the theoretical concepts relevant to our research aim. It reviews the theory of consumer behavior in tourism while paying significant attention to the importance of values and the

tourists' decision-making process. The fourth chapter describes the methods we have employed to collect and analyze the data we have collected in order to answer our research question. In the following chapter, we present our findings, while also operationalizing the previously mentioned theoretical concepts, which are used to analyze and to better understand our data. Lastly, we present a concluding discussion and practical implications based on our findings.

2. Literature review

In this chapter, we will introduce the phenomenon of digital nomadism. Therefore, previous studies have been reviewed. The second part of this chapter will focus on the characteristics and motivations of digital nomads.

2.1 Digital nomads

2.1.1 Defining digital nomads

“Digital nomad” has become a popular term in recent years. As a result, more and more researchers have started understanding and conceptualizing the phenomenon. However, there is still no general definition of what a digital nomad is. The term was first introduced in a book called “Digital Nomads”, which was written by Makimoto and Manners in 1997. In their book, they describe digital nomads as people who live the so-called future lifestyle of continuous and simultaneous traveling and working with the help of digital technologies. Digital nomadism could appear as a lifestyle due to digitalization and mobility (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guille, 2021). Table 1 summarizes the most relevant definitions of digital nomads from the past few years. Based on these definitions, mobility, travel, digital independent work, and the quest for freedom are critical elements of digital nomads (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guille, 2021).

Author(s)	Year	Definition:
Müller	2016	“A new generation of location independent freelancers, young entrepreneurs, online self-employed persons.” (p. 344)
Reichenberger	2017	“Digital nomads are individuals who achieve location independence by conducting their work in an online environment, transferring this independence to mobility by not consistently working in one designated personal office space, but using the possibility to simultaneously work and travel, to the extent that no permanent residence exists.” (p.

		27)
Cook	2020	“Digital nomads as young, work-oriented professionals who reject outwardly imposed structures of traditional office work—such as the 9 to 5—and place value on autonomy, flexibility and the ability to travel and work where they please.” (p. 355)
Richter and Richter	2020	“Digital nomads operate outside of the classical organizational boundaries and can be considered as ‘contemporary entrepreneurs’ who bring disruptive business models into different industries and have a different working culture and value different types of capital. Those who adhere to this style of life are redefining work-life by pursuing employment that allows for global travel, flexibility in work hours, and a departure from the traditional office environment.” (p. 78)
Chevteava and Denizci-Guille	2021	“Digital nomads are location-independent remote workers who are simultaneously engaged in extensive leisure travel with no break from work.” (p. 3)

Table 1: Definition of digital nomads (Authors, 2022)

Based on the above-mentioned principles, digital nomad is not the only term that has become widespread. Other terms such as remote worker, freelance worker, backpacker, flashpacker, or even business travelers might be used interchangeably to describe or refer to digital nomads.

To overcome this issue and to distinguish digital nomads from other types of travelers and workers, many researchers have categorized and classified these terms based on different principles. Richards (2015), for example, investigated three types of youth “nomadism”: the backpacker, the flashpacker / digital nomad, and the global nomad. His research is based on the mobility paradigm and analyzes the internal dynamics and relationships between mobility and different types of nomads. His findings indicate that backpackers are the most

“self-sufficient” because they are engaged with other travelers and rely on each other regarding information. Flashpackers / digital nomads, on the other hand, are more engaged in a digital setting as their main focus is to maintain an effective work environment. Thus, they are more concerned about infrastructure and independence. Lastly, global nomads are the nomads that are most engaged with local communities and stay the longest at one location, while their aim is to be as free as possible to avoid contact with the system (Richards, 2015).

Later on, Reichenberger (2017) categorized digital nomads into three levels:

1. As flexible workers without engaging in extensive traveling
2. As those who keep their residence but travel quite often
3. As a choice, mobility, and traveling as a lifestyle without any permanent residence.

However, other researchers such as Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet (2021) do not consider the first-level as digital nomads due to the lack of travel components.

Additionally, several models attempted to clarify the lines between these terms. Cook (2020), for example, based his research on the notion of mobility from a work engagement perspective. In this study, categories emerged based on two intersectional scales, one representing the level of mobility and the other representing the work focus (Figure 1). Based on this model, digital nomads are highly mobile, meaning they only spend a few weeks at one location while also being highly work-focused, unlike traditional tourists or backpackers. Cook (2020) also emphasizes the blurry boundaries between the work and leisure relationship, manifesting into a quest for freedom. He mentions “location-independent workers” or “remote workers” as synonyms for digital nomads; however, these terms are missing the mobility and travel component of digital nomads (Cook, 2020). In other words, all digital nomads are location-independent workers or remote workers. However, not all location-independent workers or remote workers are digital nomads.

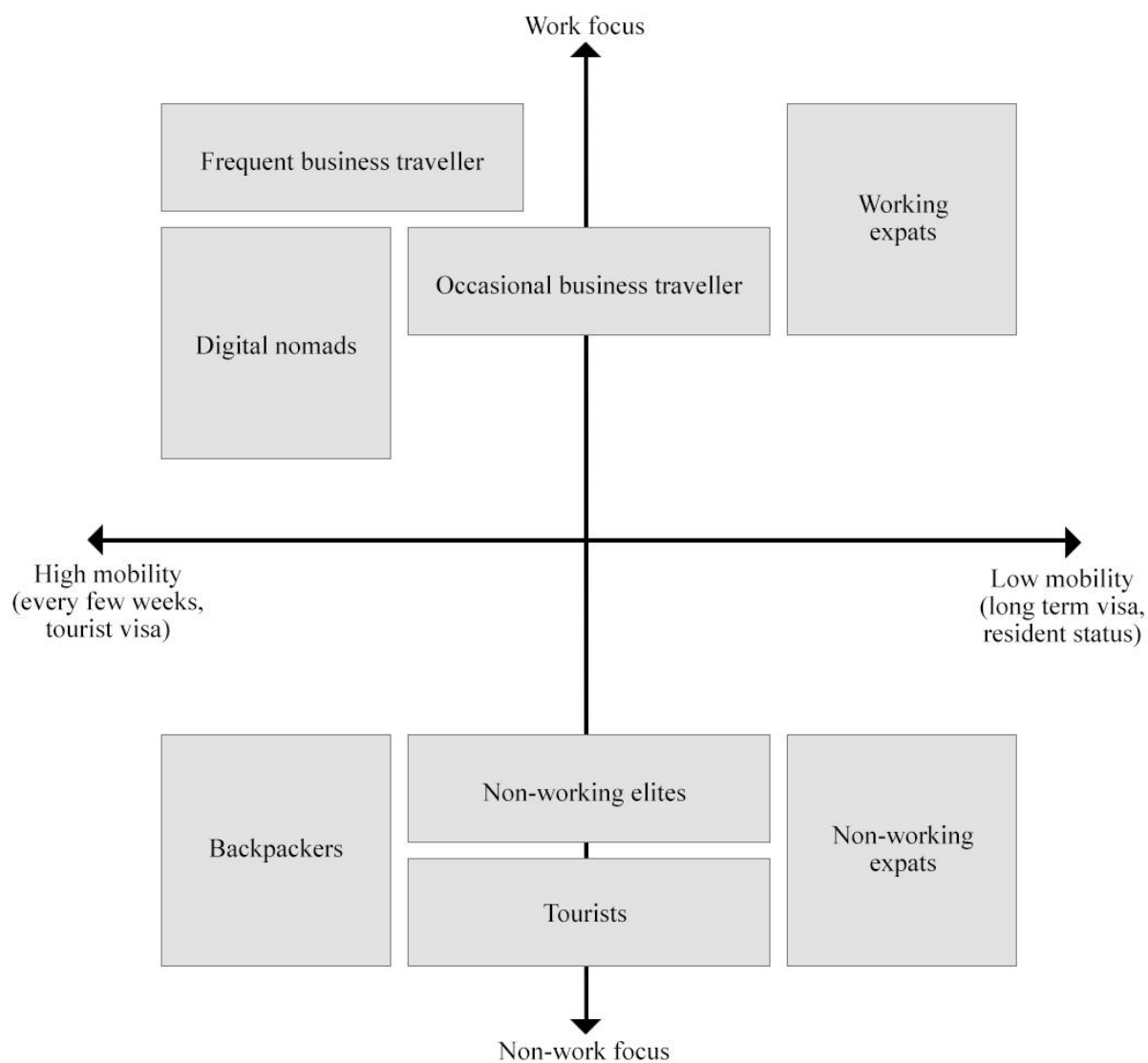


Figure 1: Travel types based on mobility and work focus (Cook, 2020, p.357)

Clarifying the differences between other terms and digital nomads was also the basis of Hannonens' (2020) research. She argues that digital nomads have not been approached from a work-life or lifestyle perspective before. Therefore, she aimed to provide a holistic approach through lifestyle-led mobilities. Differences between digital nomads and other related terms are represented in Figure 2. This figure shows that digital nomads both connect to lifestyle-led and work-related mobility, because they represent all of the following: the effective professional work productivity, continuous international travel as a choice of lifestyle, the extensive use of technology, and connectivity. Compared to Richards' (2015, p. 7) definition, which does not distinguish between flashpackers and digital nomads, Hannonen argues that even though the two terms overlap, flashpackers "do not commonly make use of technology and connectivity to work while traveling". Based on this distinction, travel and

the purpose of travel play an important role. However, this is also the case for traveling professionals / business tourists. But while digital nomads travel based on their preference, traveling professionals' travel behavior is pre-set by their working conditions. This also leads to the difference between business tourists and digital nomads. Hall et al. (2019) argue that digital nomads are a new form of business tourism. Based on Cook's (2015) scales (Figure 1) regarding workforce and mobility, business tourists share the same characteristics such as high workforce and high mobility. However, as the previous example shows and as Reichenberger (2017) claimed, the difference between them is the purpose of travel because digital nomads travel for leisure purposes to a destination of their choice, while business tourists travel to predetermined places.

Work-related mobility	D	Lifestyle mobility
Telecommuting	I	Backpackers
Freelancers	G	Flashpackers
Traveling professionals	T	Global/Neo-nomads
	A	
	L	
	N	
	O	
	M	
	A	
	S	

Figure 2: Differences between digital nomads and other types of travelers (Hannonen, 2020, p. 5)

Chevtava and Denizci-Guillet argue that most of the research about digital nomads focuses on the work or the lifestyle aspect. There is a lack of research trying to understand digital nomads as tourists. Thus, most of the definitions of digital nomads do not consider digital nomads from a tourism point of view. To overcome this gap, Chevtava and Denizci-Guillet (2021, p. 3) suggested the following definition for tourism and hospitality studies: “Digital nomads are location-independent remote workers who are simultaneously engaged in

extensive leisure travel with no break from work”. Due to the purpose of our research, this paper uses this definition as a base to understand digital nomads.

2.1.2 Motivations and characteristics of digital nomads

In order to get a deeper understanding of digital nomads, it is crucial to investigate their motivations and characteristics. Previous studies present digital nomads as mostly Western, young (primarily millennials), educated people who primarily pursue careers in the field of the gig economy, for example as marketing specialists or software engineers. Digital nomads are describing themselves as "self-determined, free, and independent" (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet, 2021, p.3), which manifests in self-employment, not paying taxes, and to not have permanent residence (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet, 2021).

Freedom can be considered an essential component of the motivation for adopting a digital nomad's lifestyle. However, many researchers consider the lack of discipline in the workplace as the primary motivation for digital nomads. Moreover, Reichenberger (2017) claims that freedom is a more complex phenomenon and could occur in different forms. One of them is "professional freedom," which means to be free from the classical employment form. The second one is "spatial freedom," which refers to the ability to be mobile and travel internationally. The third type of freedom is "personal freedom", which emerges when both professional and spatial freedom are achieved. Personal freedom lets digital nomads develop personally and professionally through having experience and learning new skills. An important criterion is that these three elements should be fulfilled together to meet the digital nomads' desired state of being.

From a tourism point of view, Hannonen (2020) mentioned that novelty-seeking through different touristic activities can be considered a primary motivation for digital nomads. The recreational purpose of travel is a significant component of the digital nomad lifestyle. However, it is debatable if that is the main purpose of their trip. Reichenberger (2017) claims that leisure purpose is integrated into their work-life, and certain leisure components such as enjoyment are anticipated through work.

Hannonen (2020) also highlights the importance of digital nomad communities and the desire to meet like-minded people. Due to the fact that digital nomads tend to follow recent mainstream societal rules, they prefer to join the “tribe” which is not based on countries'

borders, but on the same and shared values and lifestyle (Hannonen, 2020). Regarding travel patterns, this could mean that digital nomads prefer hotspots, like Bali or Chiang Mai. Due to the density of co-working or co-living places a strong digital nomad community has been formed in those places (Hannonen, 2020). Moreover, Hall et al.'s (2019) observation shows that digital nomads tend to choose a place where they have a connection, either through friends or family or with other digital nomads, which further supports Hannonen's argument.

Another important characteristic regarding digital nomads' travel motivations is the importance of the cost of living in relation to the quality of life. Cook (2020) mentions that frequently blogged places are usually located in Asia where the cost of living is lower compared to the Global North. Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet (2021) complete the importance of the cost of living with the factor of climate and notice that digital nomads prefer warm places.

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter introduces the theory of consumer behavior and then goes on to review concepts relevant to our research aims such as values and the tourist decision-making process. The last subchapter will explain how those concepts are operationalized in order to better understand the theory.

3.1 Consumer behavior in tourism

Consumer behavior within tourism is one of the frequently researched areas, and it covers many different subcategories, from decision-making to tourist motivations and attitudes (Cohen et al., 2013). Consumer behavior is derived from the marketing field. It is concerned with all activities directly involved in obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services, including the decision processes that precede and follow these actions (Engel et al., 1995, p. 4). Consumer behavior theory has become more and more popular within marketing since the 1950s to provide “a systematic and in-depth understanding of buying processes” (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005, p. 815) regarding products at the beginning, and later it involved tourist service as well. Within tourism, consumer behavior is concerned with how and why tourists engage in particular tourist activities, such as visiting a destination, and the dynamics and driving factors behind that decision (Woodside and Decrop, 2017). From a marketing point of view, this information is critical for destination management companies to apply good marketing strategies to attract exemplary visitors (Çaliskan, 2018). Different researchers tried to understand tourist behavior from different angles and different disciplines. Moutinho (1993), for instance, incorporated the social and psychological influences on travel behavior and created a model. From the social side, he emphasized the influence of culture and subculture, social class, reference groups, and the role of the family. As psychological factors, he noted personality, learning, motivation, perception and attitude, and complex interaction between these elements which affect consumer behavior (Moutinho, 1993). However, criticism against research like this is a lack of comprehensive and holistic understanding of such a complex phenomenon as consumer behavior (Cohen et al., 2013). Moreover, others argue that theories and models created initially for mainstream consumer behavior do not relate to tourism due to the lack of applicability and validity (Cohen et al., 2013). Consumer behavior in tourism includes many different concepts which help to understand tourists' behavior.

However, the cornerstone of understanding consumer behavior in the tourism field is the decision-making process and it is based on different kinds of models rather than definitions to demonstrate its complexity (Cohen et al., 2013). Moreover, the choice of tourist destination is highly linked to values thus it influences the behavior of tourists (Cohen et al., 2013). The following part of this chapter will introduce the above-mentioned two concepts in more detail.

3.2 Value in tourism studies

Value is an important, but also very complex concept. Gallarza and Gil (2008) state that value is often used differently within separate disciplines as it is a very abstract concept and can be understood in many different ways. One of the most universally accepted definitions is by Zeithaml (1988, p. 14), who states the following: “Perceived value is the consumer overall assessment of the utility of a product based on the perceptions of what is received and what is given”, hence she based on a getting-versus-giving approach.

Consumer value has been central to consumer behavior literature for many decades. Value is, in fact, central to marketing and consumer behavior (Holbrook, 1999). However, the definition of consumer behavior is constantly changing, due to changes in society. In recent decades there has been a shift from material values to ethical and intellectual values. Previously, values have often been considered as the perceived value in relation to the price paid and were the determining aspect for the repurchase decision (Gallarza and Gil, 2008).

To challenge this definition, Holbrook (1999, p. 5) developed a typology, which explained different types of consumer value. He defined consumer value as an “Interactive, relativistic, preference experience”. Thereby, he considers consumer value as interactive, because there is an interaction between the subject and the object. Thus, the value depends on the characteristics of some physical or mental object.

Moreover, he considers it relativistic, because the value can only be evaluated when it is being compared to another object. A tourist, for example, might consider several different destinations, but still, choose one over the other one due to factors such as price or climate. Another reason why it is relativistic is that it is personal, because it varies from one person to another. Holbrook (1999, p. 7) uses the example of “one man’s meat is another man’s poison”, hence every customer is different. To form an effective marketing strategy, it is

therefore important to segment customers and to focus on their different needs and wants. Lastly, it is situational as it always depends on the context in which the judgment is made. This also means that a preference can always change, because it depends on the situation or context it is made in.

Moreover, consumer value is preferential and often based on the individual's judgment or evaluation of a product or service. Holbrook(1999) considers this the most fundamental assumption of consumer value. Finally, consumer value is an experience, which means that the value lies in the consumption experience and not the product itself.

While this framework has been successfully employed in the marketing field, one of the main criticisms is that it is too stereotypical and ambiguous in order to be applied to real-life situations (Vespestad et al., 2019). However, there have been other researchers who approached value in its multidimensional nature. One of them is Sheth et al. (1991), who introduced the consumption value theory.

3.2.1 Consumption value theory

As we mentioned earlier, value can be considered a complex multidimensional phenomenon, which has contributions from many different disciplines (Sheth et al, 1991; Groth 1995; Grönroos, 1997; de Ruyter et al., 1997, Sweeney et al., 1999; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, all cited in Sanchez et al., 2006). As mentioned before, tourists' decisions differ from other types of consumer decisions as tourism products are experiential, intangible, and heterogeneous. Gatersleben et al. (2012) state that consumption values can be a good predictor of tourists' behaviors.

Sheth et al. (1991) propose that consumption values explain why consumers choose a certain product or service over another one. As a result, they created the consumption value theory, which is based on three fundamental propositions. First, consumer choice is a function of multiple consumption values, namely functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value. Second, consumption values make differential contributions in any given situation, meaning that decision-making is highly individualistic and contextual, which is an assumption that has been verified by previous studies (Phau et al., 2014; Sheth et al., 1991). Tourists who visit their families, for example, might be driven by different values than a person who goes to a new place for the first time (Sirakaya et al.,

1996; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). Third, consumption values are independent. According to Sheth et al. (1991), it is often impossible to maximize all values. As a result, one person might sacrifice one value in order to obtain more of another value.

As mentioned above, the model consists of five values. Functional value is based on the perceived utility of the product and is related to the attributes and the functional usability of the product (Sheth et al, 1991). Traditionally, functional values have been considered the main driver of consumer choice, which is due to the fact that it underlies economic utility theory. However, the model has also been used in tourism. Phau et al. (2014), for example, found that tourists pay specific attention to functional values such as the quality of infrastructure and varied gastronomy in the destination (Phau et al., 2014). Denys and Mendes (2014), on the other hand, name quality, variety, reliability, comfort, safety, and prices among the most important destination factors when considering functional values.

Social value is connected to a consumer's "personal geographic, demographic, socioeconomic, political and cultural dimensions" and can have implications for the social image (Sheth et al., 1991; Denys and Mendes, 2014). According to Hyman (1942), individual behavior is influenced by group membership. As a result, social values in consumer choice are often a result of interpersonal communication and information dissemination. Denys and Mendes (2014) explain that social value can have a different meaning in tourism as it is derived from social interactions. Therefore, social value in tourism is based on factors such as "people's friendliness and hospitality, respectful treatment, genuine care for customers, the willingness of others to help" (Noypayak, 2009). Phau et al. (2014) and Shanka and Phau (2008), on the other hand, state that tourists may choose a destination based on different social groups that they belong to or aspire to belong to, hence they want to feel a social connection with the destination or are driven by the possibility of making friendships or meeting like-minded people.

Emotional value is based on the capacity to arouse feelings of "affective states". Goods are associated with different emotional responses. Sheth et al. (1991) name the example of feeling fear while watching a scary movie. Thereby, consumer choice may be "driven by non-cognitive and unconscious motives" (Sheth et al., 1991, p. 161). In tourism, emotional value can be created by feelings of freedom or relaxation.

Epistemic value is connected to the feeling of curiosity, seeking something new, or satisfying the desire for knowledge. Thereby, a specific product, in this case, a destination, might be chosen because the consumer is bored with the previous one. In the context of destination choice, epistemic value can be associated with experiencing fun, escaping from everyday life, and experiencing a new place. Previous studies also indicate that epistemic and emotional values might be hard to differentiate as they may arouse similar feelings (Phau et al., 2014).

Lastly, conditional values are based on the specific situation or a set of circumstances that are facing the choice maker. Shanka and Phau (2008) state that conditional value is a value that is focused on the extrinsic utility of alternatives. They elaborate that the Bali bombings, for example, might be associated with conditional value as the choice maker might choose another destination based on the higher perceived safety. Phau et al. (2014), in fact, specifically emphasize determining factors such as personal safety and good value for money when it comes to destination decision-making.

Previous studies using this model have shown that consumption values play an important role in determining the intention to visit a destination. However, the model has primarily been used in quantitative studies. To get a deeper and richer understanding of individuals it is important to use qualitative methods (Phau et al., 2014).

3.3 Destination choice and decision-making

Destination choice is a very complex process influenced by many different factors. As the tourism industry has been growing rapidly, studies regarding destination choice have gained increasing importance as they can help destination management organizations better understand tourist behavior. Decision-making has, in fact, been an increasingly important topic for marketers since the 1950s. As a result, most models related to decision-making have their roots in consumer behavior literature. Because of that, previous studies regarding destination choice tend to follow a microeconomic or behavioral approach (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005).

In previous studies, decision-making is often described as a process. Thereby, the process is often divided into different stages. Those stages are generally described as “recognition that there is a decision to be made, formulation of goals and objectives, generation of an alternative set of objects from which to choose, search for information about the properties of

the alternatives under consideration, ultimate judgment or choice among many alternatives, acting upon the decision and providing feedback for the next decision” (Carroll and Johnson, 1990; Einhorn and Hogarth, 1981; Engel et al., 1986; Huber, 1980, as cited in Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005).

Models from the tourism literature follow a similar process. According to Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), a majority of the tourism literature has been describing decision-making as a funnel-like procedure, where tourists narrow down their final choice based on different alternatives (Moutinho, 1987, Woodside and Lyonski, 1989; Um and Crompton, 1990; Um and Crompton, 1991; Um and Crompton, 1992). Those models, called choice set models, are based on the assumption that the destination choice consists of an evaluation and selection process in which tourists compare and decide among many different alternatives (Karl et al., 2015). Amongst the most known models are the structural models from Um and Crompton (1990) and Woodside and Lyonski (1989). Since those models were created, they have been continuously developed by numerous researchers. As a result, the terminology among those models differs. One example can be seen in Figure 3.

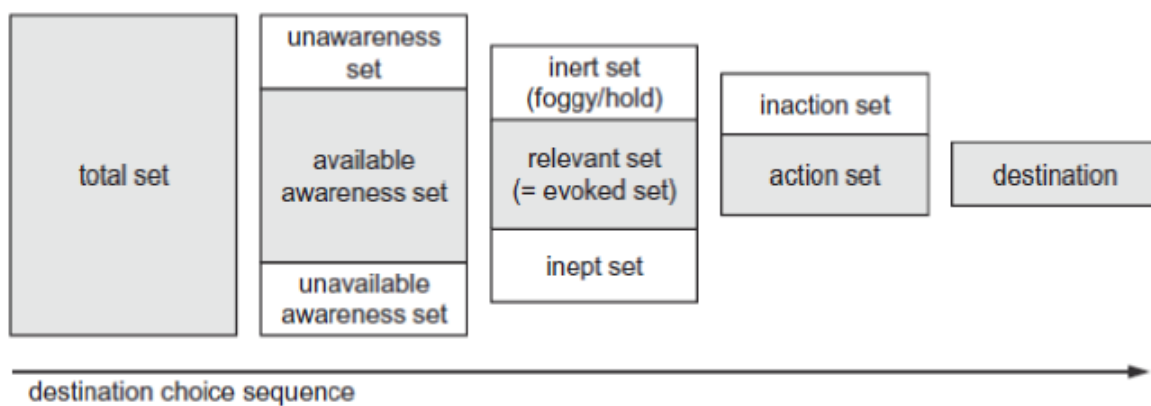


Figure 3: Destination choice sequence (Karl et al., 2015, p.49)

In choice set models, it is assumed that tourists assign destinations to different sets. First, there is a total set, which includes all possible destinations. Tourists, however, are only aware of a limited number of destinations, which are within the “awareness set”. The awareness set includes destinations that are in a tourist’s long-term memory. Woodside and Lyonski (1989) emphasize that marketers can play an important role in embedding destinations into the awareness set. Throughout the decision-making process, the tourist reduces the number of destinations as he evaluates them as either relevant, inert, or inept (Karl et al., 2015). The

inept includes destinations currently considered unsuitable, for example, because of unpleasant experiences or negative comments from other sources such as family and friends. Inert sets, on the other hand, are destinations that tourists feel indifferent about, for example, because they do not have enough information to evaluate the destination (Woodside and Lyonski, 1989). Destinations that are neither inert nor inept become part of the evoked set. When a destination is in the evoked set, tourists will start gathering information about the destination. Out of the evoked set, the action set evolved, leading to the final destination choice (Karl et al., 2015).

The different stages are influenced by psychological and internal variables as well as non-psychological and external variables (Um and Crompton, 1990). Lang et al. (1997) classified these factors into a traveler's sociodemographic background (age, income, life cycle, etc.), psychographics profiles (benefit pursued, preference, attitude, etc.), marketing variables (product design, pricing, advertising, etc.), destination-related attributes (attractions, situational variables, etc.) and awareness.

While choice-set models are commonly used in tourism research, they have been criticized for being overly simplified and neglecting the context in which tourists make decisions (Karl et al., 2005). Smalland and Moore (2010) criticize that the results of studies are often limited by their methodological choices and usually only find direct or efficient causes related to decision-making. Subtle or distal causes tend to remain unexplored. Smalland and Moore (2010, p. 3) describe this issue as a “trade-off between generality, simplicity, and accuracy”, resulting in ineffective tourism marketing and management practices. To conquer this issue and to investigate how internal and external factors interact with each other, it can be useful to look at the values that tourists attribute to a decision.

3.4 Summary

In the two previous chapters, we reviewed existing digital nomad literature and different concepts of consumer behavior. As our aim is to understand digital nomads' destination choices, we use previous literature to obtain a thorough understanding of their characteristics and how they may differ from other types of travelers. As an important part of the digital nomad lifestyle is to work and travel simultaneously, it can be assumed that they base their decision on different factors and values than tourists do. Destination choice is a complex process that is influenced by numerous different factors. Previous studies have ignored the

multi-dimensionality of destination choice (Sanchez et al., 2006). Therefore, we use consumption value theory to group different factors in order to simplify them. Grouping the factors into values helps us to investigate which value dimension is most important in the decision-making process, specifically the final stage. It also enables us to get an understanding of how they arrived at their final conclusion and what their evaluative criteria are.

4. Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodological considerations and explains how the research aim, the chosen theory, the chosen method, and the collected data are linked together. First, the research strategy as the core part will be explained including the research design as well. This is followed by the data collection and explains the process and analyses of the data. Finally, considerations about ethics and research quality will be introduced also.

4.1 Research strategy

According to Bryman (2016), qualitative research is more concerned about words rather than numbers, hence it focuses on the individual's understanding of the social world. As our research question is based on a “how” question in order to gain in-depth knowledge about digital nomads' destination choices, a qualitative approach is a better fit than a quantitative one as a research strategy (Flick, 2011). Moreover, because digital nomads' destination choices have not been researched yet, a qualitative research strategy has been chosen as it provides a better understanding of a phenomenon rather than just testing a theory (Bryman, 2016).

In the case of qualitative research, the relationship between the theory and the research is usually inductive (Bryman, 2016). However, in this study, abductive reasoning was used. Bryman argues that abductive reasoning is suitable when the “perspectives of the subject studied is the empirical point of departure” (Bryman, 2016, p. 401), hence abductive reasoning provides a better understanding of their perceptions, language, and worldviews. Moreover, this study does not aim to come up with a new theory but rather aims on extending and contributing to the existing research about digital nomads.

We chose a cross-sectional design, as it enabled us to collect data about more than one case at one particular point in time (Kumar, 2019). Even though the cross-sectional design is commonly used in the case of quantitative research, it is possible to use it in qualitative, especially when the aim is to understand the influence of factors (Bryman, 2016). As our aim is to investigate destination choice through the influence of digital nomads' consumption values, this design aligns well with our study.

Regarding epistemological concerns, this paper is aligned with interpretivism. According to Bryman (2016, p. 28), interpretivism is “concerned with the empathic understanding of human action”, which indicates that there are multiple knowledge claims and it can be studied by interpreting the subjective meaning behind words (Fay, 1996). This philosophical approach lets us understand digital nomads' values that their destination choice is based on. To uncover these subjective meanings, qualitative semi-structured interviews were used as they allow follow-up questions that help to gain in-depth knowledge and to understand the meaning behind the words.

Regarding the nature of the social entity or in other words the ontological consideration, this study took a position of constructivism as it aims to understand the underlying process of reality construction (Silverman, 2013). According to Bryman (2016, p. 33) constructionism “is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors”. Moreover, social phenomena and their categories are not predetermined but are constantly changing and produced through interactions (Bryman, 2016). This ontological position has also shaped the chosen method, thus interviews enable us to understand how different digital nomads understand their own reality at this specific time.

4.2 Data collection

As mentioned earlier, semi-structured interviews have been chosen for the data collection. Semi-structured interviews follow a certain degree of structure but still have a higher degree of flexibility. Opposite to structured interviews, they enable the interviewer to probe answers, which then again encourages a dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee (May, 2011). As a result, it is possible to get better insights into how research participants view the world (Bryman, 2016). On the other hand, that also means that there will be a greater variety of quality and information in the different interviews (May, 2011). We believed semi-structured interviews to be suitable due to the subjective nature of destination choice. We wanted to be able to probe their answers and get a deep insight into why digital nomads make certain choices.

4.2.1 Sample

According to Flick (2011) one of the most important issues to consider is the aim of the sampling. As this study aims at gaining an in-depth understanding of digital nomads, we were

aiming to cover the population as well as possible. Therefore, purposive sampling has been chosen as a sampling method. According to Bryman (2016) purposive sampling provides an opportunity to strategically choose participants based on the research aim and question.

In our case, the population of our study was digital nomads. As our network lacks digital nomads, we used the internet to find them. We searched for “digital nomads” on Facebook and joined the ten largest digital nomad groups based on the number of members. Out of the ten groups we posted in, seven were aimed at digital nomads in general. The other three groups were aimed at specific destinations, namely Bali, Lisbon, and Split, which can be considered digital nomad hotspots. After being accepted to the groups, we created a post explaining our research and asking them to message us in case they were interested. As a result, we got several dozen messages and comments on our post. We tried to contact the respondents in chronological order. However, we often encountered the problem that our messages could not be delivered due to Facebook’s security policies. We then gave further information to those who were interested in our study and finally scheduled the interviews to the convenience of our interviewees in case they were still interested. During the interviews, we encountered one problem. Even though we tried to highlight our definition of digital nomads in our Facebook posts, such as being a “location-independent remote workers who are simultaneously engaged in extensive leisure travel with no break from work” (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet, 2021, p. 3), - we realized that people understand digital nomadism in different ways. As a result, two out of the 17 interviews were considered unsuitable as the interviewees could not be considered “location-independent” and did not “engage in extensive leisure travel”. Those two interviews are highlighted in Table 2.

Participant	Age	Gender	Home country	Occupation	Length	Interview data
Putri	26	Female	Indonesia	Entrepreneur	50min	March 14, 2022
Jessica	34	Female	USA	Marketing Services	53min	March 15, 2022
John	36	Male	Canada	Life- and Business Coach	55min	March 17, 2022
Adam	34	Male	USA	Blogger	50min	March 18, 2022
Kate	32	Female	Indonesia	Operation Manager	55min	March 18, 2022
Juan	28	Male	Mexico	Online Tutor	52min	March 18, 2022
Amanda	35	Female	USA	Nurse Practitioner	50min	March 18, 2022
Vivien	32	Female	Hungary	Operation Manager	50min	March 25, 2022
Charlotte	42	Female	France	Consultant	48min	March 28, 2022
Gloria	32	Female	Columbia	Travel Writer	40min	March 28, 2022
Carol	49	Female	USA	Freelance UX Strategist	52min	March 30, 2022
Steve	60	Male	UK	Entrepreneur	46min	March 30, 2022
Leo	61	Male	Canada	Sales Coach	43min	April 04, 2022
Gustav	30	Male	France	Business Coach	50min	April 15, 2022
Thomas	29	Male	Slovakia	Stock Trader	45min	April 15, 2022
Henry	27	Male	Scotland	Filmmaker and Investor	1h15min	April 19, 2022
Chris	27	Male	USA	Consultant	45min	April 21, 2022

Table 2: Information about the interviews

As visible in Table 2, the age of our respondents ranged from 25 to 61, and our samples were almost equally represented by female and male respondents. Even though our aim was not to favor any nationality and to be as heterogeneous as possible, the majority of our respondents were from the Global North such as Europe or North America. However, some interviews originated from Central or South America and Asia. For ethical reasons and in order to protect our participants' identities, we changed their names into fictional ones. As visible later throughout the analysis, we did not end up using quotes from every participant. However, we used quotes that represented the majority of our sample.

4.2.2 Designing and conducting semi-structured interviews

Altogether, 17 semi-structured interviews have been conducted, but as we mentioned only 15 of them have been used and analyzed. The interviews were conducted between the 14th of March 2022 and the 21st of April 2022. The duration of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. All of the interviews were conducted through Zoom, mainly because most of the interviewees were located outside of Sweden, which made it difficult to meet in real life. Zoom can be considered a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)-mediated technology (Archibald et al., 2019). Because most digital nomads work remotely and are familiar with video technology, Zoom was considered a suitable platform. Additionally, Zoom interviews are nowadays often preferred over other methods such as in-person- or phone interviews (Archibald et al., 2019). Like most other VoIP-mediated technologies, however, Zoom can cause technical challenges. Some of the interviewees, for

example, lived in places that had a bad Wi-Fi connection, which meant that we sometimes had to ask them to repeat answers or to call into the Zoom meeting with another device, for example, their phones. Another challenge was the quality of the audio recordings, as some of them were partly difficult to understand. However, with slowing down the audio file later we could overcome this challenge.

To make sure that all main themes would be addressed, and that it would be possible to ensure cross-case comparability an interview guide was created prior to the interviews (Bryman, 2016). To create the interview guide (see [Appendix 1](#)), we asked ourselves what we needed to know in order to find out how digital nomads were choosing their destination and tried to look at our research topic from their point of view. We then identified different themes and topic areas which consisted of demographic questions, questions about the participant's general travel experiences, and questions regarding their destination choice. When formulating the questions, we made sure that they were comprehensible and relevant. Additionally, we confirmed that the questions were not too specific so that the participants would have enough room to elaborate on the questions (Bryman, 2016). To test the questions, two pilot interviews were conducted. To find participants for the pilot study, we posted in two different digital nomad groups on Facebook and scheduled interviews based on their availability. The interviews were conducted through Zoom as well. Besides testing the research instrument, we also considered the pilot studies as a good way to test and improve our interviewing skills. As a result of our pilot study, more questions came up and some of the questions were re-considered (Bryman, 2016).

For each interview, both of us and one interviewee were present. The questions, however, were only asked by one of us while the other one made notes to summarize the most important and relevant points of the interview. To make sure that our interviewees felt comfortable, we made sure to explain the interview process to them and tried to be as transparent as possible. Furthermore, we tried to find a quiet area to avoid distractions. To break the ice, we began by asking the interviewees questions about their general travel patterns, for example, where they have traveled last and what they like about traveling. This helped us lead to other questions that were more relevant to our research.

4.3 Transcription and data analysis

The first step of our data analysis was to transcribe the interviews by slowing down the audio recordings and transcribing them word by word. Because the interviews were conducted through Zoom, we sometimes struggled to understand the parts of the interview. Therefore, we made sure that both of us re-listened to the audio recordings and corrected each other's transcripts. At the end of each transcription, we made notes, which helped us to summarize the interview and to give us a good starting point for coding and analyzing our data. Before we started coding, we made sure to read through our transcripts several times (Flick, 2011). To analyze the data, thematic analysis was used to identify themes that appear repeatedly within our data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The next step was the coding process which has been conducted in a shared Google document where we color-coded frequently appeared keywords. After we went through all the text, the next step was to categorize these codes and start to establish themes. In this process, we generated approximately 20 categories while we reflected upon certain codes' relevance as well. The final step was the emergence of the final six themes, which were based on the literature about the characteristics of digital nomads. These themes - namely *the ability to deal with the destination's limitations*, *making the most of one's money*, *looking for paradise*, *the excitement of the unknown*, *the comfort of the known*, and finally *the chase for freedom* - are all significant in our research question and will be analyzed in the next chapter under each theme.

4.4 Choosing the literature

Our literature selection process started with the help of three different academic databases, namely LUBsearch, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. As the subject of this thesis is digital nomads, the process started with reviewing previous articles about digital nomads and highlighting the research fields, the chosen methods, and the main findings of the relevant papers in a shared Excel document. This provided us with a good overview of our research subject as visible in the literature review (Chapter 2) The previous literature about digital nomads also guided us towards a relevant theoretical framework (Chapter 3). For the theoretical framework, keywords such as “consumer behavior in tourism”, “destination choice”, “decision-making process” and “consumer values” were used. Throughout the reading process, however, other sources have been identified. The final literature consists of studies from many interdisciplinary fields within tourism.

4.5 Ethical considerations and research quality

According to Bryman (2016, p. 144), “research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality, and transparency”. When collecting data, it is vital to protect research participants. Therefore, there are ethical principles that have to be considered when conducting research. Ethical principles can be broken down into four main areas, which are based on whether there is harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, or deception (Silverman, 2013).

According to Bryman (2016, p. 135), harm can have different meanings and can refer to “physical harm, harm to participants’ development, loss of self-esteem, stress and inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts”. On the other hand, harm can also be induced by not maintaining confidentiality over the records. As it was of great importance for us to not induce any negative consequences to our research participants, we made sure that they were aware of how their data would be used in our research and made sure that they would not be able to be identified. To guarantee anonymity, we changed their names into fictional ones and used those ones instead of their original ones in our analyses (See Table 2).

Another important aspect was informed consent. As our research participants answered our Facebook posts or texted us privately based on the post, the participation was voluntary by nature. Additionally, we let the participants sign a consent form (See in the [Appendix 2](#)), which was sent to them after we agreed on an interview time. Consent forms give research participants the opportunity to be fully informed about the aim and the nature of the research (Bryman, 2016). By signing the consent form they agreed that their participation was voluntary, that they were aware of the fact that the interview would be transcribed and recorded, that the transcripts would be used in the thesis, that they would not expect a payment, and that the data would only be used for academic purposes. Moreover, we made sure that they were aware of when the recording started and ended.

Another aspect that is closely linked to informed consent is the invasion of privacy. Even though the consent form allowed us to interview our participants it was important for us to not delve too much into private areas such as income or religious beliefs (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, we consciously avoided such questions.

The last aspect is deception. Deception has various degrees and is often used because the researcher wants to limit the participant's understanding of the research aim in order for them to answer in a more natural manner (Bryman, 2016). To not deceive our research participants, we made sure that they are well-informed about the aim and method of our study.

To ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the thesis, we tried to be as transparent as possible with our biases and reflect upon them both during the interviews and the data analysis process. We made sure the questions for the interviews were based on the literature and also not to influence the respondents with opinions or giving words to them. Moreover, even though the replicability of qualitative studies is much harder than quantitative ones (Bryman, 2016), with the help of a purposive sample we tried to improve the transferability of our study. As mentioned earlier, our purposive sample was based on our definition of digital nomads and we made sure all of our participants fit into the criteria of the definition. Moreover, we made sure to discuss our process with our supervisor and other fellow students in order to keep the consistency of our findings and make sure we have not been biased throughout the data analysis process.

5. Results and analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of our empirical data based on the digital nomad literature and the proposed concepts of consumer behavior. The first part introduces the six themes which emerged from our empirical data. The second part will explain in more depth digital nomad consumer behavior with the help of the consumption value theory and with the concept of decision-making process.

5.1 Factors that influence the destination choice

5.1.1 Ability to deal with the destination's limitations

Among the respondents, one of the most frequently mentioned topics was the accessibility and the available services of the destination. These two merged into the theme of limitations of a destination due to the fact that these issues are related to governmental issues and decisions. The main keywords were *infrastructure, safety, entry requirements* or in other word *visas*, and due to the timing of the thesis, *COVID-19 restrictions*.

When choosing a destination, digital nomads are faced with a number of factors that can potentially limit their experience at a destination. One of the most limiting factors is the infrastructure at that destination. When it comes to infrastructure, digital nomads primarily refer to the quality of the internet connection. A functioning internet connection can be considered an important factor when choosing a destination because digital nomads make the majority of their income online (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet, 2021). Gloria, for example, states that she wouldn't be able to go to a destination that does not have a good internet connection.

“There are plenty of places that I would love to be in, but if I don't have Wi-Fi, I can't work. So yeah, so that maybe that's one of the most important things when I consider a new destination” – Gloria

Steve, on the other hand, demonstrates the consequences of being at a destination with a bad internet connection.

“I was staying in a hotel in Guatemala, and the internet was nowhere near as good as I said it was. I had to work with data. Um, we were talking about a big problem one weekend. Uh, I

was working on a virtual event. I have like 20 appointments on Saturday and half-hour appointments for the big virtual events from America. And they told me on Friday that all of the electricity for the whole of the lake will be shut down on Saturday as well, so we're still using a new generator. So, uh, but I couldn't even work off data if the mobile phones didn't work except to get my PA to reschedule my goals. And we just had no electricity for those 12 hours. Uh, we do get power cuts quite a lot in Guatemala, and it could be half an hour. It could be 20 minutes, or it could be five hours. But when you have power cuts, then you can at least work from your phone data.” - Steve

Additionally to the internet connection, there are several other services such as available bank services, grocery stores, bakeries, hospitals, and transportation that are considered when choosing a destination. Leo, for instance, mentioned the following:

“Some of the digital nomad villages in Madeira didn't have a bakery. Didn't have, uh, a grocery store and digital nomads are pretty stingy. They don't eat out in restaurants all the time. They like to cook through meals and you can't really do that. If you don't have those really, really basic things placed by food placed by bread, um, a place to do your laundry, uh, places to congregate, um, to do yoga, for instance, that's a big digital thing. So yeah, little things like that.” - Leo

Due to those problems, digital nomads seek destinations that offer a good infrastructure for their lifestyles. Bali, for example, is a digital nomad hotspot. According to some of the interviewees, one of the reasons is the high density of cafes and co-working places.

Another limitation when living at a destination is the safety at that destination. While it has not been mentioned as frequently as infrastructure, it is often considered important, especially because digital nomads tend to travel alone. However, the concern around safety also often depends on the destination's government. Digital nomads that go to more touristy places tend to be less concerned about their safety, as the places they go to are usually quite safe. Digital nomads that go to more isolated or rare spots, on the other hand, tend to be more concerned about their safety. This was specifically evident in female digital nomads. Charlotte, for example, talks about her experience in Egypt and how she bought a ring for herself to feel more at ease.

“I didn't know about this before, and I know this is a sensitive subject, but when you're here, it seems as if men and women can't be friends without thinking about sex. So, I actually

bought myself a ring in order to protect myself from unwanted attention. I thought that men would stop talking to me if I wore it, but it didn't work.” - Charlotte

Gloria is another interviewee who emphasized safety. She mentions that safety is really important for her since she is usually not familiar with the good and bad areas of a city.

“My home is Columbia, even if it's not the safest city in the world because it's just a huge city. But I know where to go and where not to go. In the neighborhoods, you know. I think that I take that into account a lot, especially since I'm usually traveling alone. I ask myself whether it's going to be safe for me if I can go out at night to do things at night and then get home safe.” - Gloria

None of our male interviewees mentioned a concern about safety. However, it is important to mention that most of our male interviewees had a travel companion, which might give them a feeling of safety. Henry actually mentioned that he thinks that crime can happen everywhere and that it is important to know where the good and bad areas are.

“I used to think about crime, but at the end of the day, it happens everywhere. I just try to avoid the bad areas.” – Henry

Steve explains it in a similar way.

“My perception of Columbia was that it was dangerous, and when you get there, you know, there is a crime. But you just need to take precautions. Don't go to a cashpoint at midnight, and don't buy drugs in a bad area when you're drunk (...) because this is what gets people into trouble. You just have to be careful and know your way around.” - Steve

The importance of a destination's infrastructure can be attributed to the nature of digital nomadism. As mentioned before, digital nomads are more engaged in maintaining an effective work environment due to the fact that they are working remotely, thus they are more concerned about certain aspects of infrastructure than other types of travelers, for instance classical tourists (Chevtaeva and Denizci-Guillet, 2021).

Additionally, digital nomads often have to deal with limitations in order to get to a destination. These issues are usually connected to the bureaucratic issues of that destination. One of the main concerns of digital nomads' is the entry requirements of a destination. Because digital nomads can often not legally work on a tourist visa and are usually not

eligible to obtain a work visa, they need to pay close attention to the available types of visas as those regulations vary among countries. Many respondents brought up the topic of visas. Gloria and John, for example, mentioned the following:

“There are a lot of places in the Caribbean that issue digital nomad visas. So I’ve been thinking about looking into either Dominica or St. Lucia. I think that’s where I’ll go (...) So I’ve been thinking about places that have the digital nomad visa, because one thing about being a digital nomad is just the visa, right? Like, you have time limits, so I am just looking for places that have the new digital nomad visas, places where I can stay for like six months. And I think I just really found out that I like slow traveling. I want to explore the region and not have to be worried about time running out.” - Gloria

“Actually, I believe Costa Rica recently released a visa specific to digital nomads, which I think is just the coolest thing in the world to see an opportunity for people wanting to travel and work away and become nomads for that. I think it's very smart of them to do it and also to encourage people to, you know, to live this type of life.” - John

Another limitation that digital nomads may encounter is COVID-19 restrictions. Due to the fact that our study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, our respondents have been affected by travel regulations and border restrictions. How different destinations handled the pandemic and what kind of regulations have been applied was an important aspect when choosing a destination. Jessica, for instance, mentioned that she couldn't travel over some of the borders in surrounding countries, which made her change her route.

“I did a big circle, and now, during the pandemic and COVID-19, I could travel from province to province, but I could not travel across the border like to Uruguay or to Brazil or to Chile. I mean, the border restrictions are not crazy now. but they were so I was traveling as much as I could inside Argentina.”- Jessica

Another example is Putri, who said the following:

“Next month I will go to Thailand because they already don't have a lot of restrictions.”- Putri

Juan mentioned his previous plan and how it changed during the pandemic.

“Before COVID-19, we tried to get visas to Australia. That was my and my girlfriend's goal, because of the good salary, nice weather, and so on. But because of COVID-19, it stopped, and now the restrictions are super hard, and that is how we ended up in Europe. I liked it and decided to stay here”. - Juan

Vivien mentioned how the fact that Croatia is the neighboring country to her home country affected her choice to spend months there due to its accessibility and the possibility of an easy return to her home country.

“I really started to like Croatia, especially during the COVID, because it's very easy to get there. So when everything is questioned about how you can travel better, there will be a vaccine? What can you do? What cannot you do? So everything was, of course, a big question, during COVID and, uh, going to Croatia was only one border. And of course, very close. So even then, we had the news that, okay, you can't get a vaccine then we could have, get very easily to the car and go back to Hungary. So it was, it was not an issue.” - Vivien

However, one of our respondents mentioned the positive side of the pandemic and the fact that typical tourist places, which are usually crowded, were quite empty so he could enjoy it more.

“Actually, you know, it was very tough to navigate the rules and regulations that were constantly changing. So that was quite interesting, but it was very rewarding traveling in the sense that you get to go to a lot of these places that are usually typically very busy, and then it's not busy at all, and you get to see the place like it was probably 20, 30 years ago, which is quite amazing.” - John

As we mentioned in the introduction and as proven by our findings, digital nomad visas have become a significant factor that influences travel decisions, which also goes hand in hand with the trend of slow traveling. However, for the possibility of slow travel, digital nomads' needs have to be fulfilled. As Jessica mentioned, a destination has to fulfill all of her criteria, and the majority of those are related to governmental issues such as infrastructure.

“So when we find a place which fits all of our criteria such as infrastructure, wifi, nature is good, no pollution, not overcrowded we tend to stay there longer. Right now, we have a perfect mix of everything.” - Jessica

As visible in our findings, infrastructure and governmental regulations have a strong influence on destination choice. This confirms previous research by Cook (2020), who classifies digital nomads as highly mobile and work-focused. To stay mobile and to be able to work, functioning infrastructure and easy accessibility play an important role.

5.1.2 Making the most of one’s money

Based on our empirical data, another common reason for digital nomads to choose a destination is to get the most out of their money. This is linked to the prices and quality of certain services and to the cost of living, hence to their spending power at the destination. The relevant keywords for this theme were *money, cost, price, quality, exchange rate, cheap, and expensive*.

One of the first aspects that digital nomads consider is how to get to a certain destination. Many of our interviewees described that they compare ticket and visa prices before choosing a certain destination. As digital nomads travel a lot more frequently than tourists, it can be assumed that ticket prices can bear a considerable cost factor. Juan, for example, explains how he decides between different options before choosing a final destination.

“The main point in the destination is we tend to check the flight if there’s a good connection which is cheap like Ryanair and Wizzair and we look into the options and see the prices, checking these airlines and see what they offer and see from all the options what we would like because we don’t want to go to a colder place right now.” - Juan

Another important factor in regards to making the most out of one’s money is the cost of living at a destination. In the majority of cases, digital nomads earn their income from their home country. When they choose destinations, they tend to choose places in which they can get more out of their income compared to what they could get in their home country. However, it is important to consider that the perception of how much someone can get out of their money strongly depends on where they get their income from. A person that gets their income from Indonesia, for example, might have a different spending power than a person

who gets their income from the USA. John gives a good example by explaining how the spending power of one of his American customers might be different in Mexico City compared to his home country. While 20 dollars can not get him much in the USA, he can get a lot of it in Mexico City.

“I have a podcast, and I had a guy on the podcast yesterday who lives in Mexico City, and he teaches English. He's from the states, and he only works a couple of hours a day. He makes about 20 bucks an hour, but in Mexico City, that allows them a ton of freedom.” - John

Another example is mentioned by Steve, who describes the spending power of US dollars when living in Guatemala.

“I met some people in Guatemala who are teaching English there. They're getting paid enough to just about survive on (...) If you live in the USA and you make 3000 dollars a month, it's not going to get you far, but in Guatemala, it's got a spending power of about 9000 dollars. You know, it will at least double the value depending on where in Mexico you live of course. Your income can be doubled or sometimes even three times the value.” - Steve,

Therefore, spending power can be considered one of the main reasons to choose for or against a destination. Adam, for example, explains that he does not understand why digital nomads choose to go to Costa Rica considering it is so expensive.

“And Costa Rica is expensive, the prices are massively high and the food is not even great, so I don't understand why everyone wants to go there? I mean it's beautiful, but you can have the same things and even more somewhere else.” - Adam

John, who actually lived in Costa Rica at the time he was interviewed explains the negative surprise he experienced when encountering prices in Costa Rica.

“Everyone told me Costa Rica is expensive, but it really is quite expensive. Like, I'm a minimalist. I'm very simple. Like I eat eggs and vegetables and you know fruit. I'm very simple, but you're still for sure going to be spending. Like, you can't leave the grocery store, no matter how little you buy without spending like 40 to 60 American dollars. It's not cheap by any means.” - John

Several other interviewees, who have been in Costa Rica, however, mentioned that the high prices mainly apply to tourist hotspots. Interestingly, many of our interviewees explained that

the high prices are caused by digital nomads themselves, which sort of leads to a contradiction because that would mean that digital nomads can not make the most of their money in Costa Rica due to digital nomadism itself. One of the interviewees that explained this phenomenon is Leo.

“Apparently, there have been problems in Costa Rica where the digital nomads have come in and used their digital nomad dollars to drive up the rents and started buying property. They’re not very welcome there because of that. There are a lot of factors involved, you know, the people who own the properties are renting them out to digital nomads, but they don’t have to rent them out to digital nomads. They still rent them out to digital nomads, because they will rent them out to whoever will pay the most. In this case, it’s the digital nomads that have come along and they can go into a little village and pay three or four times as much as a local family could pay. That is a problem that has been created and we need to try to make it less of a problem.” - Leo

Another important aspect is the price-quality ratio of products and services at the destination. One of the most typical examples our interviewees brought up is the quality of food. Steve, for instance, compares the prices between Mexico and Guatemala.

“I’ll try to eat organic whenever I can. In Mexico, for example, organic is a really big section where it should be in supermarkets is bigger than the organic markets. You look at the same thing, in Guatemala and it’s so much cheaper, your fruit and vegetables are organic and it’s so much cheaper.” - Steve

One of our other respondents, Putri, answered similarly about Bali.

“We have a lot of restaurant Cafe any kind of food you want we have with the high quality” - Putri

This confirms previous research by Cook (2020), who states that the cost of living is a significant factor in destination choice. The findings presented in this chapter present the different layers and their complexity.

5.1.3 Looking for paradise

Another significant theme that emerged from our findings is “looking for paradise”. This theme represents the complexity between climate, natural attractions of a destination, and how those are connected to certain emotions and desires. The most commonly used keywords in this theme were *climate, weather, nature, beauty, peace, calm, sports and leisure activity*. It is important to highlight that the meaning of paradise is highly individualistic. However, the main components are quite similar among digital nomads.

Almost all of our respondents mentioned the importance of weather and climate when choosing a destination. However, the preference for weather is quite individualistic. For instance, Steve mentioned the importance of warm weather in his decision.

“Uh, well, for me, I can't speak for anyone else, but certainly for me and other digital nomads I spoke to, it is the weather. I don't like cold weather. So in the UK, we don't get really good summers and the winters along.(...) Why, why stay stuck in a country where you've lived all your life when you've got the rest of the world you can visit and just have some amazing times. But I think primarily for me, the reason is the weather.” - Steve

A few of our respondents even use weather as a main criterion in their destination choice. Juan's and Thomas' answers provide an example of this.

“One thing is now the weather. Poland is beautiful but I need warmer weather. So that is why we are going to Sicily now. It's warmer there and also in Spain that is why we want to go there, not like super hot but a little bit better than here.” - Juan

“Yeah, climate definitely because the Canary Islands are the warmest part of the European Union, the entire European Union. You know, except the Overseas Territories, but you know, it's even warmer than Mallorca or Malta. Wherever December or January temperatures are only, you know, 16, 17 Canary Islands. Generally in January, you can get 20 or 21. So that's why I went there because of the climate.” - Thomas

However, the weather is not the only important factor within this theme. Many interviewees also emphasize the importance of natural attractions such as beaches or mountains. Chris, for instance, mentions the following:

“Another place I went to is Belize. Belize is a beach location, which is super attractive, you know, during the winter months. People wanting to escape cold weather (...) And, you know, making connections there and just waking up every day and being on the beach is a really amazing feeling that I've never had before.” - Chris

Natural attractions are also an important aspect in determining available leisure activities. Vivien, Jessica, and Juan, for instance, mention how their hobbies influence their destination choice.

“It has that hiking, it has those outside fun activities (...) We really like hiking so we try to find places with mountains.” - Jessica

“I like surfing and they have really good surfing.” - Juan

“I got my boating license in Croatia. It's very easy to get a boat license and find people who can teach you about sailing and motor boats. So, yeah, that was the most attractive to me at the moment.” - Vivian

Leo, on the other hand, provides a great example of how these layers are connected. His choice of Madeira, for example, was sufficient weather and climate-wise. However, he could not enjoy his hobbies.

“I'd like to be able to cycle Madeira, but I wasn't able to do stuff on the water. So I brought the clothing that I needed to go paddleboarding and I'd found a place to rent before I went, but it really wasn't happening there. There was no place to get on the water. So those are factors that influenced my destination choice.”- Leo

Moreover, many of our respondents mentioned the connection between nature and the aesthetic of nature, more specifically the desire to be in an aesthetic environment. Jessica and Chris, for example, describe this connection between a landscape and beauty in the following way:

“And on the Brazil side, you have a lot of beaches. Like some of the prettiest in the world. So we want to go to the coastline.” - Jessica

“I’ve been in Portugal only for a week for a very short amount of time and I really loved it. I was in the Algarve region, which I thought was the most beautiful coastline I had ever seen.”

- Chris

However, as mentioned previously, destination choice is highly individualistic and so is the perception of what is considered beautiful. Carol, for example, mentions that she finds beauty in things that are blossoming.

“I think what I really want, what I’m really after at this stage is beauty and ease (...) I’m just kind of looking for a lot of beauty right now and for me, that’s things that are blossoming.”

Carol

Furthermore, nature awakens certain emotions which are visible in the following quotes. Jessica, for example, explains that she feels at peace when being close to nature as it gives her a feeling of balance.

“I just want to be in peace and in nature like around a lake or hiking and out in nature. I lived my life in these big cities. It is just time to be closer to nature and get away from phones and computers to have balance in my life(...) I started to really appreciate nature, the more I travel the more I want to be close to nature and not the big city. And the digital nomad lifestyle gives me the possibility to do that, and I don’t have to be in the big city, and I can be in a small-town surrounded by lakes and mountains.”

- Jessica

This theme represents what digital nomads consider when “looking for paradise”. While paradise means something different for everyone, the tendency to choose a destination primarily relates to the individual’s preferred climate, natural attractions, aesthetics, and their ability to pursue their hobbies. However, desires and emotions are complex and can appear in different contexts as visible in the following theme.

5.1.4 The excitement of the unknown

This theme represents digital nomads’ desire for novelty. As Hannonen (2018) mentioned, seeking novelty is an important motivation for digital nomads. Our findings also support this assumption. Seeking novelty can be manifested in different forms. However, the most common ones were the desire to learn about new cultures, meet local people, learn new

languages, and to have the opportunity to discover new places. The most frequently occurring keywords were *culture, local, new, adventure, exciting* and *novelty*.

According to one of our interviewees, the digital nomad lifestyle can be addicting and lead to a constant need to learn and experience something new.

“One thing with being a digital nomad is that we are not really settled. Sometimes I’m telling myself to only go to one more place, but then the opportunity arises and I just go to another place anyways. It can be an addicting lifestyle because there’s always something new to discover.” - Putri

Many digital nomads consciously try to stay away from things they are familiar with. Gustav, for example, mentions that he avoids going to digital nomad hotspots or places with a lot of French tourists.

“I am just lucky enough that I can work from everywhere (...) But I don't know if the question is, if I want to go there (Bali), because there is a huge community of digital nomads, the answer is no. It's kind of the opposite. Actually, I don't like to go where everyone is going.” - Gustav

Many of our interviewees also emphasized the importance of learning about and engaging with the local community. They like to explore new cultures and try to live like the locals do. Chris, one of the digital nomads who is traveling together with his wife and his child explains the advantages of staying at a destination for longer.

“My plan was to go to a new country every three months. You know, you could kind of get deeper and deeper into a place and feel what the local lifestyle is. Then I could also sometimes potentially go back to New York for a couple of months to be with friends and family. But then, you know, for winter, go into more of a tropical location and then certainly Europe is attractive during the summer, you know, like Greece or Portugal, or at least something like that. So you're kind of really thinking about what you want out of life and you know, what type of cultural experiences and the diversity you could get, you know, it's also having a young child you know, trying to broaden his horizons by getting him those experiences.” - Chris

John also emphasizes the importance of engaging with the local community and the value that you can gain from doing so.

“I think it's very important for digital nomads to manage your expectations and not try to turn a place into the place that you're trying to leave and you know go with the flow and appreciate these things (...) It's the most important, you know, there's nothing worse than people who just go to a place, just take advantage of everything and talk down about the way things are.(...) It is important to not just put up with the local culture but to find ways to volunteer and find ways to give back. Go out of your way to do things the way that they do it. Like, you know, there is a reason why some people get a bad reputation when they travel. And you can call it a stereotype. You can call what you want. But I see it every day, you know, someone comes here, they yell at the waiter or the waitress, or they're honking. And you know, it's unfortunate. I mean, one of the beautiful things about traveling is it opens your mind to other cultures and their ways.” - John

Another interviewee who emphasized the importance of learning about locals and their culture is Vivien.

“I think cultural experience, uh, you know. We like to travel to the east. So experiencing the Eastern culture and especially the Islamic culture is very interesting for us. As I mentioned, I studied Arabic, which of course meant also studying a little bit about Islam. I was curious of course, but it's more important if you are curious about the people, because all people we have or Iranian people, we have met out of Iran. They're just amazing and very kind, very helpful with, uh, really, really welcoming. Uh, and that's what we found in the country too. So, the people are just amazing and those such was very, uh, very inspiring for us to go to a destination, which is not that, that much of a tourist trap.” - Vivien

Richards (2015) argues that digital nomads are less engaged in the local community and prefer independence. Based on our findings, however, we could distinguish a group of digital nomads whose main purpose is to meet and learn from local communities and who try to live their life like locals do. Yet, we could also identify a group of digital nomads who represent the other side of the coin as presented in the next subchapter.

5.1.5 The comfort of the known

While some digital nomads seek novelty, many digital nomads also seek familiarity when choosing a destination, which is why “the comfort of the known” emerged as a theme from our data. The theme of the comfort of the known includes keywords such as *the influence of friends, family, and partners, digital nomad hotspot and community, the influence of word of mouth and advertisements, and the feeling of nostalgia.*

As we mentioned earlier, we identified two distinct groups of digital nomads who differ based on how strongly they identify with being digital nomads. Digital nomads who fully identify themselves as digital nomads tend to be very engaged in the digital nomad community and tend to go to places that are known for having a large digital nomad community. Several of the interviewees, for example, mentioned that they choose new destinations based on where their friends, family, or partner live, as visible in the examples of Juan and Gloria.

“I like the connection that Europe has, you know. Even if my wife and I are in Spain, we can still visit our families.” – Juan

“Just my cousin lives there. And he just told me that he was trying to leave. He doesn't really love it. So, I was like, okay, I'm buying the ticket before you leave. So, I can take advantage of having a Christmas day.” – Gloria

As mentioned previously, many digital nomads are very focused on engaging with the local community and avoiding typical tourist or digital nomad hotspots. However, some digital nomads seek the exact opposite and base their choice on going where other digital nomads go, hence they have a need for belonging. Gloria, for example, talks about an event on Jeju Island, South Korea, which was specifically organized for digital nomads.

“I did like three weeks on this island, that's called Jeju Island and the South Korean government really wants to promote digital nomads, so they were having a program where they invited digital nomads and gave us free housing and free access to a co-working space. And then they had workshops for entrepreneurs and stuff.” - Gloria

Chris, who is a co-founder of a digital nomad community, explains the importance of digital nomad communities. This aligns with Hannonen's argument as well which highlights the

importance of the digital nomad community. As Chris uses the term “tribe” he refers to the exact same components as Hannonen, namely the importance of community-based on shared values and principles instead of societal order.

“I’m actually one of the co-founders of a digital nomad community. It basically brings together like-minded people, tribe and true digital nomads or you know, people kind of dipping their toe in for the first time. So we provide a community with weekly events, a calendar, family dinners, weekend excursions, basically just a way to feel comfortable knowing that you’ll go and make friends. I was originally invited to go there as a guest and I really just fell in love with the concept and long story short, I ended up investing in the company and you know, we really launched under a new brand, and now I’m one of the co-founders of that brand.” - Chris

Another reason for seeking familiarity is that it is often considered more comfortable. While digital nomads usually stay in places longer than classic tourists, they often do not stay long enough to fully learn the new language. This creates a language barrier and often makes it harder to engage with locals. Gloria, for example, mentions that it is often easier to be with other expats.

It’s just really easy to be with the other expats because when you go to a country, it’s very hard to actually like to make local friends because they really have their own life. They have their own group of friends. They have their own routine, their own places. And so you’re like coming in as a random person just like and often there’s like a language barrier and it is work for people, right? Like when they have to like, you know, you’re like slow and you don’t understand everything and the and so it’s just very easy to go with the people who are experiencing the same as you are. - Gloria

Therefore, digital nomads tend to not only meet with people from the digital nomad community but also people who have the same nationality or speak the same language.

“So like, it fits my imagination in that way. There seems to be a lot of activity around people moving there. Um, so that kind of, I like that as especially it feels like there’s a decent American contingent there. So that means there’s kind of an automatic reason for me to reach out to people and be like, Hey, let’s have coffee. Like I don’t need any other excuse other than “ We’re from the same place.” - Carol

Another aspect that is somewhat connected to familiarity is nostalgia. Several digital nomads like to go to places that they have previously visited as a tourist. Vivien, for example, went back to Greece, because she experienced it as a child and now wants to go back there as an adult to see it through other eyes.

“There are lots of things in mind. I don't know, you know, what life brings to us and Greece came because I really liked Greece as a kid. So, you know, we went there with my parents in the nineties, you know, those big coach buses traveling 24 hours to the same beach and then spending your whole holiday, just on the very warm beach and you were in Greece. But in a way, I felt like I wanted to see so much more than that. So I had really fond memories, but I wanted to see it again in my own way. So that's how we ended up there so yeah, we can see what, uh, what inspiration we get on the road.” - Vivien

Leo, on the other hand, mentions his longing for going back to Bali. He explains that being in Asia made him feel special and that he got addicted to this feeling.

“(…) So I decided to go to Bali. I tried to make as much money as possible. And I went to visit my brother. I didn't care that it was Bali. I didn't care. I didn't know anything. All I wanted to do was visit him. And that's how it started. And after a couple of weeks, I was like, I don't like this place. I want to go, I'm gonna go. I ended up staying there for eight months (...) And I started to make some friends and well I started getting addicted to this feeling of “I'm spiritual”, you know, “I'm special”. “I'm different”. “I'm here I'm a foreigner you know, I'm special”. And I started learning the language. And then people started being like “Wow, that's amazing”. How could you do that? And then you feel like you started to become like an expert in your own bubble. So I then eventually left them. But I was still addicted. I was upset. I was thinking about going back every day. I was in the UK for a few months and every day I was... in my mind... back. Back over there. I need to get back. And so I eventually did.” - Leo

This theme aligns with Hall's (2019) observation which claims that digital nomads' destination choice depends on their connections. Moreover, it confirms the importance of feelings such as nostalgia and belonging to the digital nomad community. In the following chapter, we identified another theme representing yet another important feeling digital nomads are seeking.

5.1.6 Chasing freedom

Another important aspect when choosing a destination is to experience freedom. As mentioned previously, Reichenberger (2017) considers three different types of freedom, namely professional freedom, spatial freedom, and personal freedom. John, for example, describes professional freedom. While he was very successful in his previous full-time job, he explains how his life as a digital nomad gives him control and flexibility about his working tasks and times, as well as his location. The most relevant keywords were *free, freedom, flexibility, pressure and escape*.

“And a lot of what I do as a coach is helping people, you know, create a life they love, design their dream life and what that entails that I've learned over the years is typically two things. One of them is freedom, the ability to know this is not for me, you know, being a realtor, a successful realtor for 10 years even having flexibility and that I had, I was very caged to the city that I worked in. And also, I worked every day, you know, if it was a holiday because my clients weren't working, I would be working, you know, they want to look at houses. So even though I was successful financially, you know, I wasn't satisfied because I didn't have any freedom. So, when I created this new life, one of the things that I wanted to focus on was freedom and I think the other part is fulfillment, which is doing work that's meaningful to us. And so, when I created this life, I'm very blessed to have this freedom and flexibility to, you know, be able to work where I want and how I want. And I want to take advantage of that. So typically, I'm just one to go with the universe, where when something tells me it's time to move, then I will, but I don't really, I try not to focus too much on timelines, or I have to be here at this time or, you know of. And I don't know if that always serves me going back to coming here, right when the season started, but I mean, overall in your life, I think, you know, go with the flow. Everything's working in your favor if you have that mindset.” - John

John continues by explaining that even as a digital nomad and with the flexibility that comes with this lifestyle, work is not always fun. However, it allows him to live a life in which he can do fun activities that would usually be restricted to weekends or vacations. This is a good example of spatial freedom, which describes the motivation to live and work location-independent in order to get exposed to a different type of life. Spatial freedom often also represents a shift from materialist values to the value of sparking creativity and learning new skills (Reichenberger, 2017).

“I need to still work and grow a business, and I think having an appreciation for that work and understanding that, it's that work that allows you to live this incredible life, you know, you can go and just hang out and do whatever you want. But in six months, you're going to be back. You know, working at it in an office full time and losing that privilege of having that lifestyle. So, I think when you it's really about the mindset around the work you do and understanding that. Even if I don't enjoy the work while I'm doing it, it's doing this work that's allowing me to surf this afternoon or that, allowing me to drink coconuts, you know, drink coconut water from an actual coconut instead of a process container, and I think it's an incredible question and matter where you live or whether or not, you're a digital nomad, being a coach, and someone who's active and, you know, focus on fitness and mental health.”
- John

Another good example of spatial freedom is Charlotte, who is trying to escape from the societal norms of the Western society and wants to distance herself from its typical “timeline” and materialism.

“I was like okay, I need to unload this pressure from society from the Western society, you know, all of these requests like, by this age, you're supposed to have this and this and this and that. And you're supposed to keep up with it. And I was like, Where do I block all of this? You know?” - Charlotte

Professional and spatial freedom were mentioned frequently and hence confirm previous research (Reichenberger, 2017). Another type of freedom that was mentioned frequently is financial freedom. Financial freedom goes hand in hand with “making the most of one’s money”, as it allows digital nomads to be less restricted in terms of making financial decisions regarding things such as accommodation and food.

5.2 Understanding the consumer behavior of digital nomads

5.2.1 The value dimension of a destination choice

The consumption value theory can help us group the previously mentioned themes in order to get a better understanding of digital nomads’ behavior (Gatersleben et al., 2014). Additionally, they can help us to understand the value's relevance in the decision-making

process. Thereby, it is important to mention that some of the themes can be categorized into several values as visible in Figure 4.

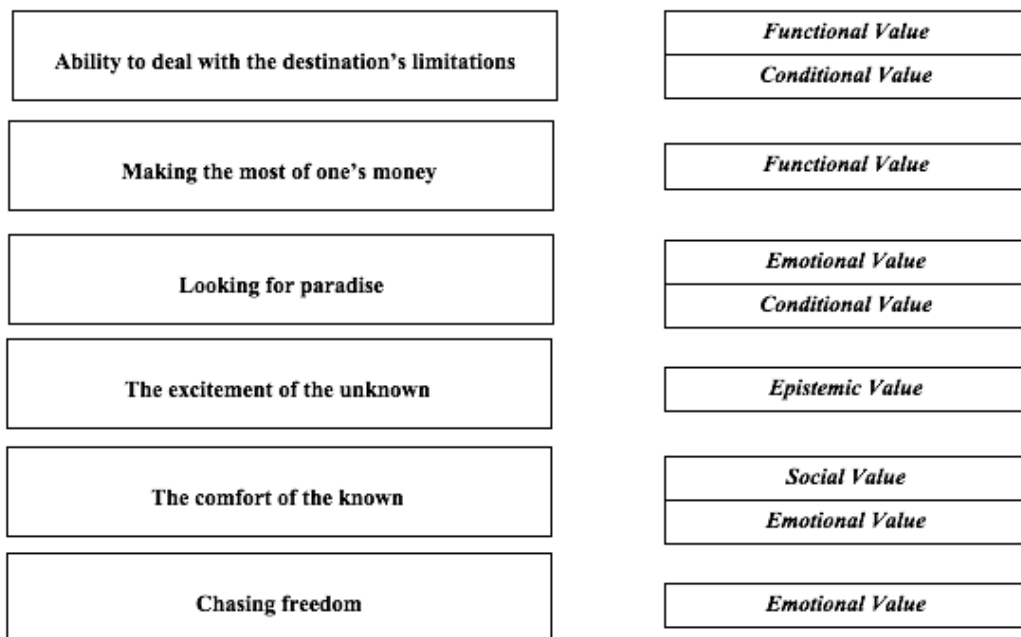


Figure 4: Themes categorized into consumption values (Authors, 2022)

One of the most comprehensive values is conditional value. Conditional value is based on a specific set of circumstances that could influence the decision-maker (Sheth et al., 1991). Based on our findings, conditional value has been identified within the theme of the *ability to deal with the limitations of the destination* in a form of visa and COVID-19 regulations. Moreover, due to the complexity of the *looking for paradise* theme, certain factors from that theme such as natural attractions and climate have been considered part of this value. Based on our findings, we can argue that conditional value is relevant to the majority of digital nomads, even though it is relevant in different ways. Living a digital nomad lifestyle requires a certain ability to adapt to new or changing situations, thus conditional value has a greater impact on digital nomads than on tourists. COVID-19 is a great example as it highly influenced the possibilities of available destinations for the digital nomads. However, it is also important to highlight that COVID-19 and visas belong to limitations due to bureaucratic issues, meaning pre-set circumstances. Natural attractions and climate, on the other hand, are more related to the individual preferences of digital nomads. Altogether, we can conclude that while conditional value plays a significant role in the destination choice, it is not the primary reason digital nomads choose a certain destination.

Emotional values are based on evoking feelings or affective states (Sheth et al., 1991). Different destinations have the capacity to arouse different feelings, which can be considered highly individualistic. Based on our findings, emotional value appeared in three themes, *looking for paradise*, the *comfort of the known*, and *chasing freedom*. In the case of the *looking for paradise*, we highlighted how different natural attractions could evoke certain feelings such as peace or calmness. The *comfort of the known* theme describes the sense of belonging. However, the form of belonging could differ from feeling attached to the digital nomad community, thus seeking those destinations when the digital nomad could experience the community of like-minded people or pursue the feeling of comfort in the company of friends or family. The third theme, *chasing freedom*, perfectly represents the importance of emotional value in the case of digital nomads as it describes its complexity and different layers. Emotional value is quite significant and in many cases quite hard to identify because people are usually not conscious of it. The most important characteristic of emotional value is the fact that it is always individualistic just like feelings and emotions. Thus, we could identify that, even though the emotional value is highly significant for each digital nomad and significantly influences the destination choice, it is only relevant at the individual level, hence not to the level of our whole digital nomad population.

Another value related to feelings and emotions is the epistemic value. It is based on feelings of curiosity, novelty, and desire for learning (Sheth et al., 1991). From our themes, the *excitement of the unknown* has been identified as epistemic value as it represents a seeking for novelty in a form of meeting new people, discovering new cultures, and learning new languages. Epistemic value and its influence on destination choice have often been neglected in previous research about digital nomads. However, there is a group of digital nomads who identify themselves as a part of the local community in which they have the chance to learn and develop. Our findings showed that epistemic value is significant for the specific type of digital nomads who identify themselves as digital nomads to a lesser extent. Thus, epistemic value plays an important role only in their destination choice, but not in the case of our whole population.

In the case of tourism, social value is connected to social interaction at the destination and the social groups that the destination represents (Sheth et al., 1991). Based on our themes, the *comfort of the known* can be connected to social value. More specifically, our finding

suggests that the digital nomads who identify themselves strongly with the digital nomad community have the tendency to choose a destination that matches their aspiration to belong to that social group. Thus, as in the case of epistemic value, we might conclude that social value also plays a significant role in the destination choice, however, just in the case of a specific type of digital nomads.

As mentioned previously, functional value is based on the perceived utility of a product (Sheth et al., 1991). One of the functional value dimensions is to be *able to make most of one's money*. The other value dimension is the *ability to deal with the limitations of the destination*. Functional value is the only value dimension that has been mentioned by all digital nomads. They were most commonly mentioned in regards to having good infrastructure and being able to afford a good lifestyle. Interestingly, both of those factors depend on each other, because digital nomads need to have a good infrastructure in order to make money, which then again allows them to afford a good lifestyle. Hence, functional aspects have the greatest influence on digital nomads' decision-making as they represent a requirement for the digital nomad lifestyle. Based on our findings, digital nomads would sacrifice other values in order to get more functional value.

5.2.2 The decision-making process

As mentioned previously, destination choice is a very complex process, which is influenced by many different internal and external factors. The previously identified values can help us to get a better understanding of how digital nomads choose a destination and what their process looks like. Similar to tourists, digital nomads follow a funnel-like procedure. Even though there is a large number of possible destinations, digital nomads are only aware of a limited number of destinations (Karl et al., 2015). Based on our interviews, those are the main destinations they have been to before, destinations where family, friends, or a partner are located at or destinations they have read about in traditional or social media. Throughout the decision-making process, digital nomads evaluate their destination as either inert or inept (Karl et al., 2015). Based on our findings, destinations may be considered inept for numerous reasons. Those reasons, however, are highly individualistic and affected by different types of values. Some of the most common reasons mentioned in the interviews, however, were climate conditions, and a lack of safety or distance from family. Destinations that are neither considered inert nor inept represent the relevant set. At this stage, digital nomads start

gathering more information about their destination (Woodside and Lyonski, 1989). Values such as emotional, social, or epistemic highly influence this phase and affect what kind of information the given person is looking into. However, based on our findings, digital nomads tend to research the cost of living and the quality of the infrastructure as necessary criteria, hence the final decision is based on the functional values of a destination.

6. Discussion

In the previous chapter, the thematic analysis of the empirical data has been presented. In this chapter, we bring together our findings and answer our research question while acknowledging the limitations of this study. Additionally, the societal and practical implications of the study and suggestions for future research have been represented.

6.1 Concluding discussion

In a broader sense, this study aimed to understand the consumer behavior of digital nomads from a tourism point of view, as this angle is lacking in academic research about digital nomads. To accomplish this, consumer behavior theory, including theories and concepts such as the consumption value and choice-set theories have been used in order to be able to answer our research question of *how digital nomads choose their final destination*. This study also contributes to the interdisciplinary field of tourism by understanding digital nomads' consumer behavior.

To be able to answer our research question, our study has been broken into three parts. In the first phase, we identified themes through a thematic analysis. These themes were then connected and categorized based on the previous literature about digital nomads' characteristics. Each theme summarizes the digital nomads' most important factors of a destination. Through those themes, factors such as infrastructure, especially wifi, entry requirements, cost of living, quality of service, climate, natural attractions, and the sense of belonging were the most frequently occurring, thus the most significant ones. Additionally, factors related to feelings such as novelty, excitement, freedom, peace, calmness, and the urge to learn new things were other factors that were frequently represented. Finally, these themes and factors were understood with the help of consumption value theory, in order to simplify the decision-making process.

In the second phase, we could understand the consumption values in relevance to the previous themes. We found out that digital nomads vary greatly in terms of preferences and individualistic motives. However, certain segments could be identified with the help of the values. Those who preferred to meet local people and were curious about the local culture, for example, were driven by epistemic values and tended to not identify themselves as digital

nomads. Those groups who strongly identified themselves with the digital nomad community, on the other hand, were driven by a sense of belonging and made their decision based on their social and emotional values. Besides their different preferences, our findings showed that functional value, specifically infrastructure and the cost of living were the most significant factors and were mentioned by all of our respondents.

Lastly, we used the decision-making process to answer our research question, focusing on the final stage of the process. Based on our findings, the process of digital nomads' destination choice is the same as the one of tourists. The difference lies within the influencing factors. This finding provides a useful way to conclude our research. Conditional, emotional, epistemic, and social values play significant roles in different stages of the decision-making process. However, this is based on individualistic preferences and decisions. Due to the fact that we were focused on the final choice of digital nomads, we have not elaborated deeply on the earlier sets and their relevant consumption value influences, as it was outside of the scope of this research. Based on our findings, however, we could conclude that digital nomads make their final choices based on functional values as this was the shared pattern in our sample. For the social relevance of the study, we found out digital nomads could be grouped into different segments. Therefore, a deeper understanding of their characteristics from a tourism point of view would be necessary. However, based on our findings we propose certain societal and practical implications for the tourism industry which will be presented in the next subchapter.

6.2 Societal and practical implications

For our society, this study could contribute to a better understanding of digital nomadism and highlight the most important differences between tourists and digital nomads in the context of destination choice. Even though digital nomads have been around for more than two decades, there is still a general confusion about this phenomenon. This study provides some clarification by examining their values.

Moreover, COVID-19 has opened the doors for digital nomadism. Due to the normalization of remote work and the resulting increase of remote job positions across the entire world, this trend is predicted to grow intensively throughout the following years. Digital nomads are profitable for destinations not only because they stay at destinations longer than typical

tourists, but also because their occupations are usually associated with high income, meaning they help boost the local economy without taking jobs from it.

Based on our findings, there are many factors that influence the destination choice of digital nomads. In this study, we categorized those different factors into consumption values, which can serve as a way of segmenting and targeting different types of digital nomads. While many of those factors are contextual and can not be controlled, there are several ways for destination managers to increase a destination's attractiveness. Most of them are related to dealing with potential limitations that digital nomads may encounter. One of the most important aspects is to provide good infrastructure, specifically a strong and stable internet connection, as this is a requirement for digital nomads to earn money and finance their lifestyle. Therefore, destinations can establish co-working and co-living spaces in order to help establish digital nomads' networks and find like-minded people.

Another way to increase a destination's attractiveness is to implement digital nomad visas. While tourist visas are often limited to a period of three months, digital nomad visas allow digital nomads to stay and work in places for longer than traditional tourists. Compared to tourist visas, those visas usually last for at least one year and often even more. Since digital nomads tend to make spontaneous decisions, it is also important to ensure an efficient application process. Besides making the process easier, implementing digital nomad visas can also help strengthen the image of a destination as a “digital nomad” location.

While digital nomads are profitable for destinations, it is important to also consider problems that can arise due to digital nomadism. The example of Costa Rica and its increasing rent prices represents one of the problems that can arise through the steady increase of digital nomads. Therefore, it is important to implement certain regulations in order to not hurt local communities.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study comes with certain limitations. Due to the nature of qualitative research, the results cannot be generalized further than our subject. Due to the fact that our sample was based on the definition of digital nomads as “location-independent remote workers who are simultaneously engaged in extensive leisure travel with no break from work” (Chevtaeva and

Denizci-Guillet, 2021, p. 3), the transferability of our study is limited. The definition of digital nomads is quite ambiguous based on the academic literature, especially in the tourism field. Thus, future research could attempt to base their sample on different factors. As the COVID-19 pandemic was still relevant during our data collection, similar research could be repeated in the distant future when COVID-19 is not an influencing factor anymore. Moreover, most of our participants come from Western countries, thus studies based on different factors such as age, nationality, or gender could shed light on different demographic dimensions of digital nomads.

Even though we used a purposive sampling technique, this study cannot be completely replicated as it is impossible to “freeze” a social setting or to replicate the exact circumstances under which the study was conducted. Especially, the pandemic had a large influence on our findings as it caused a shift in the traditional workplace.

A quantitative approach could be also relevant for future research to investigate the correlations in a more clear manner, while also giving the possibility to examine not only the final stage but the whole decision-making process and the influencing variables in each stage, thus helping to segment digital nomads more clearly.

Lastly, the pandemic has changed the traditional work environment, which means it might open doors to new types of remote work and new types of digital nomads, which could be of interest for future studies.

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8. Appendixes

8.1 Appendix 1: Interview guide

Step 1: Demographic questions

Tell me about yourself (name, age, nationality, occupancy, why you decided to become a digital nomad, how long have you been a digital nomad)

Step 2: General travel experience

What do you like about traveling?

How do you plan your trip?

How long does your trip usually last?

Step 3: Three stages of the decision-making process

Which destination did you visit last time?

Why did you choose that particular destination?

What do you like about this destination?

Describe your experiences in this destination, both positive and negative.

Is there anything that really surprised you at that destination?

Did you consider any other destination(s) before?

Why did you choose X instead of Y?

Do you still consider Y as a potential destination?

What are your main criteria when you are selecting a destination?

Can you tell me about your next trip?

Which destination(s) are you considering?

Why are you considering these destinations?

What is the most important aspect when choosing a destination?

8.2 Appendix 2: Consent form

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the study investigating digital nomads' destination choice. The study aims to understand the destination selection process of digital nomads.

The study forms part of the compulsory program curriculum and is supervised by one of the assigned supervisors of the department of Service Management at Lund University, who will ensure that students adhere to all the necessary rules. The resulting thesis is assessed and graded by an examiner at the end of the course.

During the course of the student working on the study, your personal data are protected and will not be disclosed to unauthorized persons. We will store recordings and other details in a safeguarded manner. Any audio collected in the first phase will be anonymized, coded, and transcribed as text. This will be done immediately upon transmission in order to disable any potential for detecting that you have participated. When the study is completed and the thesis has passed the assessment, we will destroy the original data that has been collected.

The results of the study will be published in the thesis in a manner that will not reveal the participant's identity.

In case of any questions, feel free to contact us through the following contact details.

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Name:

Gender:

Age:

Occupation:

Time:

Date:

By ticking these boxes I agree that*

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time
2. I am aware that the interview will be recorded and transcribed
3. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used in the thesis
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation
5. I consent to recording the interview only for academic purposes and analyzed anonymously