The digital nomad identity: Insights about the future of work(ers) from YouTube vlogs

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ABSTRACT

Digital nomads are individuals who conduct their work online, thus allowing them flexibility in terms of location of work. They present a case of workers who are mostly self-employed and, therefore, do not have an employer nor a specific occupation that can be identified with them. The data corpus is composed of 209 videos from 11 different YouTube channels which are all managed by self-identified digital nomads. The analysis found that by utilizing the freedom in terms of what information can be shared and how these can be presented on YouTube, self-identified digital nomads were able to assert multiple identities that they attach to themselves. They define digital nomadism by putting a heavy emphasis on doing work online, as opposed to travelling, as its more salient component. They highlight the positive aspects of digital nomadism, positioning themselves as individuals who succeeded to attain their individual goals. At the same time, they balance the outstanding qualities by sharing the challenges and struggles they encounter. They also address their relative advantage in relation to their countries of origin. More than a phenomenon that exhibits a convergence of work and travel, the identities constructed by digital nomads allow us to consider digital nomadism as a manifestation of the modern worker's aspirations and a possible re-imagination of inequalities in terms of work.

Keywords: *identity, digital nomadism, vlogs, YouTube*

Introduction

Sociologists have always been interested in the topic of work. At the dawn of the 19th century, concerns regarding work took center-stage as it drove people away from their families and their homes, and into dedicated factories where large machineries were housed. Because of work, social life became separated into clearly defined temporal and spatial compartments.

A phenomenon that has been increasingly apparent in recent years is the possibility of working flexible hours, and from whichever point on the globe (Morgan, 2013). Jobseekers started to look for more than just security when searching for employment; they also considered opportunities for development and personal growth ("The Evolution of Work and Workforce," 2018). More than getting things done, work also became a source of meaning.

There is a recent rise in the number of people calling themselves "digital nomads." The term first appeared in Makimoto and Manners' 1997 book titled *Digital Nomadism*. In this book, they projected that improvements made on digital technologies, especially in terms of portability, signaled the start of the "new nomadic age" (Richards, 2015, p.342). The present study is concerned with the identity constructed among those who call themselves digital nomads. While digital nomadism exhibits the convergence of leisure (specifically, travel) and work, the phenomenon here is treated as an emerging work arrangement where a new work identity is constructed. Starting from this position, the study posits the enduring relevance of work, especially in terms of an individual's construction of identity.

Travel

Travel is an undeniably important aspect of digital nomadism. However, it is also where disagreements in defining the phenomenon are often observed. Reichenberger (2018) proposed four levels of classification of digital nomads in terms of the extent to which they exploit location mobility.

Table 1. Digital nomad classification based on mobility (Reichenberger, 2018, p. 371)

Level	Description
0	individuals who achieve location independence by conducting their work in an online environment = (basic requirement)
1	(basic requirement) + transferring independence to mobility by not consistently working in one designated personal office space
2	(basic requirement) + using location independence to simultaneously work and travel
3	(basic requirement + level 2) + individuals who have no permanent residence

She found that constant movement, which common understanding equates to the word *travel*, is not a "necessary requirement" but a possible option to utilize and maximize location mobility afforded by conducting work online. In this light, she suggested that there are Level 0 digital nomads. These individuals have the option to be mobile due to the online nature of their work, but do not make use of that mobility.

Other researchers suggested that to be considered a digital nomad, one does not necessarily have to be dedicated to travel; rather, being always "plugged" to the Internet is the more important feature of this lifestyle (Kuzheleva-Sagan & Nosova, 2014). Still others agreed that digital technologies are instrumental in the development of the lifestyle but they were vague in terms of how much travel a digital nomad engages in (Dal Fiore, Mokhtarian, Salomon, & Singer, 2014; Müller, 2016; Nash, Jarrahi, Sutherland, & Phillips, 2018).

Level 1 digital nomads, on the other hand, utilize this mobile option to be able to work from places other than a designated office. Mobility does not automatically refer to movement outside of one's city or country. In her study, Reichenberger (2018) admitted to not having participants who could be classified under these first two levels. However, she noted that levels 0 and 1 digital nomads might not consider themselves one because of the lack of extensive travel in their lifestyle.

Level 2 digital nomads travel occasionally and intermittently while still maintaining a home base. This means that, to an extent, mobility is utilized in the popular sense as it relates to the phenomenon of digital nomadism. The final category of digital nomads "maximize" mobility by abandoning completely the idea of a home base. This aligns with studies which explicitly defined travel as referring to overseas travel (Schlagwein, 2018a), as well as those which also allowed for domestic mobility (Jacoby & Holland, 2019; Reichenberger, 2018).

Work

Spreitzer, Cameron, and Garrett (2017) suggested using the term *alternative work arrangements* instead of *standard work* which refers to work that is "done full-time, would continue indefinitely, and was performed at the employer's place of business under the employer's direction" (Kalleberg, 2000, p.341). The use of the term aims to capture situations of work

> from high-skill freelancers who chose not to be employed…, to low-wage service workers who are on-call for unpredictable work hours and barely able to make a living, to workers with long-term employment contracts

but who work where they want when they want (Spreitzer
et al., 2017, p. 474).

They identified "three dimensions of flexibility" that can be used to classify alternative work arrangements that now exist: 1) flexibility in employment relationship; 2) flexibility in the schedule of work; and 3) flexibility about where work is accomplished.

Employment relationship refers to the parties involved in the conduct of work. In standard work arrangements, these are the employer and employee. In alternative work arrangements, this relationship may be relaxed and/ or may involve more than two parties. Part-time work, for instance, still involves an employer and an employee. However, the responsibilities of workers under this arrangement may be less structured, usually in terms of negotiating schedule, compared with full-time workers. Agency work, on the other hand, involves three parties: the worker, the agency, and the client organization.

Work schedule refers to when and for how long work is to be done. In most of the categories identified by Spreitzer et al. (2017), only one of these two elements are enjoyed by workers. Some standard, and part-time, workers still must put in a specified number of hours, thus only having relative control over when work is to be done, but not for how long. On-call workers, meanwhile, do not have control over when work is done since they are called on-demand.

Finally, flexibility in terms of where work is accomplished refers to working "away from the employer or client" (p.482). However, like flexibility in work schedule, working off-site does not necessarily mean working where one wants to work.

Digital Nomadism: Travel and Work?

Flexibility in terms of location, i.e., where work is conducted, may be an important intersection of Reichenberger's (2018) identification of digital nomads and Spreitzer's (2017) alternative work arrangements. Table 2 attempts to integrate the two frameworks.

All levels of digital nomad classification must have flexibility in work location since, as Reichenberger (2018) asserted, mobility is an element of digital nomadism, although it is not necessarily exploited.

Spreitzer et al. (2017) identified three alternative work arrangements with flexibility in terms of location: standard workers with flexible location; direct contracting; and platform-mediated contracting. Level 0 digital nomads, such as telecommuters and consultants who travel (Spreitzer et al., 2017), may be categorized under standard workers with flexible location.

While telecommuters do their work exclusively online, they still must render a specific number of hours. This means that while they conduct their work in a space of their choosing, other dimensions of flexibility such as schedule and employment relationships may not be available to them.

Levels 1, 2, and 3 digital nomads, on the other hand, may be classified as direct contractors or platform-mediated contractors. Both alternative work categories include individuals who are working for themselves and are getting their own clients. The only difference lies in where they get their clients from. Platform-mediated contractors (e.g., gig workers) get their clients online, while direct contractors may be introduced to their clients in person through networks (e.g., freelancers/independent contractors and day laborers).

According to Spreitzer et al. (2017), choosing to have an alternative work arrangement is limited to high-skilled workers who value "maximum control over their schedule and content of their work" (p.485). Digital nomads are an example of this. The main feature of their lifestyle is the flexibility in work allowed by high-technology developments, which only require people to have stable Internet connection, and the rest of the details of how they get their work done —where they are, what they wear, how they do it—are up to them (Müller, 2016; Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018).

Choice is further highlighted in relation to the duration and location of travels in that these aspects are self-determined (Müller, 2016). Unlike other workers (e.g., pilot assigned to an overseas flight, or an engineer sent on a business trip) whose location and duration of travel is determined by his/her employment, digital nomads choose where to conduct their work and how long to stay. Compared with others who categorically have the same elements of flexibilities available to them, digital nomads have a clear advantage in terms of having a say about the character of these flexibilities.

Methodology

Content analysis was done on a sample of vlogs about digital nomadism. Content analysis is an established methodology in the social sciences that describes the content of communication traditionally used in the fields of advertising, communications, and journalism (Herring, 2010). It is also the most commonly used method of analysis in studies using content gathered from social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Snelson, 2016).

Billions of videos, which translate to millions of hours in watch time, are hosted by YouTube. Among the most popular videos on YouTube today are vlogs—a video format where people share "their thoughts, advice, expertise,

Table 2. Digital nomad classification based on mobility, and alternative work based on dimensions of flexibility

Alternative Work Category	Three Dimensions of Flexibility (Spreitzer, Cameron & Garrett, 2017)			Digital Nomad Classification Based on Mobility (Reichenberger, 2018)
	Employment Relations	Work Schedule	Work Location	Level
Standard Worker with Flexible Location	Limited Flexibility	Limited Flexibility	Flexible	0
Direct Contractor	Flexible	Limited Flexibility	Flexible	1, 2, 3
Platform-Mediated Contractor	Flexible	Limited Flexibility	Flexible	1, 2, 3

comedy, day-to-day life, and many other types of content in video form" ("How Vloggers on YouTube are Changing Influencer Marketing," 2018). As content-creators choose what information to share, they are simultaneously creating a story about themselves that they want to communicate to their audience. Looking into the vlogs to better understand digital nomadism takes advantage of the freedom YouTube has granted content creators, giving them no restrictions in what and how they want to share and talk about their thoughts on a particular topic such as their experience living life as digital nomads.

To explore what identities are constructed by digital nomads about digital nomadism through vlogs, the content of 209 videos from 11 different YouTube channels were analyzed. These were all managed by self-identified digital nomads. The shortest video was 40 seconds long while the longest ran for 21 minutes and 24 seconds (21:24). The overall average length of videos was nine (9) minutes and 48 seconds (00:09:48). Table 3 shows the breakdown of the number of videos per channel, as well as the total video length for each:

Most of the channels that are part of this study have playlists whose titles included the terms *travel* and/or *digital nomad/ism*. The videos, and relevant information about them, in each of those playlists were recorded and transcribed.

Table 3. Total number of videos analyzed per channel.

Pseudonym	Sex	Country of origin	No. of Videos Analyzed	Total Video Length (hh:mm:ss)
Carl	M	Australia	34	05:31:03
Stef	F	Australia	20	02:52:32
Keith	M	USA	5	00:51:14
Katy	F	USA	4	00:19:23
John	M	England	14	02:10:19
Ellie	F	England	5	00:58:56
Lea	F	England	32	04:46:55
Jem	F	England	21	04:32:51
Becky	F	Canada	7	00:51:16
Jack and Rose	M and F	New Zealand	20	03:34:00
Bryan	M	the Netherlands	47	07:42:10

Video Elements

Analysis was done not only on the video transcripts but also on other video elements such as voice-over, text on video, background music, and picture and video snippets. The presence or absence of these elements were noted in each of the videos, which helped in identifying the video formats used to present digital nomadism online. Four more information were noted: who are in the video, where it was shot, when it shot, and what the video is about.

Texts

Texts in this study refer to textual data gathered, i.e., video transcripts, video titles, and other textual data collected from each of the digital nomad vlogger's channel information. The "About" tab of each channel was also visited to account for owner information. As the name suggests, this contains information about the owner of the channel. The page is formatted such that the information available are only the ones the owner of the channel is willing to disclose, thus varying from one channel to another. This gave us a glimpse of the kind of identity the channel owners wished to present and assume on the platform, as well as the kinds of content that could be expected from them.

Transcripts were gathered by making use of a YouTube function that provides a timestamped transcript of a video. A separate Word document was created for every YouTube channel included in the study. Because

these transcripts were automatically generated by Google, some words were missed during the transcription. They were corrected by re-watching the videos side-by-side with their respective transcripts and checking for accuracy. The process also allowed the researcher to insert the proper punctuation marks since most automatically generated transcripts were unpunctuated.

Data Analysis

The collected videos were subjected to qualitative content analysis. Specifically, the present inquiry used both manifest and latent content analyses (Bengtsson, 2016) in order to provide an understanding of the phenomenon of digital nomadism in general, and of the presentation of the digital nomad identity on YouTube in particular. Manifest content analysis focuses on description, while latent content analysis digs into what something said/written means (Bengtsson, 2016). With this said, both can still be done in the same study since one extends the inquiry of the other.

Bengtsson (2016) identified and highlighted four stages of doing content analysis. These stages are: 1) decontextualization; 2) recontextualization; 3) categorization; and 4) compilation. Decontextualization includes the process of coding which can be inductive or deductive. This is especially appropriate for exploratory and descriptive research designs (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The main goal of coding is to reduce the size of data (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). It is therefore necessary, as an initial step, to condense statements into meaning units. Meaning units must retain the essence of the statement while making use of the least number of words possible (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Guided by the study's objectives, excerpts from full transcripts were lifted and compiled in an Excel file.

Specifically, the researcher began by identifying meaning units from one channel and then labelling them with codes. Working categories were used to label the meaning units. As more and more channels underwent decontextualization, the codes changed until the final channel was analyzed. This process is recognized in the literature as "open coding" (Bengtsson, 2016).

The second stage, recontextualization, involves juxtaposing the coding list against the transcript, checking whether all relevant statements have correctly been accounted for. Decontextualization and recontextualization are not mutually exclusive steps, i.e., it is not clear where one ends and the other one begins. After each of the channels' video transcript underwent decontextualization, the working codes that emerged were compared with those that were previously generated. The iterative process of labelling

meaning units with codes as new statements were included in the corpus called for the overlap between these two steps.

For the third stage, the codes were organized into categories and themes. Categories comprise codes which deal with the same topic or issue and answer the questions who, what, when, and where. Categories refer to the manifest content of data. Themes, on the other hand, refer to the underlying meaning or the latent content, and answer the questions why, how, in what way, and by what means (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Formulating categories and themes involves making use of the least number of words possible which can easily communicate to the readers the kind of data present, while at the same time, making sure that the essence is not lost. Finally, the process of compiling the categories refers to the presentation of data.

Research Ethics

YouTube content creators can control what and how much information could be shared on the platform. This allows them to be more personal with their content (Pereira, Quinn, & Morales, 2016). However, concerns regarding accessing these types of materials are often raised, particularly about getting consent for online content to be used in research.

Eysenbach and Till (2001) proposed determining first whether something is public or private before deciding whether consent is required. For private material such as personal correspondence through e-mail or chat rooms where registration is required before joining the chat, informed consent is indispensable (Madge, 2007). However, for publicly accessible content, it may not be necessary (Association of Internet Research, 2002; Madge, 2007). As with behavior in public spaces that can usually be observed without requiring consent, online public behavior can also be considered as not necessitating informed consent from participants (Convery & Cox, 2012).

The videos used for the study are all publicly available. These videos were accessed without having to sign in using an existing YouTube account, i.e., they were all accessible even when using an incognito browser to gather videos for this study. Additionally, Fair Use considerations suggest that no violation is committed, and that the channel owners incur no potential harm. The videos were accessed for research purposes and there was no intention to re-publish them online. Moreover, the final product for which the videos were gathered is a written manuscript, so the profitability of the original videos are not affected.

Nevertheless, the study used pseudonyms to refer to the owners of the channels to safeguard their identity.

Characteristics of Digital Nomads on YouTube

Earlier studies found that only a third of digital nomads are female (Bolden-Barrett, 2018). While there are more females (8) than males (5) in the pool of channels that was used for the study, it must be noted that most of the female content creators were also traveling with their partners who were of the opposite sex (except for Becky).

Table 4. Demographics of content creators.

Pseudonym	Sex	Age (as of data gathering)[1]	Country of origin	Year started[2]	Current income sources
Carl	M	--	Australia	2016	Blogging Freelancing (Web development)
Stef	F	30	Australia	2014	Travel influencing Travel photography Online courses production Consulting
Keith	M	34	USA		Day trading Online course producing
Katy	F	26	USA	2015	Freelance photography and videography Remote social media management
John	M	--	England		Freelancing (Web development) Online courses production Podcast production Blogging
Ellie	F	28	England	2013	Freelance videography

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1   Data were gathered from videos and other linked accounts (e.g., blogs, Instagram page, or Twitter accounts).

2   Unless otherwise stated in the 'About' section, the year when the channels first went online was taken from the date of the first upload (of videos about digital nomadism). Year started was also referenced in their linked accounts.

Pseudonym	Sex	Age (as of data gathering)[1]	Country of origin	Year started[2]	Current income sources
Lea	F	--	England	2015	Fashion blogging Entrepreneur Freelance PR Life coaching Online courses production
Jem	F	--	England	2017	Copywriting Blogging Digital marketing
Becky	F	--	Canada	2016	Blogging
Jack and Rose	M & F	--	New Zealand	2017	Blogging (as a couple) E-commerce (Male) Freelance graphic designing (Female)
Bryan	M	31	The Netherlands	2013	Entrepreneur Blogging Business coaching and consulting

In terms of age, the literature found that younger people tend to be more nomadic than their older counterparts (Bolden-Barrett, 2018; Richards, 2015; Schlagwein, 2018b). On average, they range from ages 25-28 (Richards, 2015). This statement is better qualified to mean that digital nomads tend to *start* assuming digital nomadism between these ages. The present data confirmed the same trend. If one refers to the year when they started their digital nomad journey, one finds that they went nomadic in their early to mid- 20s.

One common thing among these digital nomads is that all of them were "strong passport" holders. A country's passport is strong if it can enter many countries visa-free. This is important in terms of the countries which they easily had access to (Thompson, 2019). This echoes the observation made in the study of Schlagwein (2018a) which stated that digital nomads are "mostly Western professionals."

In terms of work, earlier studies on the topic found that most digital nomads work in the field of information and communications technologies (ICT), holding careers in programming, web development and design, blogging, graphic design, digital marketing, and creating contents for podcasts and video streaming sites such as YouTube (Nash et al., 2018;

Reichenberger, 2018; "Who are the 'digital nomads'?," 2018). Similarly, the digital nomads who are part of this study all were engaged in ICT-based work.

Structure of Digital Nomad Vlogs

Similar to the freedom in the kind and range of information that one can share on the site, YouTube also imposes no rules on how videos should look like once uploaded to the platform. This results in a variety of presentation formats. The study identified five video format types of digital nomad vlogs: 1) Sit-down videos; 2) tour videos; 3) interview videos; 4) montage; and 5) day/week in the life videos.

Sit-down Format

Sit-down videos involve the content creator, by themselves, talking directly to the camera and discussing a topic. Usually, these videos are shot from one angle, in a single location, and there is relatively minimal editing besides texts and background music.

Q and A (Question and Answer) videos fall under this category. Prior to the shooting, questions are gathered from comments in videos previously made. Sometimes, content creators announce on other social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter that they will be doing this format, and from the comments on that announcement they gather the questions. Thus, the interviewers are practically absent. The interviewee—the vlogger— "facilitates" the interview by addressing the viewers while repeating the question asked and answering them. This kind of videos usually involves the content creators by themselves, or with their partners for company.

Tour Format

Tour videos include those where the content creator showcases a particular location, which is not necessarily a tourist area. In fact, most of the tour videos in the study's corpus were apartment tours and apartment hunting videos. Some tour videos also feature co-working spaces. John, one of the content creators, defined co-working spaces as

> an open plan office that anybody can come to; you get Internet access, there's lots of like computer chairs, tables, there's some like lounge around areas, it's like free tea, free coffee, fridge in there ... it's basically just like a big modern fancy office that you pay a monthly membership to and you can go and sit down in like the open-plan area.

While digital nomadism generally points to the convergence of work and leisure, the existence and rise of co-working spaces can be considered

a remnant of the traditional work arrangement, or the persistence of the practice of compartmentalizing work and life in mutually exclusive spheres and spaces. While people try to move away from the conventional, dedicated office spaces, the necessity to look for spaces where one can work remains (O'Brien, 2011).

Interview Format

Interview videos are straightforward–these are videos where the content creators interview an individual or group of individuals. Similar to sit-down videos, interview videos are usually shot in one place. The interviewer usually switches back and forth between the camera and the interviewee, creating the effect of facilitating the interview for an audience.

Montage Format

The montage are videos which show a collection of videos or pictures, while background music is playing. Other times, the content creator also does a voice-over narration or annotation.

Day/Week-in-the-Life

Finally, Day/Week-in-the-Life Format videos are those which take the audience through the content creator's day or week. These videos are usually heavily edited compared with other formats, making use of texts as transition devices signaling another day or another part of the day. These videos almost always include time lapses as well. In this format, the viewers see that much of a digital nomad's day is devoted to working with their laptops, either at home or in a co-working space.

Topics of Digital Nomad Vlogs

After reviewing each of the videos and summarizing the content to identify the topics they are talking about, five categories emerged: 1) transition; 2) lifestyle; 3) travel; 4) work; and 5) information. Table 5 provides a brief description of these categories, as well as the usual video format/s each of them take. For instance, day/week-in-the-life videos and apartment tours are identified under the "lifestyle" category since they showcase the living arrangements and everyday practices of digital nomads. Sit-down and interview videos, on the other hand, are mostly classified under "information" because of their general air of seriousness and informative nature.

Table 5. Video categories based on topic

Video Categories	Description	Video Formats
Transition	Tell stories about how narrators became digital nomads	sit-down montage

Lifestyle	Talk about topics like living arrangements, and everyday practices and routines	day/week-in-the-life sit-down tour
Travel	Feature spots/locations that digital nomads have visited	tour
Work	Focus on topics about online applications, software, and online and offline tools that help in the conduct of work	sit-down
Information	Share information about living the digital nomad lifestyle	sit-down interview

Note, however, that the category labels do not mean mutual exclusivity. For instance, while apartment tours and apartment-hunting videos are categorized under "lifestyle," this does not mean that they are not informational. Aside from showcasing the living arrangements of digital nomads, these videos also give the viewers other information such as areas where cheap accommodation can be found, the price range of accommodation options, and the like. Forty two percent of videos are lifestyle videos (88) and 30 percent are information videos (63). The remaining 28 percent is an aggregate of transition, travel, and work videos.

Table 6. Number of videos per channel and per category

	Total videos	Transi-tion	Lifestyle	Travel	Work	Informa-tion
Carl	34	1	24	5	0	4
Stef	20	1	8	1	1	9
Keith	5	0	3	0	2	0
Katy	4	1	0	1	0	2
John	14	1	2	0	1	10
Ellie	5	0	3	0	0	2
Lea	32	2	8	1	4	17
Jem	21	3	11	0	3	4
Becky	7	0	6	1	0	0
Jack and Rose	20	1	9	0	0	10
Bryan	47	4	14	3	21	5
TOTAL	209	14	88	12	32	63

Digital Nomadism: What it is and What it is not

The definition of digital nomadism is similar among the videos that were examined for this study. In general, their definitions are aligned with the literature in terms of it being a kind of emerging work arrangement where individuals can earn an income from anywhere in the world with the help of advanced technologies (Dal Fiore et al., 2014; Jacoby & Holland, 2019; Kuzheleva-Sagan & Nosova, 2014; Müller, 2016; Nash et al., 2018; Reichenberger, 2018; Schlagwein, 2018b, 2018a).

Table 7. Self-referential definition of digital nomadism on YouTube

	Digital Nomad Definition
Stef	I'm homeless and travel full time (a.k.a. live out of a backpack), I have strongly embraced the remote revolution
Ellie	I spend pretty much a good, decent year as … a fully-fledged digital nomad, with no base working online
Keith	As a digital nomad day trader and so-called finance guru I am able to work from anywhere in the world and live a life most only dream of.
Becky	I'm currently traveling the world as a digital nomad. I'm trying new things—especially ones that push myself out of my comfort zone and/or are unique to the area—and documenting my adventures on YouTube.
Carl	… So this week's vlog … just goes to show you that you can work a full-time job remotely and live a pretty normal life in a developing country like Indonesia.

These definitions of digital nomadism provided by digital nomads in this study echo the assertions made by earlier studies that working remotely does not necessarily entailing foreign travel (Jacoby & Holland, 2019; Kuzheleva-Sagan & Nosova, 2014).

> To become a digital nomad, you need two things: the first is an online job or work that you can do remotely, some way of making money online; the second thing is the nomadic side and that's just having the ability to move around, not being tied down to any one location. (Jem)

It should be emphasized that what was highlighted in these videos was the ability to travel and not the actual exploitation of this ability. Additionally, drawing from the dimensions of flexibility proposed by Spreitzer et al. (2017), we found that digital nomads enjoyed all three— flexibilities in employment relationship, work schedule, and location of work—though we still found no uniform measure of the extent. And

because digital nomadism has been around for only several years, we found some vlogs addressing misconceptions. They were especially critical about likening digital nomadism to a vacation.

Table 8. What a digital nomad is not according to digital nomads on YouTube

	Digital Nomad Definition
Katy	... being a digital nomad is not an escape or a vacation
Lea	... being a nomad Isn't the same as being a traveler. ... people just generally don't understand what you're doing. People think you have no money and you're living in Thailand because you can't afford to live in England. Or they think that you're just on holiday or traveling and you're not working 12 hours a day running a business.
Jem	A digital nomad is not a job. It's just a term for somebody who does their job online.
Keith	... I don't know if I have ever been happier in my life! The fact [is] that this is not a vacation.

While these statements may be dissociating digital nomads from other kinds of travelers (Müller, 2016; Richards, 2015), they may also be understood as doing so for completely different reasons. Whereas the focus in extant literature is on the aspect of travel itself, i.e., being more authentic and connecting with locals, these statements that were found in the study have a lot more to do with work. Digital nomads on YouTube, more than trying to distinguish themselves from other kinds of travelers and justifying their travel practices, stress the work aspect of digital nomadism.

The Presentation of the Digital Nomad Self on YouTube

Digital nomadism is treated in this study as a kind of emerging work arrangement facilitated by advancements in technologies. This work arrangement allows for several flexibilities including employment relations, schedule, and location (Spreitzer et al., 2017). These changes prompt a rethinking of aspects of work and the worker.

Walsh and Gordon (2008) suggested that work identity is composed of organizational and occupational identities. Standard work arrangements have provided workers of the industrial capital era a firm grounding of their identity. That is, they can easily identify themselves with their employer-organization and their specific occupation (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Following the tenets of social identity theory, they proposed that membership in organizations and occupational groups is one source from which individuals can draw when constructing their own self-concept.

On the other hand, the digital nomad phenomenon presents a case of workers who are mostly self-employed and so do not have an employer.

As such, constructing a work identity can no longer be attached to one's organization. In that case, Walsh and Gordon (2008) asserted that occupations will be the basis of an individual's work identity. However, tying working identity with a specific occupation may also be out of the picture since digital nomads hold multiple jobs to earn an income.

How then is work identity constructed among digital nomads? The following sections discuss the identities constructed among self-identified digital nomads in their respective YouTube channels.

The Relatable Vlogger

The vlogger identity is a given because of the platform on which their performances were analyzed: YouTube. Meanwhile, relatability emerged as a theme among the vlogs analyzed due to their common feature of relating personal information to their audience. In terms of the videos' format, we found that next to sit-down videos (59%), the most used format among the videos in the study's data corpus was the day/week-in-the-life format (19%). Although an entire day, or an entire week, was shown in a matter of minutes, viewers could gain insight into life as a digital nomad. Moreover, when the digital nomads used the sit-down format for their videos, they talked very informally to their audience. In terms of language, they tended to use more friendly language than formal ones when addressing their viewers.

All these efforts were a manifestation of audience-pleasing self-presentation (Baumeister, 1982; Baumeister & Hutton, 1987). This suggests that people engage in self-presentation because they expect to gain rewards which are controlled by the audience. One of the implicit tasks of a vlogger is to gain more views and subscribers. At the same time, these efforts can also be considered as self-constructing self-presentations. As they consistently present themselves and their lives using these techniques, they are also creating an image that they want to convey to their audience.

In terms of the topics they chose to discuss and experiences they chose to include in their vlogs, relatability was accomplished by sharing traditionally backstage information such as failures and struggles. For example, unstable Internet or a lack of co-working space to work in were revealed to the viewers.

Impression management assumes that individuals make use of certain tactics in order to present an ideal version of themselves, putting on the front stage information that helps with establishing a successful version of the self and hiding in the backstage those which undermine it (Goffman, 1956). Being honest and having relatable experiences, however, gain viewers and subscribers (Glatt, 2017; Singh, 2017). Given that there is no limit to how many videos can be uploaded on each channel, sharing stories of struggles and

challenges may serve as a springboard to telling the success stories. Against the backdrop of the not-so-beautiful experiences, the digital nomads in this study painted idealized versions of their success. Since the vlogs were edited before they were uploaded, this kind of information was still limited to those that could support their relatable narrative. While digital nomadism was generally presented as an ideal lifestyle, fears, challenges, and issues met were also presented to the audience.

The Digital (Nomad) Worker

Self-construction is another motivation behind self-presentation aside from audience-pleasing (Baumeister, 1982; Baumeister & Hutton, 1987). This means that people engage in self-presentation strategies to impress upon an audience their ideal selves.

Consistent with the literature review about how much travel can be imputed to digital nomads, the digital nomads on YouTube, in defining digital nomadism, also did not have a consensus regarding the issue. However, they clearly agreed that while digital nomads do not need to exploit their mobility, it is necessary for mobility to be an option for them to be categorized as digital nomads (Jacoby & Holland, 2019; Kuzheleva-Sagan & Nosova, 2014; Reichenberger, 2018).

While this may count as an attempt by digital nomads to differentiate themselves from other types of travelers, it also serves to affirm the study's position that digital nomadism may be viewed in terms of work. The point is not so much to justify their travel practices but rather to assert the centrality of work in their conception of digital nomadism.

This assertion can also be gleaned from lifestyle videos that adopt the day/week-in-the-life format. They typically include footage of the digital nomads looking for spaces to work in, working on their laptops either at home or at a co-working space, and in some cases, getting frustrated over slow/lack of Internet connection. Documenting their days or weeks and showing them to their audience on YouTube involves the process of actively choosing which parts to include and which parts to omit. Since 24 hours or seven days must be condensed into around a nine-minute video, the choices made as to what gets published prove to be crucial in determining what kinds of identities are constructed by those who identify as digital nomads.

Analyzing the work videos further validates the notion of the centrality of work. Because they conducted their work exclusively online, among the videos included in this category are those talking about software and applications that facilitated the conduct of their work. Also included here are videos dedicated to talking about the gadgets they brought with them whenever they traveled.

Choice of location was also affected by conducting their work online. Because work was a priority, they did not choose a location based only on its affordability, but also on its connectivity. This reflects Richard's (2015) findings that the rising number of digital nomads has affected the criteria by which the attractiveness of a place is judged, having access to the Internet as one of the primary considerations. This is why Chiang Mai, Thailand is so popular among aspiring digital nomads. From the current study's data corpus, at least 53 videos (25%) out of 209 were shot in or discussed Chiang Mai. The city is said to be a digital nomad hot spot with several co-working spaces, lightning Internet and data speeds, lower cost of living, and the presence of a thriving community.

The Dream Chaser

The dream chaser identity emerged in relation to the idealization of digital nomadism. This is accomplished by highlighting the positive aspects of travel, of destination countries, of working online, and of working for one's self.

Digital nomads generally hold a positive attitude towards travel. They see travel as fun, and as something that fosters creativity and introduces novelty. In the context of this study, their attitude towards travel was mediated by prior travel experience. A look at their travel background (i.e., the travels that they did prior to becoming digital nomads) revealed that all the content creators had either lived abroad or started travelling when they were much younger. Whether or not their previous experience with traveling was extensive did not affect this positive attitude.

Seeking greater personal freedom and balance are the main reported reasons for choosing a digital nomad lifestyle (Reichenberger, 2018). Personal freedom has two components for digital nomads—professional freedom and spatial freedom. The first one pertains to "the motivation to select and structure work-related tasks in a self-imposed manne" (p. 371). Digital nomads usually characterize traditional work, or office work, as inhibiting, because it restricts the performance of leisure activities which they identify as an essential part of life.

Spatial freedom, on the other hand, elaborates on the concept of location mobility, which does not necessarily mean being able to travel frequently or to far locations. It is only when these two freedoms are available for the digital nomads to enjoy can they say that they have achieved holism or balance in their lives. Ultimately, control over these two aspects allows for more opportunities for self-development.

Digital nomadism is also made attractive by the possibility of exploring the world and experiencing new things sustainably. This means that digital

nomads do not have to sacrifice the ability to make money to travel and vice versa. This is an opportunity that the digital nomads in the study did not see being possible if they had continued working in their traditional jobs and living in their respective home countries. They remarked that while there were certain benefits to enjoy, they also admitted that the cost of living was high and maintaining that standard hindered them from pursuing other things. This goes hand-in hand with their perception that the destination countries allowed them to live a more comfortable and easier lifestyle without having to spend so much. Whether it was to support frequent travel or to fund or grow their businesses, the digital nomads made full utility of the money they saved from living in more affordable countries.

Digital nomads on YouTube paint an ideal picture of their lifestyle and, consequently, of them as individuals who dared to chase this ideal. They accomplish this by presenting their definition of digital nomadism and curating the related topics they discuss. Tying this with the identity of the relatable vlogger, the dream chaser identity gives the viewers a message that while digital nomadism is an ideal lifestyle, it is within reach as well. If the digital nomads were able to do it, then everybody can.

The Privileged Westerners

The characteristics of digital nomads on YouTube highlighted here make a case for their capacity to adopt a privileged lifestyle. Firstly, coming from "strong passport" countries gave the digital nomads who are part of this study more options in terms of countries they could go to.

Secondly, all of them already had money-making skills associated with digital nomads even before they became one. A look at their career backgrounds revealed that most of them were already engaged in digital work as early as their university years. They had also been exploring hobbies like photography. Those who did not engage in digital work in university or traditional jobs were already learning prior to becoming digital nomads. This supports the idea that any kind of occupation involves "rigorous socialization experiences." "[K]nowledgee, skills and abilities are not easily learned by just anyone and that they require a special learning experience and a special person to grasp them" (Trice, 1993, p.26). Thus, not everyone can do it–or at least, not as easily as the digital nomads in the study claim. Statements like "[e]verybody can do it" (John) reflect this perception of digital nomadism as having a low entry barrier. However, their personal experiences may prove otherwise.

They also made a point about how money is essential to the lifestyle by saying how much should be saved or recommending to at least know where income is going to come from before deciding to become a digital nomad. It

can be inferred, then, that digital nomadism involves financial risks which are not entirely dismissible.

One of the strategies employed by digital nomads to maximize their purchasing power is moving to a cheaper location. All of the digital nomads in the study came from Western countries and moved to cheaper Asian countries. This move can be maximized only by those whose currency exchanges for a lot more in destination countries in Asia. This strategy makes no sense for someone coming from a weak currency country. This comparison demonstrates the advantage held by the would-be digital nomad who has the capacity to choose their locations. Applying the three dimensions of flexibility proposed by Spreitzer et al. (2017), the study also found that flexibilities in terms of employment relations and schedule are also enjoyed by digital nomads on YouTube.

Finally, while their jobs do not need formal qualifying education or training, they need to at least possess the personal capacity to learn specific skills. And foremost of all, they need to own or have access to a computer. This seemingly taken-for-granted requirement of owning a laptop is what facilitates mobility, coupled with learning new skills, comprise the advantage enjoyed by those who assume the digital nomad lifestyle.

By sharing personal experiences alongside informational content, digital nomads can tailor fit their videos to their intended viewers. By saying that *everybody* can do it, digital nomads on YouTube are actually only speaking to those who have a similar socio-economic background as theirs. It may therefore be assumed that the target audience of their vlogs are those who plan to become digital nomads themselves, or those who are similarly capacitated. The demographics of digital nomads would confirm that this audience likely comes from developed countries.

The Digital Nomad Identity

Digital nomadism, as presented on YouTube by self-identified digital nomads, is both an alternative work arrangement and a lifestyle choice. While the current investigation started by viewing the phenomenon as work, simultaneously considering it as a lifestyle choice is inevitable due to the convergence of work and leisure as aspects of life.

Although the study was successful in isolating a work identity, i.e., of a digital worker, other identities such as the relatable vlogger and the dream chaser, also emerged from the investigation. While the characteristics attached to these identities are positive and hopeful, another identity also emerged that highlights emerging inequalities in the world of work. Looking specifically at the countries of origin of the digital in this study, it can be inferred that the strategies for transitioning that they employed come with

caveats. Coming from Western countries, they have a clear advantage in terms of choosing work locations and maximizing their currency's value.

Conclusion

The study's investigation of digital nomads who are sharing their stories and information about digital nomadism on YouTube supports the claim that content creators make choices in terms of how they are going to accomplish their tasks, and how they want to appear as in front of their technically absent audience. Editing, formatting, and the choice of topics to talk about on their channels influence the identity that digital nomads convey to their audience. The findings support previous applications of self-presentation theories in online contexts: while online self-presentation allows people to have more control over what information will be shared to their audience, these are the same motivations that govern face-to-face interactions.

As an emerging work arrangement, digital nomadism prompts a reconceptualization of work, worker, and workplace. The study found that despite the blurring of boundaries between leisure and work, work proves to have an enduring influence on an individual's self-identity. In the absence of organizations to which one can attach one's identity, the present inquiry identified online work as central to the identity of digital nomads.

Aside from this positive way of looking at the convergence, one may also recognize the economic inequalities that are surfaced by the digital nomad phenomenon. The study found that digital nomads come mostly from Western countries. They maximize both the social privilege guaranteed by their country of citizenship and the superior buying power of their currency by moving to Global South countries.

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