Identity work among digital nomads

An exploratory study of the connection between a sub-group of digital media entrepreneurs
and their felt identity tensions arising from the conditions of COVID19

Student Name: Nina Rosa Juffermans ("Ninarosa")

Student Number: 494046nj

Supervisor: Dr. Sven-Ove Horst

Master Media Studies - Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis

June 2020

• **Abstract and Keywords**

Identities and identity development are becoming an important topic in research on organisations and entrepreneurship. However, the connection between digital media entrepreneurs and identity work is underresearched, especially among digital nomads. Digital nomads are a sub-group of digital media entrepreneurs that consists of people who work online, travel long and frequent, and have an uncertain return rate. A prevailing situation that influences how people act as entrepreneurs, how they communicate and evolve –and hence strongly defines possibilities for identity work– is the current pandemic of COVID19 and the subsequent corona crisis. This research explores the struggles involved with identity work, formation, and change as well as ways to solve or tackle this through the frame of COVID19 to ultimately answer the question: How do digital media entrepreneurs conceptualise, focus on, and tackle tensions and problems of identity work?

Eleven online, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted among digital nomads, with a mix of entrepreneurial experience, nationalities, ages, types of work, and current locations. This data was analysed through a thematic analysis, which resulted in 4 main themes and 19 sub-themes.

The main contribution of this research is to provide an in-depth understanding of how digital nomads are facing struggles of identity work. I show that digital nomads conceptualise, focus on, and tackle problems and struggles of identity work by having, developing, and upholding a specific mindset, utilising and discovering social media, finding, associating, and developing relationships, and retaining an opportunistic approach. In doing so, I contribute to academic research on the identity work in general and around digital nomads in particular. More specifically, the contribution relates to the effects of COVID19 on identity, reveals the interconnectedness of struggles of identity work, and supplement previous literature on digital nomadism with research that has COVID19 as a frame. Overall, this research can contribute to being more conscious of our own identity work, and for entrepreneurs to be able to identify and effectively tackle identity struggles and problems of identity work. Additionally, the trend of remote employment could be an opportunity for investing in the co-working industry.

KEYWORDS: *Identity work, identity struggles, digital media entrepreneurship, digital nomads, COVID19*

Table of Contents

- **Preface**

I thought I'd be ready and fully prepared to write my master thesis after writing a bachelor thesis with three research methods (survey, interviews, and focus groups) and 33.000 words in 10 weeks AND writing a premaster thesis where I had to find participants and conduct three focus groups (in total: 12 people) 3 days after arriving at the location of data collection. Little did I know this master thesis was going to be such a journey. It definitely has not been an easy ride but the destination is beautiful, though I say it myself. Holy guacamole, without even a hint of doubt, this has been the most intense, difficult, stressful, time-consuming, and challenging thing I've done in my academic career. The process of drafting the thesis proposal has been accompanied by ups and downs, confusion and clearness, setbacks and windfalls – with my close to drop-out of the degree as the very low point. The coronavirus has also heavily impacted the thesis in the sense that it influenced my mood as well as my topic and consequently the data collection since I was not allowed to travel to Nepal and Sri Lanka as intended and could not conduct face to face interviews. I must have done something horribly wrong to upset karma…

On the positive side, I feel fortunate and extremely grateful for supervised by Sven-Ove Horst. I know life is characterised by uncertainty but if there is one thing that we can be a 100% sure about, it's the fact that without his continuous help, prep-talks, motivation, and overall support, this thesis would not have come to such a (hopefully) successful end. (I guess karma then forgave me, for some reason) I cannot thank him enough for providing me with all the words and actions I needed to pick myself up and get this fucking piece of academic art done. I'll make an attempt, though: thank you SO MUCH for being such an amazing supervisor, I am so proud of what we accomplished together!

Obviously, there are way more many people to thank. I know it's extremely cliché but I am so grateful my parents and friends have always been there for me. Sometimes, I just needed to hear some encouraging words and other times they truly helped me out with progressing on the thesis content-wise. I'd generally like to thank the ESHCC for teaching me all those great skills that I have applied with pleasure (at least, most of the time…). And obviously – the participants in this study! Could not have done it without you. Honestly, I'm close to getting emotional now since this is the end of my academic career; I am not going to exploit my master degree anytime soon and don't feel like getting a second one. Can't cope with the idea of another master thesis.

I'm ready for the world and I hope the world is ready for my master thesis – and then, for me. Happy readings!

Nina Rosa

1.   Introduction

Context Setting

Identities and identity development are becoming an important topic in research on organisations (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Brown, 2015, 2017; Coupland & Brown, 2012; Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013; Schultz, Maguire, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2012) and more recently in the area of entrepreneurship (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Horst, Järventie-Thesleff, & Perez-Latre, 2019; Jones, Latham, & Betta, 2008; Leitch & Harrison, 2016; Watson, 2009). Generally, identities are defined as ongoing efforts to address two questions, namely 'who am I?' and 'how should I act?' (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). As a growing part of the identity literature in organisation studies suggests, the focus is increasingly on their dynamic, fluid and ever-developing nature (Brown & Coupland, 2015). This is especially true in a world where identity is shaped by emotions (Winkler, 2018) and significantly influenced by the use of digital media (Horst, Järventie-Thesleff, & Perez-Latre, 2019).

Hence, entrepreneurial identity development is a prime example and context for understanding these influences and the dynamic and changing nature of identity (Brown & Coupland, 2015). This is because entrepreneurs are often only at the beginning of knowing how to present their products to others and engage their audiences (Horst, Järventie-Thesleff, & Perez-Latre, 2019). They are learning continuously how to refine their self-presentation (Horst, Brouwers, & Hitters, 2020), and increasingly do so over digital media platforms. They refine, fine-tune, develop and revise their self-conceptions and their self-presentation, as well as the ones of their products and their start-up idea (Horst, Järventie-Thesleff, & Perez-Latre, 2019). Therefore, this thesis will focus on the notion of identity work, which is a concept that has increasingly received attention by research in management and organisation studies over the past 16 years (Brown, 2015, 2017; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008; Winkler, 2018). In particular, the focus will be on understanding how entrepreneurs perceive and manage tensions regarding their identity work that arise from tasks and challenges of developing themselves and their business idea during a time of crisis.

Generally, identity work is a refinement and addition to our understanding of identity development as a concept and as a process. Identity work requires an active contribution and investment of the persons whose identity is being developed (Horst, Brouwers, & Hitters, 2020). For example, Beech et al. (2012) have analysed the trend of identity work being used to study identity in the creative industries. Their study shows that identity work can occur as a response to internal tensions. One explanation for this could be the number of tensions that the creative industries

entail, for example, the tension between the expression of creativity (the creative self) and the need to serve a market. Therefore, identity work can occur when there is a need to balance tensions (Beech et al., 2012).

A prevailing situation that relates to identity is the current pandemic of COVID19 and the subsequent corona crisis. A catastrophic disaster such as a pandemic, tornado, earthquake, or other crisis situation has large impacts on the society and economy (Institute of Medicine, 2012). This, in turn, could be a trigger that pushes entrepreneur even more to refine, work on, and fine-tune how they work on their identity development, because it may increase resource scarcity, problems for building their network, psychological stress and many other structural, socio-economic and existential problems that threaten their development and which surface as tensions, struggles and problems of identity work (Alvesson, 2010; Beech, Gilmore, Cochrane, & Greig, 2012; Brown & Coupland, 2015; Ybema et al., 2009). With regards to economic impact, in the last week of March, almost 7 million Americans filed for unemployment (Rushe & Aratani, 2020). More people filed for unemployment in the last two weeks of March 2020 than in the 10 months before that. 33 million Americans have filed for unemployment in March, April, and May 2020, bringing the unemployment rate to 20%, which is the lowest since the Great Depression of 1930 (Rushe & Aratani, 2020). Furthermore, scholars in the field of economics have predicted a recession for 2020 (Reis, 2020). The long-term effects of this crisis, as well as the progression of the virus, are unsure yet as the situation changes by the day.

According to the Institute of Medicine (2012), adequate disaster response depends on the coordination and integration of the state and local governments, emergency medical services, public health, emergency management, hospital facilities, and the outpatient sector. In the case of COVID19, governments have taken security measures and arranged provisions to avoid the spread of the coronavirus and lessen the economic impacts. On an individual level, however, not much is researched or published about the response of the people to COVID19 and the corona crisis. It is a new terrain and circumstances for entrepreneurs of any sort. Therefore, this study dives further into describing and explaining the connection between entrepreneurial identity development, perception of self, and the context of the corona crisis as a driver that accelerates and creates new identity threats.

Conceptual Background

To describe identity work, scholars are commonly using the definition of Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), who conceptualise identity work as 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening

or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165).

Identity work, in turn, entails identity tensions which are the struggles that come with conceptualising, perceiving, and shaping identities (Alvesson, 2010; Beech et al., 2012; Manto, Constantine, Marianne, & Amy, 2010). An example of a "problem" that can trigger identity tensions is that of COVID19. Such a crisis situation can have large effects on micro, meso, and macro-scale (Garfinkel & Sa-Aadu, 2011). The financial crisis of 2018, for example, increased the likelihood of job loss as well as the difficulty to find a new job (Buss, 2009). At the same time, in terms of the micro effects with regards to identity tensions and struggles, literature suggests that crisis and recession are accompanied with increasing numbers of mortality and suicide rates (Falagas, Vouloumanou, Mavros, & Karageorgopoulos, 2009). Indeed, the global unemployment rate has increased since the outbreak of COVID19 to almost 25 million people and is expected to keep growing, the United Nations predicts (2020). The looming unemployment may thus lead to negative emotions and feelings such as distress, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Moser & Paul, 2009) for the entrepreneurs and may trigger specific emotional responses in their identity work (Brown, 2015; Winkler, 2018). Furthermore, Giorgi, Arcangeli, Mucci, and Cupelli (2015) have found that the fear of a crisis, non-employability, scarce social support, job stress, and mental stress that a crisis encompasses (such as the financial crisis of 2008 of the current corona crisis) could lead to loss of confidence, social dysfunction, anxiety, and depression. These emotions and struggles are related to identity and identity work as identity work is ultimately a development process of the 'constructions that are productive of an insecure sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

The concept of 'fear' is crucial in both the financial crisis of 2008 and COVID19, as fear is a strong, negative emotion. Research by Goleman (1996) has shown that when an emotion is very strong and very negative, it is more likely to be contagious. In the case of the financial crisis, the traders were influenced by their anxious peers, which consequently affected the stock prices and got the recession started (Keegan, 2015). This is an example of how fear has had an influence on a crisis situation. Connecting this with identity tensions, fear relates to identity in the sense that it has a negative reputation and can cause embarrassment and feeling childlike (Keegan, 2015). With regards to COVID19, media scholars have argued that fear has played a vital role in the news coverage of the coronavirus (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). However, no research has shed a light on the connection between identity work or tensions among entrepreneurs that they experience during this crisis, especially not among digital media entrepreneurs. Therefore, this is the focus of this research.

A growing body of research is connecting the dots between entrepreneurship and media (Hang & van Weezel, 2007). However, with the convergence of sectors, digitalisation, and increasing digital media use, a new kind of media entrepreneurship has risen: digital media entrepreneurship (Horst & Hitters, 2020). Digital media entrepreneurship entails the interdisciplinary phenomenon around the way in which entrepreneurs are using digital media for organisational purposes (Horst & Murschetz, 2019). Digital media contributes to COVID19 in the sense that digital media allows for sharing views and encounters at a fast pace (Jagongo & Kinyua, 2013). Although digital media entrepreneurs (DMEs) receive more academic attention as the group is growing, these entrepreneurs are still underresearched.

Digital nomads are a specific sub-group within DME. This group consists of digital media entrepreneurs that are characterised by mobility (Reichenberger, 2018) and flexibility (Orel, 2019), which makes them an important target audience to analyse in the light of COVID19, as this limits the extent to which people are mobile and flexible. To get a better understanding of DMEs, this research will focus on this specific sub-group. Digital nomads often work in tech fields (Kong, Schlagwein, & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2019), have an uncertain return date (Thompson, 2019), and travel from home long and frequent (Reichenberger, 2018). Previous research has primarily focused on the positive aspects of digital nomadism as a phenomenon. Some researchers, however, have focused on the negative aspects: digital nomads take advantage of the cheap living costs at the places they work, at the expense of the local community (Thompson, 2019).

While the aim for freedom increases (Kong et al., 2019), so does the level of strictness and number of precautions with regards to COVID19 (International Monetary Fund, 2020). Western digital nomads are currently (as of April 2020) practically unable to travel because of tightened travelling measures (Government of the Netherlands, 2020). This conflicts with the abovementioned characteristics of travelling long and frequent and mobility (Reichenberger, 2018). Academics, however, have not explored identity work among digital nomads yet, especially not through the frame of COVID19.

As part of the identity work, this research aims to explore the struggles involved with identity work, formation, and change. To know more about the struggles that digital media entrepreneurs experience, the focus is on the phenomenon of COVID19, as this could entail struggles or tensions that digital nomads contend with. This leads to the following research question:

- *How do digital media entrepreneurs conceptualise, focus on, and tackle tensions and problems of identity work?*

Relevance

As media coverage sets the agenda for public debate (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020), the prominent media coverage of COVID19 has affected the perceptions and emotions of newsreaders worldwide (Molla, 2020). For example, in the first month of the outbreak, there were 23 times more articles (in English-language print media) covering the coronavirus, compared to the first month of the Ebola epidemic in 2018 (Ducharme, 2020). Furthermore, while only 1% of the news articles[1] in March 2020 were about COVID19, it made up 13% of all the article views (Molla, 2020). Overall, online news companies saw a 50% growth in article page views. However, the link between this news coverage, digital nomadism, and identity work is not yet made academically.

Academically, the connection between digital media entrepreneurs and identity work is underresearched (Fornäs & Xinaris, 2013; Horst et al., 2019; Mallett & Wapshott, 2012). The theoretical relevance, then, lies in creating an in-depth understanding of how digital nomads (i.e. the sub-group under research) are facing struggles of identity work and how this can show for working with identity tensions more broadly. COVID19 functions as a contextual element, because it currently shapes social reality. This may have a strong effect on digital nomads, which are more mobile than other sub-groups of DMEs and are currently unable to effectuate this mobility. Through this phenomenon, one can understand more about identity. Within this identity work, the aim of the research is to explore the struggles of forming identities among the chosen target audience. Given the novelty of COVID19 as a contextual phenomenon, no academic research has been conducted in this particular area – and may indeed be relevant for further waves of the pandemic and adequate institutional, political, and societal responses, as well as for the entrepreneurs working and struggling during this kind of times. For comparison, some studies have looked at pandemics as a business threat (e.g. Clark, 2016), the economical aspect of a pandemic better known as pandeconomics (e.g. Dávila Calero, 2020), or crisis situations in general (e.g. Institute of Medicine, 2012). Additionally, the current academic research on COVID19 is predominantly conducted through a medical frame (e.g. Sen-Crowe, McKenney, Benova, & Elkbuli, 2020). However, no academic research in the light of COVID19 has, by my understanding, addressed the role of tensions in identity work that (digital media) entrepreneurs face during this crisis.

---

[1] This is according to data from Parse.ly, a company that measures content performance for a network of more than 3,000 high-traffic sites, including the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, NBC, Conde Nast, Slate, and TechCrunch (Molla, 2020).

The social relevance, in turn, has to do with the increasing social media usage of organizations and people in society generally, and of entrepreneurs in particular. The number of social media users worldwide has grown from almost 1 billion in 2010 to almost 2,6 billion in 2018 (Clement, 2019) and currently comprises 3,8 billion people (Kemp, 2020), almost half of the world population (Worldometer, 2020). The contribution to society lies in this understanding, that can lead to better decision making (Jagongo & Kinyua, 2013). Knowing how to support entrepreneurs, such as digital nomads, or self-employed individuals relying on social media more generally, can help boosting societal responsiveness and targeted support for re-starting the slowing economy.

The practical relevance of this thesis can come from a better understanding of how to manage these tensions and identity threats as an entrepreneur. It may help preparing for and better coping with another wave of infections (in the short term), and be generally more prepared for threats to their identity during other times that make it hard to develop as a media entrepreneur – an entrepreneur heavily building on and being sustained through (digital) media for their development and success. This can reduce anxiety and support more conscious and competent development despite facing struggles related to identity work. It may provide comfort and a better structure to know what to expect (manage expectations), as well as tools and prescriptions for what to do (best practices), for supporting a conscious development during challenging times.

Structure Thesis

This thesis has started with an introduction to the research, including a description of the context in which the phenomena have appeared, a description of the conceptual background, and the research question. The theoretical, social, and practical relevance have also been described here. Next, the theoretical framework will provide a literature summary of the concepts that are related to the research question, among others entrepreneurial identity work and (managing) identity threats. Afterwards, the chosen research method will be justified and explained, including the characteristics of the research set-up, participants, and structure. Additionally, the data analysis method will be elaborated on through an explanation of the stages, analytical activities, output, and visualisations of this output. Following this, the results section will give a textual overview of the themes that were found in this research. Finally, the discussion and conclusion chapter will answer the research question, connect the literature with the results from the research, compare the themes, and give an overview of the contributions to the academic world employing theoretical and practical implications. Additionally, this chapter includes an overview of the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for further research.

2.   Theoretical Framework

The following section will provide a literature summary and present different concepts and knowledge we have, to better understand and investigate the phenomenon of entrepreneurial identity work during a time of crisis, with a particular emphasis on coping and managing identity threats.

Entrepreneurship

In an attempt to define entrepreneurship, Edwards-Schachter, García-Granero, Sánchez-Barrioluengo, Quesada-Pineda, and Amara (2015) conclude that entrepreneurship exhibits a wide diversity of confused views, conceptualisations, and interpretations on both entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. The authors differentiate three theoretical lenses or approaches to analyse entrepreneurial competences and entrepreneurship subsequentially: the psychological traits theory (what is an entrepreneur?), behavioural theories and functionalist approaches (what does an entrepreneur do?), and socio-constructivist approaches (how do individuals and entrepreneurs act in interaction with their environment?). These different lenses summarise the different ways in which entrepreneurship is framed, conceptualised, and described in the academic world. The field research of this academical production will not be limited to one of these approaches but rather be open to the discernment of the chosen units of analysis.

Using the behavioural theories approach and focussing on entrepreneurial behaviour, scholars tend to use the classical definition of entrepreneurship by Shane and Venkataraman (2000): 'the processes by which individuals discover, evaluate, and exploit business and for-profit opportunities.' Academics often highlight this notion of recognising profitable business opportunities and exploiting them (Achtenhagen, 2008). Edwards-Schachter et al. (2015) add to this definition that the process addresses important social needs, without it getting dominated by direct financial benefits. Additionally, the authors describe creativity and innovation as core competences that are currently underhighlighted and devalued in the literature. It is important to mention that the conceptualisation of entrepreneurship depends on the approach and view.

Given the difficulties in defining the entrepreneurial behaviour, academic literature commonly focusses on the competences rather than the process. This falls more into the psychological traits theory and describes the entrepreneurial personality (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2015). According to the European Key Competence, the key competence of an entrepreneur is the ability to turn ideas into action (European Union, 2018). Three competence areas can be

distinguished: into action, ideas and opportunities, and resources. These altogether make up for 15 competences that create an entrepreneurial mindset: spotting opportunities, creativity, vision, valuing ideas, ethical and sustainable thinking, self-awareness and self-efficacy, motivation and perseverance, mobile resources, financial and economic literacy, mobilising others, taking the initiative, planning and management, coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk, working with others, and learning through experience. These competences partially align with the other descriptions of entrepreneurship. Ultimately, in their report on European Entrepreneurial Competences, the European Union (2018) defines entrepreneurship as 'the capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas, and transform them into value for others. The value that is created can be financial, cultural or social.' (p. 4). This corresponds principally with the classical definition by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) and adds the aspect of ideas and value creation. Furthermore, Brush (2008) distinguishes three key strategies that entrepreneurs must master, namely the ability to develop a clear vision, to manage cash creatively or learn how to bootstrap, and to persuade others to commit to the venture using social skills.

Finally, the socio-constructivist approaches tend to focus on entrepreneurship as a complex and social interactive process (Downing, 2005; Karatas-Ozkan, Anderson, Fayolle, Howells, & Condor, 2014; Steyaert, 1997; Verduijn & Essers, 2013; Watson, 2009, 2013; Wiklund, Davidsson, Audretsch, & Karlsson, 2011; Zahra, 2007; Zahra & Wright, 2011). Indeed, while conceptualising entrepreneurship, four considerations can be identified (Davidsson, 2003): should entrepreneurship be defined in terms of dispositions, behaviour, or outcomes? Does it entail profit-driven businesses or also not-for-profit contexts? Does it belong in a small or organisational context? And are purpose, growth, risk, innovation, and success necessary qualifiers for entrepreneurship? (Davidsson, 2003).

Following these attempts to demarcation, an important trend to point out is the process of augmenting and widening the scope of entrepreneurship that has been on the rise. Edwards-Schachter et al. (2015) explain how entrepreneurship covers not only the creation of business opportunities but also the generation of self-employment and opportunities detection. This manifests in intrapreneurship, corporate entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship, and social entrepreneurship, among others. Both Shane (2012) and Hoogendoorn & Pennings (2010) argue that entrepreneurs can act independently or as a part of a corporate system and can create new organisations to be innovative within an existing organisation. Brush (2008) emphasises the intertwining with pioneering practises and moves away from defining the exact position of the entrepreneur (whether one is in a company). He argues that entrepreneurs are pioneers by definition, that innovate new products or services, create new processes, open new markets, or organise new industries (Brush, 2008).

Media Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship adapted to study media is called media entrepreneurship (Hoag, 2008). More specifically, media entrepreneurship can be described as 'the creation and ownership of an enterprise whose activity adds an independent voice to the media marketplace' (Hoag, 2008, p. 74). Compaine and Hoag (2012) indeed conceptualise a media entrepreneur as 'a founder of an independent content business that has a clear revenue model, if not a profit incentive' (Compaine & Hoag, 2012, p. 32). However, as becomes apparent in the introduction, it is a point of discussion whether this founding aspect and revenue model element are fundamental for the conceptualisation.

As also mentioned earlier, creation and innovation are essential aspects of entrepreneurship (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2015) and it is argued that these entrepreneurial activities are critical in building media business success (Hang & van Weezel, 2007). Furthermore, the part of the creation and ownership of an enterprise overlaps with the definition of entrepreneurship by Shane and Venkataraman (2000), where the focus is on discovering, evaluating, and exploiting business. The media part, however, highlights the independent voice to the media marketplace. Just like the definition of entrepreneurship, the definition of media varies depending on the settings or the criteria given for a certain context (Hang & van Weezel, 2007).

One key difference between Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) definition of entrepreneurship and Hoag (2008) is the focus on solely for-profit opportunities versus for-profit and non-commercial forms of media enterprise respectively. This consideration was also described by Davidsson (2003). In the remainder of the research, both for-profit and non-commercial types of entrepreneurship will be considered. According to Hang and van Weezel (2007), media is often lumped together as a single entity and described as encompassing a large number of communications, among others newspapers, magazines, billboards, radio, television, and games. However, technological developments have fuelled the rise of new media (Compaine & Hoag, 2012).

Digital Media Entrepreneurship

Academic research on media entrepreneurship has primarily focused on innovation or corporate entrepreneurship (Achtenhagen, 2008). With the emergence of digital media, this focus has shifted slowly towards new media for the past decade (Hang & van Weezel, 2007). Digital media entrepreneurship (DME) was fuelled by the digitalisation of entrepreneurship patterns, aspects, and practices (Nambisan, 2018). This growing field is located at the intersection of studies, among others, general entrepreneurship and industry-focused studies on entrepreneurship in the media

and creative industries (Horst & Hitters, 2020). The digital media aspect, then, is an essential facet in the definition of this group of entrepreneurs. Indeed, digital technologies are impacting and transforming how entrepreneurship is understood (Paoloni, Secundo, Ndou, & Modaffari, 2019). While media entrepreneurship aims to get a classical understanding of media use, DME gives a broad understanding of digital media use (Horst & Hitters, 2020). The concept of DME, then, focuses on new products and services that are facilitated through digital media technologies. Examples of such digital media technologies are bloggers, social media influencers (Horst & Hitters, 2020), social media, the Internet of Things, big data, or artificial intelligence (Paoloni et al., 2019).

Ensuing and complementing the description of media, the media industries are defined as the industries that mainly produce and sell information and entertainment products and services (Hang & van Weezel, 2007). Through the frame of the digital media industry, some important changes have occurred in the media sector (Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005). Since the beginning of the new era, there has been a significant shift from full-time staff to freelancers and contract work. A key change that this entailed is the changing relationship between employer and entrepreneur: the old relationship in which the employer accepted responsibility for the individual has been replaced by a new relationship that is characterised as transactional, contractual, and short-term. Additionally, the deregulation of the media has precipitated a lift of the barriers to entry for new media entrepreneurs, which led to growing competition and ultimately to a decline in the pay rate (Storey et al., 2005). Indeed, Compaine and Hoag (2012) have stated that today's media markets are more competitive than ever, have high entry barriers, and are thought to be susceptible to economic downturns – of which the current economical crisis as a result of the coronavirus is an example. However, more recent literature has indicated a rise in the pay rate of media entrepreneurs, partially because of the rise of digital media and the connection with technology (Thompson, 2019). A growing body of research is also connecting these changes in the media industries with identity and identity work, which will be conceptualised and extensively elaborated on later.

Much academic research is conducted among digital media. For both private users and businesses, digital media assists in creativity, open communication, and knowledge sharing (Jagongo & Kinyua, 2013). The rise of the internet that fuelled the digitalisation has made consumers more accessible, provided a new set of communication tools, made information exchange easier and faster, and has made companies rethinking their communication processes (Jaokar, Jacobs, Moore, & Ahvenainen, 2009). Looking more specifically at digital media, it can be used to gain access to specific resources, improve online presence, communicate and ultimately boost sales and generate opportunities (Jagongo & Kinyua, 2013).

Shifting towards digital nomads, one of the characteristics of digital nomads is that they use technology in their favour and often have jobs related to media and technology, such as software engineering, design, and copywriting (Kong, Schlagwein, & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2019). This characteristic makes this target audience an interesting sub-group of DMEs to analyse. A growing body of research is being conducted among digital nomads. To be more specific, digital nomads hold the balance between expats and remote employees. They are individuals that take advantage of the increasing development in technologies (e.g. the abovementioned ones) and took the opportunity work location independently (Reichenberger, 2018). Often, they are from rich countries with strong passports (Thompson, 2019). On social media, it appears like digital nomads are living a dream life, as they often have and communicate a high level of freedom. Freedom to make life choices can contribute to higher levels of happiness (Tavor, Gonen, Weber, & Spiegel, 2018). The growing number of digital nomads globally makes them an interesting unit of analysis for academic research in the field of media; in an interview with a financial newspaper, the Dutch Pieter Levels, founder of NomadList (a platform for digital nomads) claimed a rapid growth of digital nomadism from 2014 onwards (Jansen, 2018). In his own blog, he has predicted a growth of digital nomads up to 1 billion in 2035 (Levels, 2015).

Identity in a Social Context

Taking a step back from defining identity work, the concept of identity is once again multifaceted and difficult to define, which has made the discussions about the topic differently in the various scholarly traditions (Côté, 2006). As occurred when defining entrepreneurship, identity can be defined among certain considerations. Some scholars, for example, define identity in terms of ethnic, religious, or other social entities – while others consider personality traits such as the achievement of autonomy, self-sameness, or personal meaning in the conceptualisation (Schachter & Rich, 2011). Indeed, these varying uses of defining identity have led to some confusion (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). However, according to Coupland and Brown (2012), there is consensus on the statement that identity is bound-up with answers to questions such as 'who am I?' and 'who are we?'. Furthermore, identity research requires a reflexive way of analysing from the researcher, given the reflexive accomplishments of identities (Coupland & Brown, 2012).

Identity has come to dominate a considerable amount of scholarship in the social sciences, humanities, and psychology (Hammack, 2008). In the light of the social sciences (where the field of media studies belongs to), identity is addressed on different levels: organisational, professional, social, and individual (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In this research, one is interested in the

individual level, while the majority of the previous academic research has mainly focused on the organisational and professional level.

Furthermore, Hammack (2008) points out three arguments about identity as a construct. Two are relevant for this research as it is connected to identity development and possesses analytical utility for the media field. Firstly, identity development as a process represents the link between self and society. The investigation of identity leads the way to the process of social change (Hammack, 2008). Linking this back to digital media entrepreneurs and COVID19, one is interested in exploring the identity tensions that COVID19 entails as well as general identity struggles and work of being a digital media entrepreneur. Indeed, the identity work of entrepreneurs (both the self and the social aspects it includes) are influenced by discourses existing in the society around them (Watson, 2009). Secondly and interrelated is the fact that the relationship between a dominant discourse as a narrative and a personal narrative of identity can provide access to social reproduction and change as a process (Hammack, 2008). Individuals engage with these 'master' narratives of identity as they start constructing personal narratives of identity, that will anchor the cognitive and social context through which they develop. This argument about identity is related to this research in the sense that digital nomads, as a sub-group of digital media entrepreneurs, are characterised by flexibility (Orel, 2019), mobility (Reichenberger, 2018). These unique characteristics lay the foundation for an identity narrative that will be further explored in this research, while taking identity tensions into account.

The concept of collective identity comes into play as the individuals under study are a group of actors who share a specific purpose as well as similar outputs (Wry, Lounsbury, & Glynn, 2011). The set of characteristics that is intrinsic to digital nomads can be defined as their collective identity. An identity can be called collective when there are predefined essential characteristics that can delineate membership (Kavanagh, Perkmann, & Phillips, 2020). For digital nomads, characteristics include making money while travelling (Kong et al., 2019), having an uncertain return date (Thompson, 2019), and travelling from home long and frequent (Reichenberger, 2018). In the methodology section of this research, these characteristics will be elaborated on and complemented with the operationalised characteristics that are relevant for this research. Collective identity is often described in the light of organisational identity again (e.g. King, Clemens, & Fry, 2011) but holds relevance to individual identity and therefore this research in the sense that it reflects certain characteristics that are generally expected from a specific category (Kavanagh et al., 2020). Additionally, these collective identities are interrelated with the 'master' narratives or dominant narrative discourse, as outlined by Hammack (2008).

The relationship between media and identity has received an increasing amount of academic attention because of the rise of social media (e.g. Compaine & Hoag, 2012) and overall growing academic interest in the topic of identity (e.g. Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). For example, according to Back et al. (2010), individuals are not using their social media profiles to promote an idealised virtual identity but social media might be a useful medium to communicate real personality. Based on this finding, Westgate and Holliday (2016) have researched the influence of social media on drinking identity, as drinking identity is an important predictor of alcohol use and may include the construction of individual and group identities. They found that accurate self-portrayal, social network membership, and group identity and culture are influenced by behaviour with regards to alcohol and, in turn, influence social media. Similar research has been conducted by Gomillion & Giuliano (2011) in the light of the LGTB[2] community. Their findings indicate that their individual identity is influenced in the sense that media role models foster prides and help them to view their identities more positively. On the note of coming out in particular, research by Craig and McInroy (2014) indicates that LGBTQ youth uses new media to engage in online searches for information, role models, and representations of one's identities, which is facilitating the stages of identity confusion, comparison, and tolerance. Taking these researches into account and applying them to the current research, it is possible that self-portrayal and group identity/culture have an influence on social media for digital nomads (as is the case with Westgate's and Holliday's (2016) research on drinking identity), that digital nomads use role models to view their identities more positively (as with the LGBT community described by Gomillion & Giuliano (2011), or that new media is facilitating the three stages of identity construction (as was the case for coming out of LGBTQ youth, researched by Craig and McInroy (2014). However, the field of media and identity is unexplored when having digital nomads as a sub-group or taking COVID19 as a frame.

Identity Work

As outlined in the introduction, identity work refers to the process of 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). In this sense, identity can be seen as a process that is constantly being formed and reformed through all sorts of social settings and life events (Nielsen & Gartner, 2017) to establish an identity in the eyes of people and others (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). Other scholars add to this definition that the goal is to construct a meaningful relationship between one's self-identity and social identity (Kreiner,

---

[2] LGTB stands for Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual. Sometimes a Q is added, which stands for Queer.

Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006) as identity work can be conscious and unconscious (Thompson & McHugh, 2002). Furthermore, some scholars argue that the distinct notion of who individuals are and how they relate to others is at the core of identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), while others claim that identity work can be both competitive and collaborative (Thompson & McHugh, 2002). Another distinction made in the attempt to define identity work concerns the conversational notion; while Thompson and McHugh (2002) argue that identity work can be both individual and collective, Watson (2009) has concluded that identity work is a relational or dialogic activity that cannot be done outside dialogue and negotiation. In sum, the definition of identity work has been described with several key elements and distinguishes.

Identity work is the second stage in the three stages of identity construction as outlined by Alvesson and Willmott (2002). The first stage is identity regulation, which consists of powerful attempts to define identity. As reported by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), self-doubt and self-openness are the motives that make people engage in identity work, that is the second step in identity construction. Identity work, then, is a process used to address conflicts (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) and in itself consists of ongoing processes of reflexive interpretation as well as narrative construction (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Finally, identity work produces self-identity. This stage consists of shifting narratives of the self that are unstable uncertain (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). While other literature has focused on identity construction as a whole (e.g. Hammack, 2008), identity regulation (e.g. Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) or self-identity (e.g. Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005), this research will tackle identity work specifically.
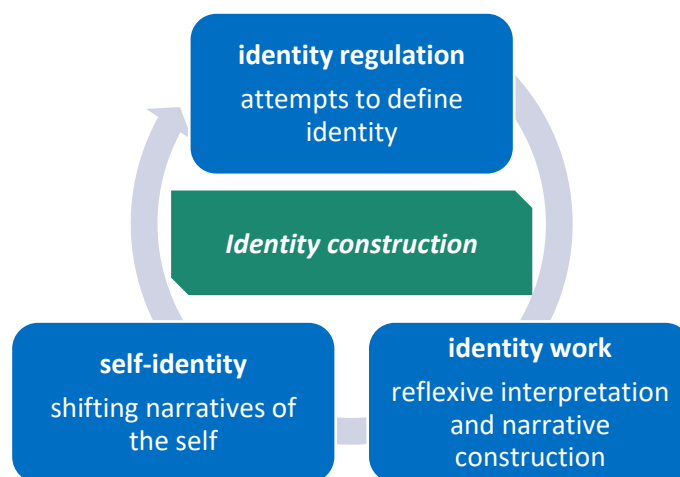

Figure 1: The three stages of identity construction as a continuous process. Adopted by the author from Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003).

Through the frame of entrepreneurship, identity work can be triggered by changes in the workplace, disruption of social relationships, cultural changes, or other work-life alterations (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003, p. 1178). The research of Horst, Brouwers, and Hitters (2020) has highlighted the connection between the entrepreneurial identity, identity work, and the creative industries in which DMEs often operate. The authors claim that identity can be linked to many aspects of entrepreneurship – mergers, motivation, among others. Furthermore, the social identity of DMEs (in their research journalism students, in this research digital nomads) could affect entrepreneurial choices. Other researchers have also connected entrepreneurship with identity work; Fauchart and Gruber (2011), for example, claim that entrepreneurial activity is full of meaning and an expression of the self. Through the frame of the individual identity, the organisations that entrepreneurs function within affect the construction of the individual identity, according to Oliver (2015).

All in all, academic research has shed a light on identity work among entrepreneurs. However, entrepreneurial identity development through digital media is currently underexplored (Horst, Järventie-Thesleff, & Perez-Latre, 2019). This research, then, will take the previous research and theories on the concepts of identity work and digital media entrepreneurship into account to understand more about the role that digital media plays in the identity tensions that these entrepreneurs struggle with.

Struggles of/in/with Identity Work

A concept related to identity work is that of identity tensions, previously exemplified as the struggles that come with conceptualising, perceiving, and shaping identities (Alvesson, 2010; Beech et al., 2012; Manto et al., 2010; Watson, 2008). Some examples defined by media academics are the tension between the need of being creative versus being commercially successful in the context of opera rehearsals (Beech, Gilmore, Cochrane, & Greig, 2012), between a traditional identity and those of a hybrid work-related identity for immigrants (van Laer & Janssens, 2014), or the tension between a career or mother identity among female entrepreneurs (Jorgenson, 2002). Identity work, then, occurs in different contexts and can concern a variety of tensions.

To be more specific on digital media entrepreneurs, academics have underlined the downsides of the gig economy, that could contribute to identity tensions. The gig economy is a new kind of economy where work in organisations is structured in projects rather than regular contracts (Barley, Bechky, & Milliken, 2017). Employment is tied to the completion of a specific task and generally of relatively short duration. This form of employment is beneficial for companies as it

increases flexibility and reduces employment costs since they do not have to pay benefits, employee training, or employment taxes (Barley, Bechky, & Milliken, 2017). From the perspective of the worker, however, this relatively short duration and financial impede entail insecurities in terms of career and the self (Liegl, 2014). Being a digital media entrepreneur, then, can trigger identity tensions because of the insecure attribute of the gig economy. The gap in research between DMEs and identity tensions, however, remains.

Focusing on digital nomadism specifically, this form of DME has downsides in itself that can be a threat to identity. For example, Brown and O'Hara (2003) emphasise the feeling of loneliness and isolation that being a mobile worker entails. Furthermore, building upon the uncertainty of the gig economy, digital nomads face insecurity in living conditions – on top of the uncertain work availability (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017). These uncertain living conditions make relationships or other forms of love difficult (Thompson, 2019), which can be a threat to identity as well. Finally, as the lines between work and leisure are blurred, digital nomads often struggle with maintaining a healthy work-life balance (Kong et al., 2019). Such work-life alternations can trigger identity work and ultimately lead to identity tensions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

COVID19 as a New Context for Entrepreneurial Identity Struggles

This research takes place during COVID19 and thus provides a significant contextual element which influences and shapes entrepreneurial behaviour (Griffin, 2007; Hjorth, Jones, & Gartner, 2008; Johns, 2006; Welter, 2011; Zahra, Wright, & Abdelgawad, 2014). Because COVID19 is not an academic concept but a complex phenomenon that currently shapes, produces, and frames struggles of identity work, it is important to briefly outline the anxieties, problems, complexities and tensions that this pandemic entails. Provocatively, the media has frequently compared the fight against the coronavirus to being in war (Hunter, 2020). Frames include a metaphor of the fight against COVID19 as the greatest challenge since the Second World War or the virus as the invisible enemy.

An important aspect that may shape identity work of entrepreneurs and other people are the security measures that were taken to avoid the spread of COVID19. In the Netherlands, as per April 2020, policies to control the pandemic include travel restrictions, shutdown of public places (among others restaurants, bars, and gyms), temporary financial arrangements, and adjusted working times (Government of the Netherlands, 2020). Additionally, it is prohibited to have a distance of fewer than 1,5 meters from another person or to gather in groups of more than three people (still in June 2020). Other countries worldwide have taken security measures along those

lines. The International Monetary Fund has made a list of security measures per country and listed 193 countries as per April 2020 (International Monetary Fund, 2020).

The security measures to avoid the spread of the coronavirus do in turn influence our emotional wellbeing and identity. A survey was conducted among almost 14.000 people across 15 major countries[3] to measure their attitudes and emotions towards COVID19 (Naidu-Ghelani, 2020). More than half was concerned for the vulnerable or weak, and more than two in five respondents said to be impatient to get back to normal life. Another third were anxious about their health, 15% said to be lonely, and 12% were angry about the restrictions to their freedom. These feelings can influence identity, identity work, identity development, and collective identity – as these are strong and negative emotions (Goleman, 1996).

Experts in the field of behavioural science have argued that the isolation leads to people craving social interaction and ultimately mistrust and cynicism when these social cravings cannot be satisfied[4] (Naidu-Ghelani, 2020). Furthermore, the uncertainty with regards to the safety can lead to anxiety, since uncertainty is an imperative inducer of anxiety[5]. Concerning identity, the isolation impacts our sense of identity, as it makes us question what kind of worker we are, how we can contribute, and how we can support the people around us. Other experts argue that social distancing can make it difficult to integrate or adjust to normal life, which causes people to be more reluctant to travel[6] (Naidu-Ghelani, 2020). Since travelling is at the core of digital nomadism, this could be an identity struggle for digital nomads that is precipitated by the coronavirus.

COVID19 has led to an increasing global unemployment rate (Rushe & Aratani, 2020) with associated effects on mental health, as outlined on in the conceptual background. These psychological or health issues can be significant (Miltiadis, 2020). Ethnographic studies from previous years and other crisis situations have found that people have an emotional connection between a crisis that happened in the past and a new or current crisis. It is then possible that a painful memory of the financial crisis of 2008 will be evoked during the corona crisis. For example, a study in Greece (Knight, 2012) and Italy (Pipyrou, 2016) revealed that the financial crisis evoked

---

[3] The data was gathered between March 26th to 30th among 28,000 adults aged 18-74 in Canada and the United States and 16-74 in Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Italy, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Korea, Vietnam, and the United Kingdom (Lacey, 2020).
[4] As claimed by Greg Gwiasda, vice president at Ipsos' Behavioural Science Centre in the United States (Naidu-Ghelani, 2020).
[5] As claimed by Stewart Shrankman, professor at the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences at Northwestern University in Chicago (Naidu-Ghelani, 2020).
[6] As claimed by Laura Brinkley-Rubinstein, assistant professor of Social Medicine at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill (Naidu-Ghelani, 2020).

memories and feelings of the famine of 1941-1943, which was one of the most fatal famines of the Second World War (Voglis, 2008). As a result, people began to stock up on food, as a fear of the return of poverty. A similar thing is happening during the corona crisis; the sales of rice and beans in the United States, for example, has grown with 25 to 37% since the first reported person to person transmission of the coronavirus on February 29th (Finney & Yip, 2020). In sum, the researched Greek (Knight, 2012) and south Italian (Pipyrou, 2016) people felt embarrassed and ashamed because of the deficient acting of their government.

Overall, this shows that the corona crisis significantly impacts social interaction and individual wellbeing. It influences business opportunities and therefore creates a lot of stressors for digital nomads, who cannot travel and have to rely on (social) media for conducting their work. To better understand how they cope with their identity tensions and find ways to continue their line of work, this study will dive deeper and empirically investigate the following research question:

- *How do digital media entrepreneurs conceptualise, focus on, and tackle tensions and problems of identity work?*

To frame this question, the following concepts were discussed and will be used for making sense of their responses to identity tensions during COVID19 and their entrepreneurial identity work (see Table 1).

Term	Definition	Source
Entrepreneurship	The processes by which individuals discover, evaluate, and exploit business and for-profit opportunities	(Shane & Venkataraman, 2000)
Media entrepreneurship	The creation and ownership of an enterprise whose activity adds an independent voice to the media marketplace	(Hoag, 2008, p. 74)
Digital media entrepreneurship	The interdisciplinary phenomenon around the way in which entrepreneurs are using digital media for organisational purposes	(Horst & Murschetz, 2019)
Digital nomads	A sub-group of digital media entrepreneurs that are characterised by mobility and flexibility	(Reichenberger, 2018) (Orel, 2019)
Identity	Ongoing efforts to address two questions, namely 'who am I? and 'how should I act?'	(Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008)
Collective identity	An identity where there are predefined essential characteristics that can delineate membership	(Kavanagh, Perkmann, & Phillips, 2020)
Identity work	The process of forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness	(Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165)
Identity tensions	The struggles that come with conceptualising, perceiving, and shaping identities	(Horst, Järventie- Thesleff, & Perez-Latre, 2019)

Table 1: Overview of the used terms, phenomena, and concepts in the theoretical framework.

3.   Method

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the boundaries in which this research operates. Justification and explanation of the chosen methodology will set the foundation for the methods section. Next, the characteristics for the interviewees as well as the interviews will be explained and justified, using existing literature on the topic. The chapter will close with an extensive and visual presentation and argumentation of the chosen data analysis.

Justification and Explanation Method

The research question was answered utilising in-depth interviews. This methodology is of qualitative nature, where the aim is to discover the 'why' (Brennen, 2017); *why* do digital media entrepreneurs conceptualise identity work in a certain way? *Why* do they focus on identity work? How do they describe identity work, how does it apply to them, and *why*? *How* do they tackle tensions and problems of identity work and *why*? The goal of the research is not to find out how many digital nomads experience struggles in identity work or to what extent it plays a role in their life. This would have been a research of quantitative nature. Rather, this research aims to reveal the underlying meanings of the conceptualisation, focus, and actions taken as a result of the tensions and problems of identity work (Babbie, 2011).

Interviews are a suitable method to answer the research question because according to Babbie (2011), the goal of an interview is creating in-depth descriptions and reflections about a certain topic – namely for creating understanding. Understanding is precisely what is needed for this research since one seeks to understand *how* digital media entrepreneurs conceptualise, focus on, and tackle tensions/problems of identity work – rather than *how many* or *to what extent*. Also, interviews allow the researcher to analyse a phenomenon in their larger social context (Brennen, 2017). In this case, interviews facilitated analysing identity work in a larger social context that is digital media entrepreneurship.

Additionally, one characteristic of an interview is an interactive set-up that allows for evoking questions, discovering what is really going on, and gathering information about what is not directly observable (Brennen, 2017). Contrary to methods such as a survey or content analysis, with interviews, one can observe body language and understand experience and perspective. This then reveals how digital nomads really perceived the identity struggles. Body language plays an important part in the in-depth understanding of the role that identity work tensions play in the lives of digital nomads. Since this is a sensitive and confrontational topic, they show signs of discomfort, happiness,

or other emotions during the interviews. This body language, then, can give an extra dimension to the words they say or give an inducement to elaborate on questions or (not) ask certain questions.

In particular, the interview technique used, was the active interview that supportive reflective appreciation of local circumstances, such as COVID19, conducting the interview over Zoom, being stressed due to isolation, etc. and supports interpretation and co-creation of meaning (Alvesson, 2003; Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; Lamont & Swidler, 2014). How this played out will be discussed below.

Characteristics of the Interviewees

Following the definition of 'digital nomads' as provided in the introduction, they often work in tech fields (Kong, Schlagwein, & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2019), have an uncertain return date (Thompson, 2019), and travel from home long and frequent (Reichenberger, 2018). In an aim to make this more measurable and concrete, some criteria were added to this definition. These formed the characteristics of the interviewees. Table 2 gives an overview of the interviewees for this research.

Name	Nationality	Based in February	Currently based	Type	Gender	Age
Pieter	Dutch	Portugal	Indonesia	Entrepreneur	Male	26
Quinn	Dutch	Netherlands	Indonesia	Freelancer	Male	25
Sarah	Dutch	Vietnam	Netherlands	Entrepreneur	Female	30
Jos	Dutch	Indonesia	Netherlands	Entrepreneur	Male	34
Christian	Swiss	Thailand	Switzerland	Entrepreneur	Male	36
Emma	Dutch	United States	South Africa	Entrepreneur	Female	28
Marek	Polish	Indonesia	Indonesia	Freelancer	Male	23
Isabel	Dutch	Indonesia	Indonesia	Entrepreneur	Female	28
Mario	German	Thailand	Cambodia	Entrepreneur	Male	29
Larissa	Dutch	Australia	Australia	Entrepreneur	Female	30
Juliette	South African	Indonesia	South Africa	Remote employee	Female	29

Table 2: Overview of the interviewees e.g. participants in this study. They are given pseudonyms.

First of all, only people who make an income online were considered a digital nomad for this research (Liegl, 2014). The importance of this income requirement lies in the 'entrepreneurship' aspect of digital nomads. There were no specific guidelines set for the height of the income.

Secondly, they should have generated an income at the moment of interviewing. Since one is looking at digital nomads through the phenomenon of COVID19, and the coronavirus has only started spreading outside China since February 2020 (Finney & Yip, 2020), the participants should have been digital nomads in February 2020. If they have been digital nomads in the past but no longer considered themselves a digital nomad as per February 2020, they have not faced the identity struggles that come with the COVID19. By the same token, aspiring digital nomads have not been on an entrepreneurial journey yet if they were *starting* a business in February 2020 and not generating an income yet at that point.

Thirdly, following Reichenberger (2018) her definition, the participants should stay at countries short enough to not need a permanent residency – otherwise, they would be considered expats and that would neglect the travelling and mobility aspect. No specific requirements were set for the age, gender, or nationality of the participants since these demographics were not assigned to the concept of digital nomads before.

Characteristics of the Interviews

Altogether, 11 interviews in-depth interviews were conducted among digital nomads. The amount of 11 is chosen as this was a sufficient amount to reach saturation, meaning no new data was found and the findings start to repeat themselves (Brennen, 2017), because it was a highly specific group of people with many similarities. Additionally, this number of interviews was feasible when keeping the data collection time of six weeks in mind. Although the participants were recruited directly through my network as an entrepreneur and digital nomad, a form of snowball sampling was applied. In this kind of sampling, participants were asked to refer their connections to also contribute to the research (Babbie, 2011). No direct connections were allowed as this will create a bias (Babbie, 2011).

Given the current government regulations with regards to the coronavirus, all the interviews happened online. Generally, online interviews have both pros and cons; while it can entail security and setup issues, can allow for less control, misses non-verbal communication, reduces intimacy and spontaneity, and makes authentic interaction difficult – it also comes at a lower cost, can provide additional (international) diversity, allows for more freedom for the participant (hence, makes the recruitment procedure easier), and makes it more anonymous (which might encourage the participants to be willing to discuss sensitive topics) (Brennen, 2017). Taking into account that no offline networking is possible (at least, extremely unlikely), that digital nomads are an international

phenomenon, and that the topic can be seen as emotionally challenging (maybe even confrontational), online interviews appeared to be a logical choice.

The interviews were between 45 and 60 minutes long. Shorter interviews might not allow for the full exploration that is desired and longer interviews might make participant recruitment more difficult as people have limited time available. The interviews were scheduled and held using Zoom. The purchased Premium account allows for an unlimited duration of the interview and makes entering the meeting easy using an URL. Additionally, Zoom has a built-in recording option, which was used for transcription purposes. The interviews were also recorded using the QuickTime audio recording feature on a MacBook and the voice recording feature on iPhone.

Interview Format

The interviews were semi-structured because this type of interviews allows for flexibility (Brennen, 2017). Semi-structured interviews are based on a list of questions. However, the difference between semi-structured and structured interviews is that the latter is not adaptable. With semi-structured interviews, the researcher carefully listens to the participants and adjusts to what is said. Furthermore, the interviews were seen as an opportunity for co-construction of meaning surrounding the issues of identity work during times of COVID19, through reflective appreciation of the stance of interviewer/interviewee, their roles in the process, complex interaction, identity work, self-promotion and representation of problems, as well as understanding how identity work is constituted by discourse (Alvesson, 2003, p. 15).

Table 3 gives an overview of the list of questions asked, ordered per concept and topic. To come up with the questions, the concepts were first considered and analysed, using the previously conducted literature review. This led to a few foci within the concepts. The foci within these phenomena, in turn, all entailed 2 to 5 questions. Important to highlight in this list of questions is the process of funnelling. The research starts general with digital media entrepreneurship and funnels down all the way to coronavirus or COVID19 as an identity struggle, moving along the concepts digital nomadism, identity work, and identity struggles on the way. Within the concepts, the questions start quite broadly and then narrow down. For example, within the focus of identity, it starts with a question for the definition and conceptualisation of identity and ends with a reflection on one's entrepreneurial identity development and possible other identities. This method of funnelling is chosen to build rapport, make the participants feel at ease, and enhance the concentration and the focus throughout the interview (Babbie, 2011).

Concept	Focus within phenomenon	Associated questions
Digital media entrepreneurship (DME)	DME definition	- What is an entrepreneur to you? - What is a DME to you? Why? - Why do you identify yourself as a DME? - Can you tell a bit more about your entrepreneurial experience and journey?
	Digital media	- What digital media do you use and why? - What role does digital media play in your business?
Digital nomadism	Digital nomadism definition	- What are digital nomads to you? - Why do you identify yourself as a digital nomad? - What do you think is special about this group? Are there similar groups of people that share such common elements?
	Pros and cons	- What are the positive sides of being a digital nomad? - What are the <u>negative</u> sides of being a digital nomad? - What is good about digital nomadism as a phenomenon? - What is <u>bad</u> about digital nomadism as a phenomenon? - Are there any changes because of the current situation? Can you explain those a bit?
Identity work	Identities	- How would you define identity? - What concepts do you relate to identity and why? / If I say 'identity', what terms pop to mind and why? - Can you tell a bit more about your identity development? - Can you tell a bit more about your <u>entrepreneurial</u> identity development? - What other identities do you have?
	Identity work definition	- Are you familiar with the concept 'identity work?' - What role does identity development play in your life? Why? - How do you use digital media for your identity development?
Identity struggles	Identity struggles definition	- What is a struggle for you? - What makes a struggle relevant for your work? - How would you define an identity struggle? Why?
	Examples	- What struggles have you come across in developing your identity? **(elaborate)** - How do these struggles influence how you see yourself? Do you see yourself differently now? - Are there any new things that you learn about yourself when passing through such a struggle? Can you explain? - Are there any struggles that you currently face? **(be open to what they say and lead the interview)**
	Triggers	What 'triggers' can you recall that have triggered these identity tensions or struggles?
	Solving	How did you tackle these tensions/problems?

		• Are there moments when you realised you have "solved" a struggle? • What is different when you realise you have solved a struggle?
Coronavirus	Effect	• Do you know whether you're going into the right direction? • Do you feel that the work you do is providing you a future? • How do you need to work right now to develop a future?
	Tensions	• Do you feel any anxiety because you don't know how it will develop? • Do you feel less secure than you did? • How do you reduce anxiety?
	Anxiety	• How does COVID19 change you/your identity/schedule/life? • What tensions/struggles do you feel? • How do you experience the tensions that come with the change of work routine, writing to others, networking?

Table 3: Theoretical concepts, focusses within, and associated questions, which all have followed from the four main concepts of this thesis.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data gathered with the interviews, an interpretive form of thematic analysis was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014; Thomas, 2010). A thematic analysis is used to find patterns in the data and compare those patterns (Brennen, 2017). This kind of data analysis was suitable to analyse the data because it allows to reveal how texts organise thoughts via themes. The purpose was to see how digital nomads conceptualised, focused on, and tackled problems and struggles that identity worked entailed. In this context, the texts were the transcripts of the interviews, that are a sum of how the participants spoke and thought about the topic. The themes capture something about the data concerning the research question and represents some level of response (Brennen, 2017). The themes, then, were a sum of these thoughts, that ultimately related to the research question and showed in what ways the digital nomads think of and deal with the struggles of identity work. In terms of the practical approach, the six steps of a thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used as the foundation of this data analysis. The six steps that were conducted are outlined in Table 4. This table also includes the analytical activities that were conducted as well as the output that were a result of these activities.

Stage	Analytical activities	Output
1. Familiarising yourself with your data	• Creating transcripts • Reading and re-reading the data • Noting down the initial ideas	• 88.829 words of transcription (11 interviews) • 16 initial ideas for the codes • 7 ideas for the themes
2. Generating initial codes	• Coding interesting features • Collating data relevant to code	• Summary of the transcripts • 348 codes altogether; between 27 and 40 codes per interviewee with an average of 32
3. Searching for themes	• Collating codes into potential themes • Gathering all data relevant to each potential theme	• 269 codes altogether; between 19 and 33 codes per interviewee with an average of 24 • A mindmap with 6 main themes + 14 sub-themes + 53 sub-sub-themes
4. Reviewing themes	• Checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts • Generating a thematic map of the analysis	• 5 main themes • A mindmap with 28 sub-themes + 148 sub-sub-themes
5. Defining and naming themes	• Refine the specifics of each theme • Generating clear definition and names for each theme	• 4 main themes • A Venn graph with 4 main themes and 27 sub-themes, with overlapping areas
6. Producing the report	• Selecting vivid and compelling extract examples • Analysing the selected extracts • Relating back to the research question and literature • Producing a scholarly report of the analysis	• Results section • Discussion and conclusion section

Table 4: The stages of the analytical process of the data analysis, based on Braun and Clarke (2006).

Detailed report of the thematic analysis

The analysis started out with creating the transcripts. In order to do so, the programme Descript was downloaded. This programme automatically detects words and sentences and created the generated the initial transcript. However, since most participants were not English natives, the programmes detection and transcription were not fully accurate. This required an extra step of manually going through the transcript to check for its correctness. Altogether, the 11 interviews generated 88.829 words of transcriptions. These are attached to the research in a separate Excel-file. After reading and re-reading this data a few times, 16 initial ideas for the codes were generated, which can be found in Figure 2. Following these initial ideas, 7 ideas for the themes were developed.
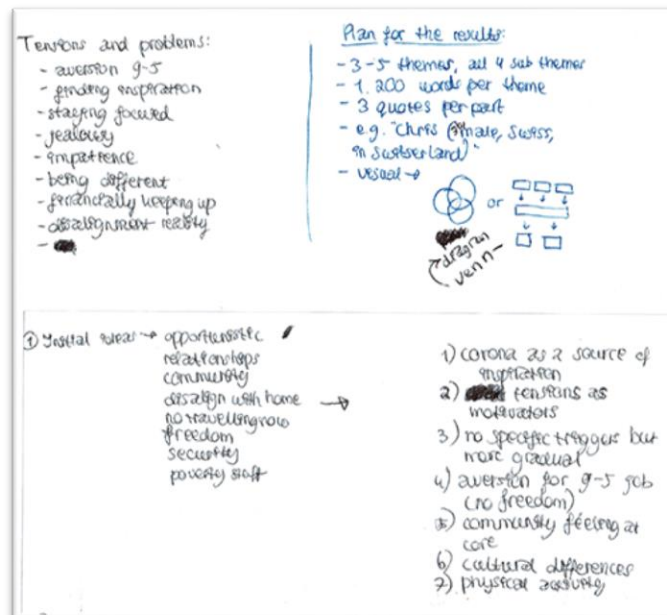
Figure 2: Step 1 in the thematic analysis: noting down initial ideas.

In the second step, a summary of the transcripts was created. This sized down the transcriptions to approximately 1.500-2.000 words per interview instead of the 7.000-9.000 words for the full transcriptions. Figure 3 gives an idea of a part of this summary, since this is one out of the 6 pages. Critically analysing these summaries, interesting features were coded. Per interviewee, small cards with the codes were created, involving codes such as 'doing voluntary work' or 'missing social interactions'. This generated in 348 small cards with codes (between 27 and 40 codes per interviewee with an average of 32). The physical setup of these cards is visible in Figure 4. This does not include all the 348 cards but gives an insight into the process.

	Solving	• How did you tackle these tensions/problems? • Are there moments when you realised you have "solved" a struggle? • What is different when you realise you have solved a struggle?	• **Work-life balance:** always working on it. Really have a schedule for today; we go walking in the morning before work. Short workout. Working until 6pm. Try to work 5 days but if there's something special, there's no option. Prioritising clients over ourselves. E.g. in Thailand daily yoga 8pm. Find a hobby that you like to do <u>daily</u> so you have to go there. Maybe a workout with a coach. Doing it together with brother now to hold accountable. Work computer all day long, get out there and release energy
Coronavirus	Anxiety	• How does Covid19 change you/your identity/schedule/life? • What tensions/struggles do you feel? • How do you experience the tensions that come with the change of work routine, writing to others, networking?	• **Business:** clients have been affected so we all have been. Clients who sell tickets, most got refunded. We had to pay back the commissions. Lack of incoming money. Also for vouchers – less gift vouchers sold. Hard to get new clients. 3 weeks ago, it was 0 but it's starting again • **Changed:** don't do so much. They're coming to us to let us show them the system. Gift vouchers are popular to support. More requests from more clients. Low conversation rate. More work for sales but <u>output</u> not as before • **Did themselves:** credit from the banks. We don't need it and probs won't use it. Also 'werktijdverkorting'; 60% Chris, 40% government. Don't have the money. • **Company structure:** 4 management people, 8 employees full-time
	Effect	• Do you know whether you're going into the right direction? • Do you feel that the work you do is providing you a future? • How do you need to work right now to develop a future?	• **Future:** business has grown amazingly. Corona lowers a bit but we're gonna go in the same direction. Not strategically changings. Wanna focus on our strategy. Still build on our product
	Tensions	• Do you feel any anxiety because you don't know how it will develop?	• **3 weeks ago:** very shocked, didn't know what to do. What to do with employees? Hence applied for the 'short work'. Just 2 weeks and then it relaxed. Hotels etc are way more affected

Figure 3: Step 2 in the thematic analysis. Part of the summary of the transcriptions from one participant.

Figure 4: Step 2 in the thematic analysis: coding interesting features. These are staples of the 348 codes sorted per interviewee.

In the third step, the codes were collated into potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The summaries functioned as a foundation for this part of the process. The 348 codes were narrowed down to 269. Between 19 and 33 codes per interviewee were created, with an average of 24 codes. In turn, these 269 codes were put into a mindmap since this allows for a clearly visualised overview. The pre-assumed themes from step 1 were also taken into account. Altogether, this mindmap included 6 main themes, 14 sub-themes, and 53 sub-sub-themes. The codes and visualisations can be found in the figures below.
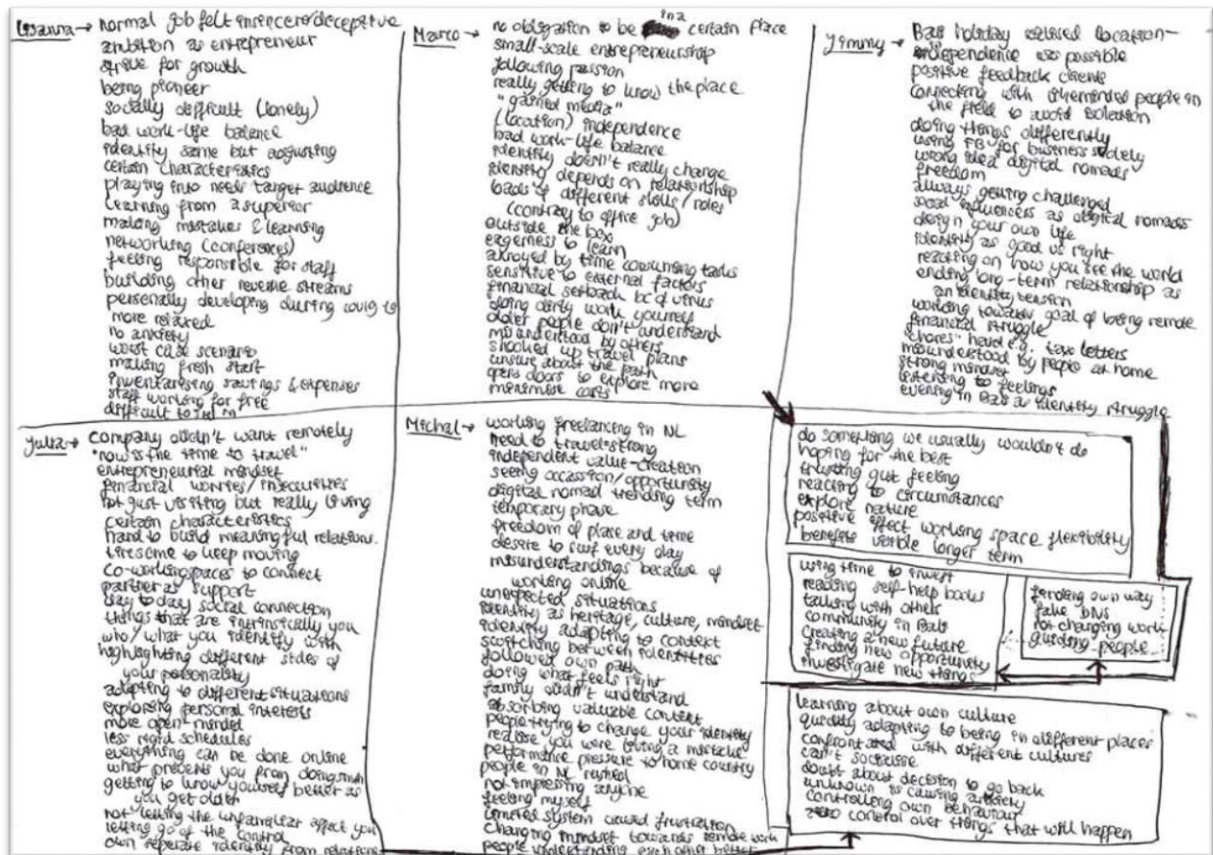

Figure 5: Step 3 in the thematic analysis: gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. Page 1 of 2 with codes per interviewee.

Figure 6: Step 3 in the thematic analysis: gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. Page 2 of 2 with codes per interviewee.
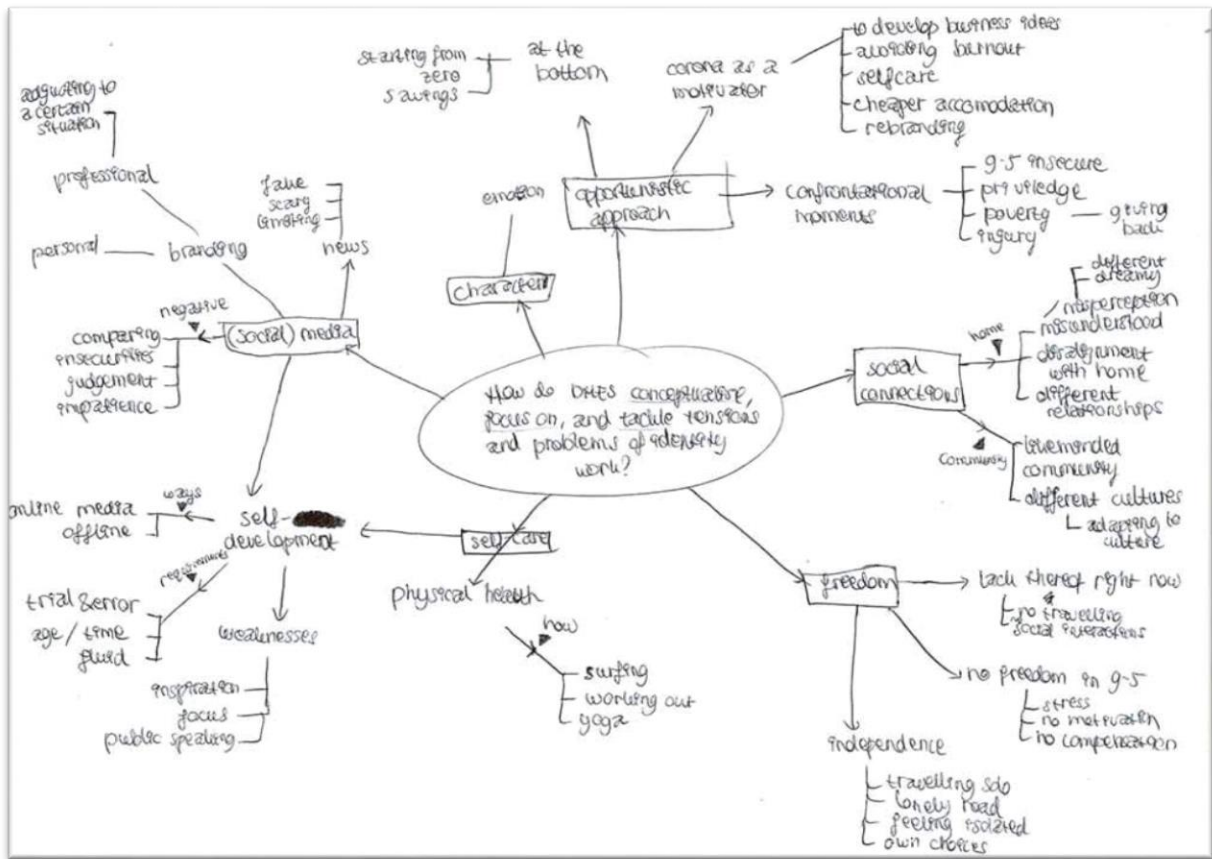
Figure 7: Step 3 in the thematic analysis: collating codes into themes. This is a mindmap that has 6 main themes.

In step 4, the themes are reviewed in order to see if check work in relation to the coded extracts. The goal was to generate a thematic map of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analysing the mindmap of step 3, five preliminary themes were created, which can be found in Figure 8. These themes then formed the basis for a new mindmap or thematic map. The 269 codes from step 3 were assigned to the 5 main themes, while trying to generate sub-themes on the go. All 269 were read, analysed, grouped, and added to the map. This resulted into a thematic map with 5 main themes, 28 sub-themes, and 148 sub-sub-themes, that can be seen in Figure 9.

Figure 8: Step 4 in the thematic analysis: collating codes into themes. The mindmap is reconsidered, taking the data into account and this has formed 5 preliminary themes.
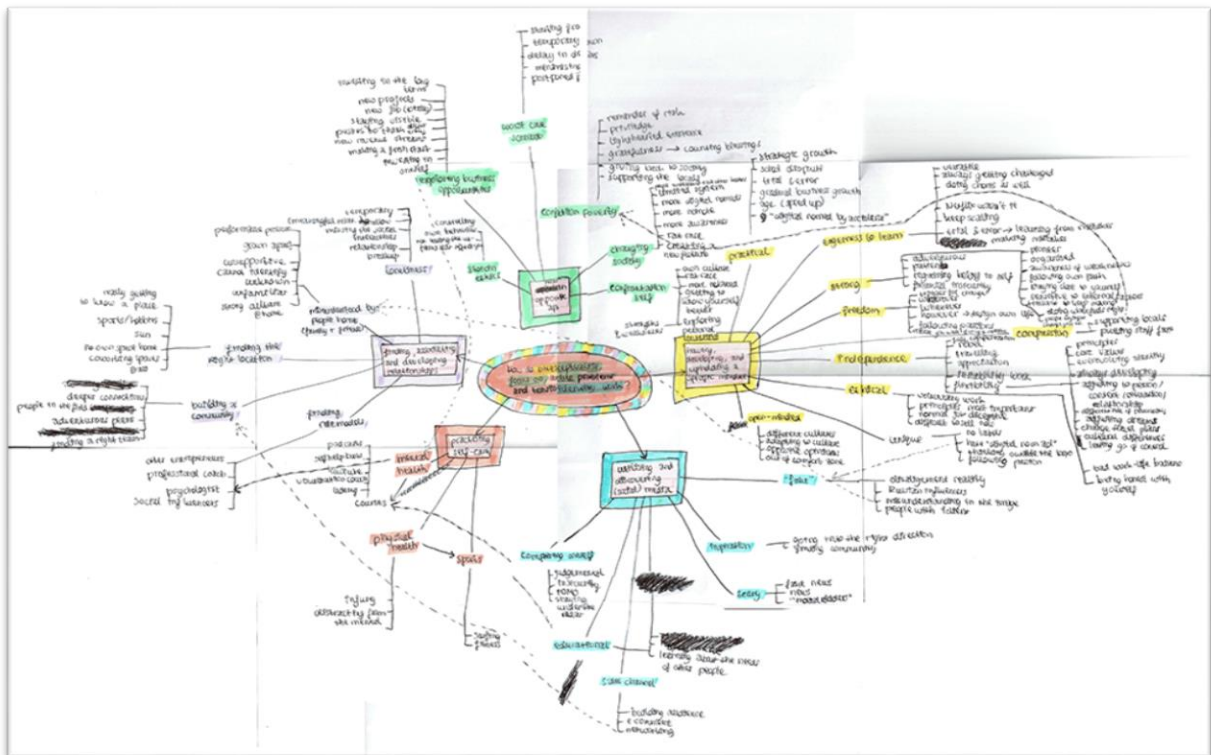
Figure 9: Step 4 in the thematic analysis: checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts. Five themes were defined. A full-size graph is available upon request.

Step 5 involved defining and naming the themes. In the aim to size down the mindmap of step 4 (since it took up 4 A4 sheets of paper), another type of visualisation was chosen. Two themes were merged, which resulted into 4 main themes instead of 5. Additionally, the themes were renamed to make them more entailing and academic. The number of sub-themes was narrowed down to 28, which were then clear definitions and names for each theme and sub-theme. To create a coherent visualisation, these 28 sub-themes were written down and cut out. An empty Venn diagram was created and the 28 themes were shuffled around until they all made sense. In a Venn graph, the core is to find overlap (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Futing Liao, 2007). For example, a sub-theme of retaining an opportunistic approach is 'exploring business opportunities'. This sub-theme applies to the main theme of finding, associating, and developing relationships as well. Because this analysis has four themes, it has four circles, which means that there are four areas where three themes overlap. For example, building a community was a sub-theme originally created in the theme of the relationships but also applies to utilising and discovering media (using social media to find the right people and build a community) and retaining an opportunistic approach (finding like-minded people in times of crisis). The complete visualisation can be found in the figure below.
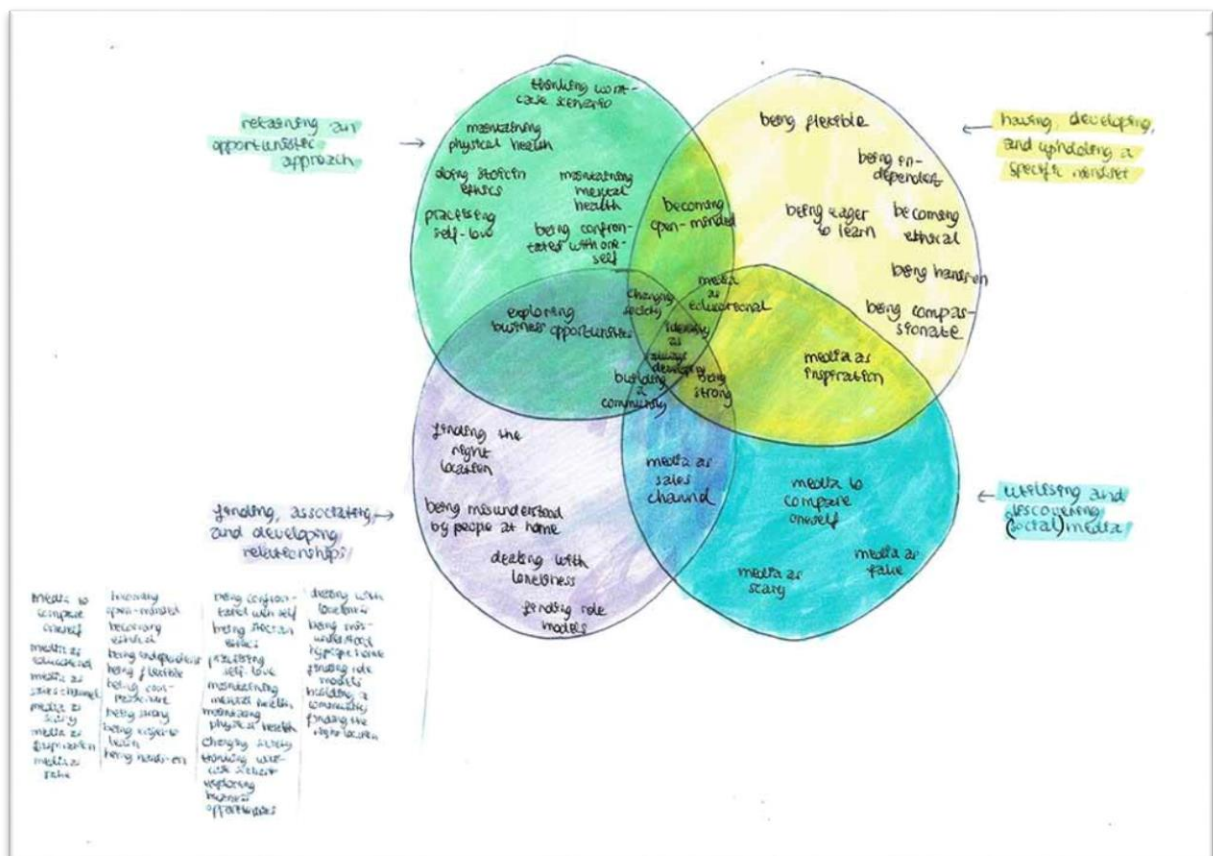
Figure 10: Step 5 in the thematic analysis: refining the specifics of each team. Defining the Venn diagram.

The sixth and final step of the thematic analysis involved writing up the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was the most time-intensive step of the analysis and was spread over a few days. The scholarly report of the analysis was produced by re-reading the full thematic analysis and the transcripts in order to select vivid and compelling extract examples. At all times, it was essential to map out the connection with the research question. This resulted into the results chapter with a description of the results and examples of extracts. A comparison with the literature was extensively done in the conclusion and discussion section, where the themes were also connected to each other and the overall research and analysis was reflected on.

First-order concept/observations	Second-order themes/categories	Aggregate dimensions/themes
• Identity keeps changing but principles stay the same • Having core values that stay the same in identity development • Identity is ever evolving • Who you are adjusts to the person, context, situation, and relationship • COVID19 caused necessary adjustments of dreams and travel plans	Being flexible	Having, developing, and upholding a specific mindset
• Lack of full compensation and appreciation in a normal job as an identity trigger • Being rebellious previously and currently • Travelling as an identity trigger given the need for organisation and independence • Experience of insecurity and instability in both the financial and personal context • Need for an adventurous character	Being independent/strong	
• Doing voluntary work • Having honesty and principles at core • Considering the previous jobs deceptive • Putting staff and other people first	Becoming ethical/compassionate	
• Need to be versatile • Experience an atmosphere of always getting challenged • Learning by trial and error	Being eager to learn	
• Having to go out of the comfort zone • Experiencing, dealing with, and learning from cultural differences	Becoming open-minded	

• Being judgemental can go unnoticed and one can be judged himself/herself as well • Insecurity can come to light and be emphasised through social media • Feeling of missing out because of social media • Using social media to see how identity can be strengthened and revised	Media to compare oneself	Utilising and discovering (social) media
• News does not help to think solution-focused and scares • News can be untruthful with unconfirmed facts	Media as scary	
• Social media can help to create an online image that does not align with reality • Perception of misalignment in reality on digital nomads' social media channels • Occurrence of 'wannabe' digital nomads	Media as fake	
• Using social media to build an audience • Using social media to network	Media as sales channel	
• Using media to reveal and work on weaknesses • Using online courses, podcasts, books, and YouTube (videos) to develop personally and professionally	Media as a source of knowledge	
• Dissatisfaction with depth of relationships • Having the same characteristics as people in their newly acquired community to construe and overcome such difficulties • Struggle to find the right team • Finding roles models to resolve identity struggles and develop an (entrepreneurial) identity	Building a community	Finding, associating, and developing relationships
• Co-working spaces as location to develop identity • Bali as a place where digital nomads assemble • Struggling to really getting to know a place • Struggling to find a place where passions can be embraced	Finding the right location	
• Friends, family, and acquaintances in home countries were unfamiliar or could not identify with digital nomadism as a lifestyle • Growing apart with friends back home; gradual process of identities and interests that divergence	Being misunderstood by the people at home	
• Misunderstanding of the social pressure and loneliness by the people back home • Lack of deep relationship can lead to loneliness • Missing out on social interactions as a result of COVID19 • Relationship breakup as identity trigger	Dealing with loneliness	

• COVID19, the security measures, and the effects on business and the economy as a way to make a fresh start • Looking into different revenue streams, related work, new business ideas • Thinking worst-case scenario	Exploring business opportunities	
• COVID19 caused a confrontation with the self that manifested in a few different ways • Realisation of performance pressure and opportunity to take a step back • Confrontation with privilege and risk and acting upon it	Being confronted with oneself	Retaining an opportunistic approach
• COVID19 as a boost for remote working • COVID19 as an opportunity to create a new future and change society for good	Changing society	
• Tackling COVID19 by staying physically active • Using the time to invest in self	Practising self-love	
• Realisation of the need to stay calm and acting upon it • Not letting the unfamiliar affect you	Doing Stoian ethics	

Table 5: Coding tree containing first a second order observations/concepts with dimensions/themes.

Ethical Implications

Engaging in ethical research involves awareness of potential confrontations, potential harm, vulnerable people, disturbance to the research site, own interaction, and own ignorance (Brennen, 2017). Furthermore, it is important to maintain accuracy, fairness, confidentially, respect, sensitivities, and anonymity.

To tackle most ethical concerns, an informed consent form was sent out to the participants before conducting the interviews. This is a norm in which subjects (interviewees) base their voluntary participation in research projects on a full understanding of the possible risks (Babbie, 2011). The format provided by the Erasmus University Rotterdam was used and adjusted accordingly to fit the purpose and procedure of the research. The forms are attached separately, including signatures. This form included an introduction to the research and researcher, description of the research, overview of risks and benefits, indication for time involvement, claim for payments, overview of participants' rights, and ended with a section on contacts and questions. This showed fairness, accuracy, respect, and confidentiality as well as understanding and expression of possible harm and vulnerability.

On the note of privacy, confidentially, and anonymity, one of the participants wanted to remain anonymous. In her transcript, her name was already replaced by a pseudonym. The same happened with the name of her company. Although the other participants had agreed upon using their real first name, it was decided the change this to a pseudonym as well. The reason for this was the high level of personal information that could have resulted in feelings of unease when being able to be linked back to the person.

Another ethical implication was the consideration and awareness of the emotional state, which relates to the awareness of potential confrontations, harm, and vulnerability. It became apparent that some participants saw these interviews as a source of reflection that could help them in the process of development during the time of crisis. On the flip side, some questions and topics were quite personal and could lead to psychological harm (Babbie, 2011). To reduce this risk, topics that appeared to be too sensitive were avoided and the depth of these topics was decided by the participants.

With regards to the awareness of own interaction and own ignorance, it is important to outline that I am a digital nomad myself and my role as an entrepreneur and digital nomad could be an ethical concern. The concept of reflexivity comes into play, where I reflect on my role as researcher, taking my own values and beliefs into account. This risk was minimised by leaving most of the talking up to the participants and having semi-structured interviews instead of open interviews.

4.   Results

After conducting the thematic analysis as described in the previous chapter on methodology, four main themes emerged. These themes will now be presented in a textual format and are illustrated by exemplary quotes from the interview data. The goal of this chapter is to provide a clear overview of the results of the research, to build the foundation for discussing and concluding the results, in the aim to answer the research question (cf. Figueiredo et al., 2017).

Having, Developing, and Upholding a Specific Mindset

Being flexible

The first result that fits into the mindset theme is that of being flexible. This manifested in having an identity that keeps changing whereas the principles stay the same. This requires a flexible mindset. In the same line, the participants said to have core values that they identified themselves or a company with. These core values stayed the same in the identity development. Additionally, an interesting finding was that participants described identity as ever evolving. It became apparent in the interviews that identity is not a stable identity but rather requires a flexible mindset to change and adapt accordingly. Other participants described identity as something that requires adjusting to the person, context, situation, or relationship. According to some participants, who you are stays the same but your personality and how you behave is adjusted to the person. Larissa, founder and owner of a travel company in Australia, for example, describes how her core identity does not change but her behaviour is adjusted:

> *"(…) You adjust and you adapt to the industry that you're in, or the, the meeting that you're in, or (…) the conference that (…) you're in, (…) you'll adapt certain things. Like for example, I'm here and now I say fuck and shit and yay. And I do the same with my customers because we're really open or really personal. But if I'm on a conference talking to B2B relationships that are bigger companies, obviously I'm not gonna speak like that, but I'm still gonna be the same honest person that I am. And I'm still, you know, I, I might dress a little bit more chic, but I'm still not that posh person that pretends to know everything." (Larissa, 30, Dutch, currently in Australia)*

In this sense, it is important to have a flexible attitude towards identity development, since one should be open to change identity and work on it to adjust to the situation, person, or relationship. Through the frame of COVID19 specifically, the flexible mindset was needed because dreams and

(travel) plans had to be adjusted. Participants said that coronavirus had shaken up their travel plans and that flexibility was needed as a digital nomad at this point specifically.

Being independent/strong

One of the findings in this theme is that being a digital media entrepreneur (and more specifically, being a digital nomad) requires an independent and strong character. Identity work involves actions such as forming, repairing, maintaining, and strengthening, which calls for having, developing, and upholding an independent and strong mindset. Some participants claimed that lack of compensation and appreciation in their current jobs had led to an identity trigger. For example, Emma worked for a travel company in Australia where she never felt she got full compensation for it, before she started to become a business coach.

Another motive in the research was that of being rebellious – may it be in the past and ongoing or as started from being an entrepreneur. Some participants claimed to be rebels and different during their childhood and puberty, which for example signified in their soft drugs use or excessive desire to travel. Digital nomads are a specific group consisting of people that are different than everyone else and who are often on their own. Being independent and different is a core value of their identity. They are also different than the people at home, which relates to the third theme of finding, associating, and developing relationships.

For some participants, the process of entrepreneurial identity work has been triggered by travelling in general. Independence is at the core of identity work among digital nomads since it's so related to being alone during travelling. For example, Christian is the founder and CEO of an IT-company and says that travelling requires organisation, independence, and flexibility;

> *"(…) actually travelling, digital nomads... Not that easy. Everybody thinks like 'Okay, these guys are just living on the beach and dream life,' but it's not like that. You have to work for it, you have to organise a lot to go any place you don't know anybody. So that's quite a challenge, it's not super easy. So you also discover some parts of yourself." (Christian, 36, Swiss, currently in Switzerland)*

While entrepreneurship and freelancing generally entail more insecurity and instability of work and finances, digital nomadism adds this layer of 'starting from zero all the time', according to the participants. This concerns both the personal and professional situation. On a personal level, making new friends and finding your spot at a new place requires an independent and strong

mindset. For example, Quinn works as a freelance photographer in Bali and claims this constant search for clients to be a downside of digital nomadism;

> *"If I am going to somewhere new, I have to start from zero and find new clients. And it's not like - I've been in the Netherlands, I know this company, I know that company, I can just read out and get some work." (Quinn, 25, Dutch, currently in Indonesia)*

Elaborating on being able to deal with this constant travelling and instability, being a digital nomad requires an adventurous character. As became apparent in the interviews, digital nomads are not just tourists and are effectively part of the community that they are temporarily part of. This might be a clash with who they were or whom others think they are of were.

Becoming ethical/compassionate

In their identity work during COVID19, the participants said to do voluntary work and support the locals as much as possible. This shows an ethical and compassionate mindset as a part of the specific mindset digital nomads have. In the interviews, it became apparent that the participants wanted to give back to the community, especially in these times of crisis. In poorer countries such as Indonesia, people are currently starving because of a lack of income that COVID19 has caused, the participants claimed. One example is that of Quinn doing voluntary work: *"(…) if you're enjoying the sun at the pool with a Bintang and stuff, and you take a sip of the Bintang and you're still thinking about this kid that you saw when you were bringing food and you were filming it (…) - I feel a little bit guilty for feeling this." (Quinn, 25, Dutch, currently in Indonesia).*

By the same token, the ethical aspect of their mindset relates to having principles at the core. Being honest and having honesty as a core value turned out to be important to the interviewed digital nomads. The desire to be ethical and stick to principles might have developed as a result of COVID19. Elaborating on this honesty facet, the participants said to find their older jobs deceptive. This has functioned as an identity trigger for some and has encouraged entrepreneurship. For example, Larissa explained how she was annoyed by the way the company was structured and the way she had to sell, as it included lying and deceiving. She described how this was not the way she wanted to do her work and decided to prove that she knew a better way to do this. She started her company as a result.

A final motif that flows from this ethical and compassionate mindset is the fact that the participants put their staff first. Corona forced some entrepreneurs to fire employees. It turned out

that they were more worried about these people than themselves. This shows their inner drive to be compassionate. Larissa had to fire all 14 of her employees because of COVID19; *"I find it mainly annoying for my staff because they, you know, they... I feel responsible for (…) for having a job for them and then making that happen"* (Larissa, 30, Dutch, currently in Australia). Christian, in turn, had to postpone hiring a new developer and will not pay himself a salary in 2020; *"We still have some money on the bank. A last resort would be just to not pay salaries to the owners." (Christian, 36, Swiss, currently in Switzerland)*

Being eager to learn

The third sub-theme of upholding a certain mindset is that of being eager to learn. Versatility turns out to be the basis for the identity work of a digital nomad. They have learned as digital nomads and entrepreneur that they have to do a lot of things themselves, from chores to accounting. This triggered their need to develop and ability to learn new things. Mario has started a company about spiritual coaching with his girlfriend in January and says:

> *"(…) you have to do some dirty work that you usually do and that sometimes, like creating some Excel sheets to 2000 rows of Excel sheets that we messed up that needs to be fixed and all these kind of small things. It takes a lot of time. Not in a company in which you just ask another team to do it. (…) You need to put yourself into different roles. Into different identities. Be more flexible with the context because you are doing so many other things. (…) we are in control of literally everything. You really open up your mind to what you can do. The pricing, the community, the marketing strategy. Literally everything is under our control."*
> *(Mario, 29, German, currently in Cambodia)*

Expanding on this topic, the participants also claimed to get challenged all the time. As explained earlier, being a digital nomad requires a strong character and compelling organisational skills. For example, Jos, who started an online recruitment company from Bali, said: *"(…) always being challenged because it is new, every day is new" (Jos, 34, Dutch, currently in the Netherlands)* This relates to identity work in the sense that identity work concerns strengthening and revising one's position in society and doubting oneself as a result of getting challenged constantly. Here, a mindset of eagerness to learn turned out to be compulsory for the (entrepreneurial) identity work of the digital nomads under question.

Finally, the mindset of being eager to learn became apparent in the trial and error mindset of the participants. Some participants have experienced gradual business growth and self-

development. This experimental aspect has been an important part of their identity and who they are; they doubt themselves and that fuelled their identity work. For example, Pieter is currently looking into dropshipping as COVID19 has heavily impacted the online travel business he is running, but he had also tried many things before, from online courses to blogs. Although he claims that most of it never really got anywhere, he perceives it as training to create better products and experiences.

Becoming open-minded

The last motif concerning upholding, developing, and upholding a certain mindset is becoming open-minded. The participants said they had to go out of their comfort zone constantly. This topic is briefly covered in the instability and insecurity motif. In the process of becoming digital nomads and developing their identity, the participants had to go out of their comfort zone. One participant, Isabel, runs her e-commerce store from Bali and thinks digital nomads are special because of their creativity and open-mindedness. She said:

> *"(…) digital nomads are (…) challenged to think more outside of the box because of, being somewhere else or just being, like very obviously learn a lot about all the different cultures they experience. So I do think (…), that they're just like very open-minded people in general and have very high social skills and yeah, just the creative mindset to figure things out even more than just general entrepreneurs because (…) travelling and meeting so many people from different cultures just gives you a lot of people knowledge." (Isabel, 28, Dutch, currently in Indonesia).*

Expanding on this notion of cultural differences, this has been a topic that has been raised by a few participants. According to the participants, cultural differences can be an identity trigger because it forces to adjust to a certain culture. It brings people-knowledge and makes one self-aware of ones' identity. As Juliette, a remote employee in blockchain, explains:

> *"(…) A lot of the things that you think of as your identity and you identify with (…) is tied to your home and the people you're surrounded with, your family, your friends, where you live. And like when all of those things are taken away and it's just like you in this random country, like with (…) people who don't know you and don't have any background, you're just a random person. It does kind of force you to think more about like, 'who am I'? And especially when you're exposed to different people, like I've learned so much about my own culture, just being exposed to other people and realising what's different. Like with my Dutch friend and I, for example. Like she's always telling me how, like, it's so funny that our South Africans are so diplomatic.*

And you know, we, someone says, 'where do you want to go for dinner?' We'll say, 'oh, I don't mind. Anywhere is fine.' And she was like, 'no'. If you're a Dutch person, (…) you'll be like, 'I want to go there, this is what I want to do.'" (Juliette, 29, South African, currently in South Africa).

Utilising and Discovering (Social) Media

The participants said that media played an important role in the development of their identity for the shorter term (coping with COVID19) and the longer-term (entrepreneurial or professional development in the broadest and ever evolving sense). The second theme found in the thematic analysis, then, was that of utilising and discovering (social) media. This manifested in both positive and negative patterns.

Media to compare oneself

The first pattern was that of utilising media to compare oneself. One result is that social plays an important role in identity development since it is a place where being judgemental can go unnoticed. It works both ways; one can be judgemental to others or can be the one being judged. It raises the question what the social identity in the context is and what their own identity is. Instagram is named as an example by Pieter, as he compares the social media platform TikTok to Instagram; TikTok has a different algorithm than Instagram and does not require any followers. In turn, one does not have any family and friends that can be judgemental, which raises the extent to which one is ashamed.

Related to this notion of judgement, the participants said that social media specifically can be used by people to project themselves in a way that they are not, which comes from a feeling of insecurity. One can use social media to compare oneself with others to see if other people have a better life. Some interviewees did this too, others wanted to stay away from this. Sarah is one example of an interviewee who used digital media in her entrepreneurial and personal development. She is an online lawyer employing a few freelancers and being very active on her own Instagram. She said:

> *"I actually think it is holding me back somewhere to develop further. I am one of those people who will compare me to people and especially those people who will not unfollow while they are busy. I think it's just kind of limiting me somewhere, that*

I'm going to watch too much what other people do and achieve, a Celine Charlotte. I am just not her." (Sarah, 30, Dutch, currently in the Netherlands)

By the same token, the interviewees felt they were missing out if they were not travelling. Currently, COVID19 is forcing them to stay home and is limiting the travelling possibilities heavily. On the other hands, their followers feel like they are missing out from the travel lifestyle that the interviewees communicate via social media.

On a more positive note of using social media for comparing purposes, a result of the interviews is that digital nomads use social media to gauge how other entrepreneurs are developing their identities and to see whether they are going in the right direction. The latter has become apparent during COVID19. The participants are talking to others to see where points of improvements are. This relates to identity in the sense that they compare their own identity with the collective or social identity, in a positive way. It helps to discover how identity can be strengthened and revised. For example, as Isabel explains: *"I like to follow a lot of entrepreneurs, like female entrepreneurs on Instagram too, just to see what their daily things are or like, yeah, to stay productive and stuff like that."* (Isabel, 28, Dutch, in Indonesia).

Media as scary

It turns out media can also be something scary in the identity work of digital nomads. A frequently mentioned example is that of news. Multiple interviewees claim to not watch or like watching the news, as it makes them scared. This, in turn, can influence their productivity and sense of security. As Emma explains:

"I was really watching the news and it freaked me out because we have not watched the news and like four or five, six years. We stopped doing it for a reason, obviously, because it was fear and it comes out in the media. But then when you start to see it as all happening and you see the borders starting to close, you kind of want it to be up to date on what's happening in the world. And then you get articles from friends and family and you see stuff on social media, and that's when you start diving deeper into it. And then you to start your morning every day with like an hour of media consumption. You just start to freak out. So at some point we just said to ourselves like, 'okay, five minutes of checking up on the recent numbers and statistics' and stuff like that, and honestly, over the last two weeks, we have not even done that anymore because we're just like, at some point when the borders open, we'll just see it somewhere, you know? We'll just like kind of see what happens."

Another scary part is the untruthfulness of news on (social) media. Some facts are not confirmed yet but people do not do a fact check. This causes insecurity and can be an identity struggle for some. One interviewee, Quinn, explains that he does not trust the media and internet and that it has influenced the lives of many innocent locals:

> "I think the whole media is like going viral with all these fucking horror stories about corona and everybody freaked out and went home and left the people without jobs. And yeah - I think the people should have stayed, maybe. (…) Yeah, I understand why you would leave because the media is frightening people a lot (…) I don't know why I decided to follow the news. I think I was hearing some stories and then I was like - it's a shame, when you Google 'hey Google, I have stomach problems' and then it turns out that's stomach cancer. (…) They're just talking a lot of bullshit on the news. I haven't followed the news for like a couple years and I don't know when I did it now. I immediately regret it."

Media as fake

Social media was utilised and discovered in the sense that it allows someone to create a (digital) image that does not align with reality. According to some participants, what people post on their social media channels is not the real thing. There is a clash between who they are and who they want to be, which is an identity tension or struggle can manifest on social media. One example is given by Pieter, who saw a misalignment of reality by Russian influencers in Bali:

> "I just see the way they are. It's a totally different culture and how they - you know, they stage their photos and videos with like super cool motors and girls in shorts and like bikinis and tattoos and ribs and sun glasses and like - I don't know, I don't think that's who they truly are. Or maybe it is, maybe they are like that. At least - like 99% - a lot of them will go back home and do their 9 to 5 pizza delivery. Maybe, I don't know if that's what they do, haha." (Pieter, 26, Dutch, currently in Indonesia)

By the same token, the interviewees expressed a perceived misalignment in reality on their own social media channels. Commonly mentioned was the fact that life as a digital nomad is relaxed, easy, and solely filled with joy and fun. Sarah explained how she felt frustrated when experiencing people thinking she did not do anything all day. She felt obligated to post that she was working as well, as a variation on her posts from the beach, intending to show people she was not just relaxing all day. Likewise, Marek is a user experience designer that has studied in the Netherlands and

explains this as a downside of digital nomadism: *"I think most people don't realise, even if you are at Bali, you still have problems." (Marek, 23, Polish, currently in Indonesia)*

An ultimate way in which media can be fake is that aspiring or 'wannabe' digital nomads pretend like they are digital nomads, whereas they are just travelling and not performing the work aspect of digital nomadism. This can be an identity struggle for them to experience as well as to see others doing it. This links back to the first-mentioned way but differentiates in a way that it is about digital media entrepreneurship specifically and not simply about having a gap between a portrayed online identity and the real identity.

Media as sales channel

Especially in these times of the coronavirus and crisis, the interviewees said to use social media to build an audience. Media served as a sales channel as digital media entrepreneurs claimed to use media a lot to build their business and grow their audience. While some mentioned Instagram as the main sales channel (for example, Sarah the online lawyer and Isabel with her e-commerce business), others said to get the most benefit out of LinkedIn (among others, Jos with his online recruitment business) or Facebook (Larissa with her Facebook-groups about travelling). Social media, then, plays an essential role in building an online business. As explained by Emma:

> *"I would say especially as an online entrepreneur, if you do entrepreneurship and you want to be able to live in different countries around the world and you don't want to set up a physical business, then of course you go down the path of doing something online. Social media as a big part of that, I would say like 90% all of that is where obviously the revenue can come from." (Emma, 28, Dutch, currently in South Africa)*

Relating this to identity, a personal brand is often related to a professional brand. The way someone builds an audience says something about their identity, values, and personality. Media is currently often utilised in an audience building and sales-generating way by the digital nomads. This will be further elaborated on in the final theme about the (business) opportunistic way.

Another way in which media has served as a sales channel in the identity work of digital nomads was that of networking. Social media can be used to find the right people to connect with. This, in turn, can influence their identity. This motif is explored and described more extensively in the third theme, highlighting the role of relationships.

Media as a source of knowledge

Lastly, media was used as a source of knowledge by the interviewees. They used media to develop themselves both personally and professionally. COVID19 entailed an increasing amount of spare time for the digital nomads, as a result of a lack of work and security measures that limited social interactions. As a result, the interviewees said to be using social media to develop themselves and to be confronted with their weaknesses in order to work on this. Some participants named online courses to be their (media) source of knowledge. Juliette explained how Udemy has taught her how to code through relatively cheap online classes.

Other interviewees named podcasts, such as Emma: *"(…) I think podcast is very powerful to to get new knowledge from people that have already done it and are successful and do certain things that you want to do versus actually connecting with those people and in person." (Emma, 28, Dutch, currently in South Africa)*

Then, some participants used books as a medium for their identity development and to solve identity struggles. For example, Christian was confronted with the fact that he was struggling to develop the entrepreneurial identity of being a leader and a manager;

> *"I'm leading a team. (…) So, that was pretty challenging with so many new people. (…) So what I did is just reading books about how to improve that... How to manage people there and whatever, to just get into it, be aware that you have to learn. It's not like you just know it and that's the way you do it. You really have to focus on it." (Christian, 36, Swiss, currently in Switzerland)*

A more visual medium that was frequently mentioned was YouTube. Some participants used YouTube to watch videos on personal and professional development in general. For example, Emma used it to watch informative videos on the current global situation or to learn about limited beliefs, running a company, or developing herself in-depth regarding different topics. Others have used YouTube as an essential source for skills that were required for digital media entrepreneurship. Marek watches as much valuable content as possible; *"YouTube, Instagram, I always look for high quality design, workshop or high-quality surf videos. I use videos, audiobook, and I try to pick high quality stuff." (Marek, 23, Polish, currently in Indonesia)*

Finding, Associating, and Developing Relationships

It became apparent that relationships were essential in the process of resolving and conceptualising identity struggles in the broadest sense. As with the media theme, this was both negatively and positively. A few motifs could be differentiated.

Building a community

Building a community turned out to be a fundamental way to conceptualise, focus on, and tackle tensions and problems of identity work, both in the context of COVID19 and generally (before and after that). Participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the depth of their connections. They explained how digital nomadism makes it difficult to build deeper connections. According to Juliette, people want to find friends and community, because bouncing around every month or two is not enough to build proper connections with people. At the same time, digital nomads 'group' at a certain place, such as a co-working space. This makes it easier to find like-minded people, since one has similar interests and shared identity traits, as is the case with a collective identity. Some participants explained that they found support in the digital nomad community in terms of identity given the fact that these people had been through the same identity struggles and tensions. Being misunderstood by the people at home, dealing with instability, being unsatisfied with a 9-5 job (in the past), coping with COVID19 and its security measures, and continuous loneliness were given as examples of such identity struggles.

Trying to define and cope with tensions and problems that occurred in the process of forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, and revising their identity, some digital nomads have named having the same characteristics as people in their newly acquired community as a way to construe and overcome such difficulties. Summarising the first theme, digital nomads require to have and maintain a certain mindset if they want to be successful and overcome identity tensions and struggles. For example, digital nomads have this adventurous character and have had a similar journey. These shared characteristics were named to be important for building a community, given the fact that one is in the same field and shares common traits. Finding these people can be difficult and is a time-consuming process. Consequently, one identity struggle that was named was that of finding the right team. Not everyone understands digital nomadism and can work with the people who are living this lifestyle. Christian explained how building trust is the most important in building a team. This has influenced how digital nomads perceive their own skills and develop their identity.

Finally, finding role models has often been named as an essential tool or way to resolve identity struggles and develop an (entrepreneurial) identity. Role models can vary from other

entrepreneurs, coaches, psychologists, or social influencers. This can trigger identity and identity work in the sense that people compare themselves with these role models. Pieter described how he got inspired by this entrepreneur that he was an intern for during his last years of high school. This entrepreneur functioned as a role model for him, as Pieter was not aware of the opportunities of entrepreneurship before that. Pieter identified this confrontational period as an identity trigger that resolved his identity struggle of not having finished high school and not knowing what kind of job he wanted. Likewise, Emma described how she got inspired by the people in her community:

> "I used to see all these other people on social media and our network and in other masterminds that are making millions of dollars and you want to go towards that. But I still, I... Totally started forgetting that I will only get there when I actually grow myself. (…) These people are like living this life. You know? I was like, 'that - that's so cool. I want to do that as well.' So that's when you have a bigger goal and you want to make a little money per month, but that also requires some work." (Emma, 28, Dutch, currently in South Africa)

Some participants also said to have used these people to work on their own identity, as identity work among others concerns maintaining and repairing the constructions that are productive of an insecure sense of coherence. Especially in this time of COVID19, participants claimed to feel supported by such role models. For example, Juliette described how speaking to a psychologist remotely has helped her to recognise and get over her anxiety coping mechanism. She identified this mechanism in her constant need to have a rigid plan and have everything set out all the time. Being a digital nomad forced her to adjust her personality and let go of this need. This is something her remote psychologist has helped her to realise and undertake.

Finding the right location

Elaborating on the previous theme, finding the right location appeared to be essential in the identity work of digital nomads. As briefly mentioned, co-working spaces function as a suitable location for digital nomads to develop their identity since these places are designed for digital nomads. They have gained popularity among digital media entrepreneurs and are places were digital nomads can be found a lot. This attracts even more digital nomads, given the previously outlined desire to build a community and surround oneself with like-minded people. Bali is an example of a place where digital nomads assemble. Four interviewees were based there at the time of conducting the interviews and five out of the seven remaining interviewees had been there in the past year. Bali was described as an ideal location for digital nomads because of the fast internet, relatively cheap

cost of living, level of (spatial) freedom, tropical weather (often contrary to their home countries), opportunities for physical exercise, and the ensuing high number of co-working spaces. Jos described how being on Bali was a crucial identity trigger for him:

> *"So I realised when I was in Bali that this is how life should be. Working in the morning, then go to the beach, then go for a few hours work, then go to the gym, for example, then hang out with friends, then work. It makes me happy every day because I designed my own life. (…) I was at the beach, it was the first day on Bali and then I realised 'okay, what the fuck do I still… why do I still stay in Holland, why?' No one is telling me that that I have to be in Holland all the time because now I have the opportunity to do something what I really like. (…) You know, it was already dark. There was the moon, it was very bright, the beach was… the ocean was wild, huge waves. I was in a small local (…) warung. It was perfect. The first day I realised: this is going to change my life." (Jos, 34, Dutch, currently in the Netherlands)*

Finding the right location was described as essential for digital nomads and their identity development because digital nomads really get to know a place. They cannot be described as tourists since they spend a considerate amount of time in a place and are not just tourists. They spend time to find their way in it. This can also be a struggle since digital nomadism by definition entails spending time working as well. It discloses a tension between exploring a place in a fun way or being productive workwise. As Mario described:

> *"But while you are travelling, you do have a lot of amazing things to discover every day (…) And for private things could be sometimes challenging. Like 'oh we really wanted to see that bridge over there but tomorrow we are leaving.' It is a bit frustrating sometimes." (Mario, 29, German, currently in Cambodia)*

In their search for the right location, the participants named embracing their location conditional passions such as surfing or sunbathing as an identity tension. Sometimes, finding a way to embrace their passions was perceived as a fun challenge – while other times, this was a real struggle and was perceived negatively. For example, Marek's passion is surfing and he had to quit his normal job to be able to pursue this passion, which was not understood by his parents and friends.

Being misunderstood by people at home

A predominant identity trigger that can be concluded from the interviews was the misunderstanding by the people at home. The interviewees said that their friends, family, and

acquaintances in their home country were unfamiliar or could not identify with digital nomadism as a lifestyle. There turned out to be a gap or clash between the lives of the people at home and the digital nomads themselves. The people at home simply have not had the same experience and cannot relate to the digital nomads. For example, Marek described how his parents and friends from Poland were not supporting his decision to study in the Netherlands and to go live in Indonesia since they were not familiar with having a passion for surfing and building a freelance career. Likewise, Larissa described how she would come up with business ideas and her friends would label it as 'tiresome'. Confrontations and moments like this made the digital nomads feel misunderstood and ultimately caused a reconsideration and revision of their identity.

A similar motif was that of growing apart with friends back home. This is an extension on the previously mentioned motif but differentiates in the sense that it is a gradual process of identities and interests that divergence. For example, Pieter described how he came back home after a while of travelling as a digital nomad and noticed how he had grown apart in ambitions with his friends. On a positive note, he mentioned, this did not eliminate the friendship but rather change it to a more platonic relationship ('beer and tits'). Additionally, it made him appreciate ambitious and like-minded friends even more and made him connect with his digital nomad friends on a deeper level. Christian found it challenging to stay in contact with his friends in Switzerland and said that the ones that had not gone very deep were now dissolving. Upon his return back home, he concluded that some friends were not friends anymore. Reflecting on his identity development, Christian stated that he had become a lot more social and open-mined, while not being able to say the same about his friends back home. Juliette said a similar thing, noticing that she had unconsciously personally and professionally grown over the past few years of being a digital nomad. In sum, the interviewees explained how they had grown as a person and had become independent. This caused a clash when being in contact with friends from back home again and formed an identity struggle for some.

Dealing with loneliness

Often, the interviewees named loneliness as one of the downsides of digital nomadism. Also, the interviewed digital media entrepreneurs said that the people they directly or indirectly worked with were usually not aware of this loneliness. They underestimate the pressure and the psychological consequences of this lack of social interaction. As Juliette describes it:

> *"Like there are a lot of my friends who are working normal jobs who are like, 'Oh, I would love to be remote'. And then I say to them like, 'just remember that you're probably like, you're by yourself most of the day. Like, especially if you're an*

entrepreneur, you'd by yourself.' And like a lot of people are put off by that because

they really need that social connection in that day to day." (Juliette, 29, South

African, currently in South Africa).

This prominent identity struggle was solved in different ways by the participants. For example, Pieter started a WhatsApp group with entrepreneurs in the town in Bali he was based and networked from there. Now, during COVID19, he has like-minded entrepreneurs as housemates, which reduced his loneliness. Other participants have had a lot of support from their partners. Some participants tried to surround themselves with entrepreneurs that had walked down a similar path.

As briefly touched upon earlier, the lack of deep relationships can lead to loneliness. By definition, digital nomads stay somewhere long enough to not be considered a tourist but short enough to not be considered a migrant or expat. This temporary aspect of digital nomadism, then, makes it difficult to build strong relationships. On the note of digital nomads leaving over and over again, Pieter explains: *"There's been really cool people that then - like, your path just split. That's a pity." (Pieter, 26, Dutch, currently in Indonesia)*

Through the frame of COVID19 specifically, the interviewees expressed a feeling of missing social interactions, even though four out of the eleven participants had returned to their home country after the outbreak of the coronavirus. One of those interviewees is Sarah, who returned to the Netherlands just before the outbreak in the Netherlands. She named this as her main problem during COVID19; *"The biggest problem I really have really simple with social contacts. Everything got cancelled and you were really looking forward to just being here once." (Sarah, 30, Dutch, currently in the Netherlands)*

Interestingly, four out of the eleven participants named a relationship breakup as a trigger to explore or continue the digital nomad lifestyle. Some booked their ticket abroad (for example, to America or Indonesia) right after the break-up, while others used the tensions from this break-up to become stronger and picking up living their dream life. As Sarah describes:

"The whole cliché story that I lived with my ex, the relationship was over and I couldn't

find anything else quickly enough and then I went to America with my laptop I worked a

little more often than I had intended. And found that journey the next journey and the

next, and the next. (...) I always worked digitally, but I never really made the connection

of 'oh yes, then I can also work abroad.' It indeed happened by accident, I always called

myself 'digital nomad by accident'." (Sarah, 30, Dutch, currently in the Netherlands)

Retaining an Opportunistic Approach

The final theme concerns seeing opportunities and applies specifically to the current pandemic (COVID19) for the biggest part. It became apparent that in their identity work, the interviewees solved identity tensions, struggles, problems, and issues by retaining an opportunistic approach. Several ways of being assertive, avid, and optimistic can be distinguished.

Exploring business opportunities

First and foremost, it turned out that the participants approached and perceived COVID19, the security measures, and the effects on business and the economy as a way to make a fresh start. It could be an opportunity to start a new job, project, or revenue stream. It allows to start from zero again and see it as a development opportunity. For example, at the moment, Larissa is shifting her focus to expanding in different countries, learning about e-commerce, looking into advertising opportunities, and reconsidering her focus on (business) Facebook groups. In the end, she hopes to generate seven streams of income. Pieter has also started up secondary streams of revenue by looking into dropshipping instead of solely focussing on the growth of his travel-based online company. Likewise, Emma has spent her time in quarantine in South Africa talking to other entrepreneurs and brainstorming with her boyfriend about this new business idea. She is currently looking into focussing her business on high-paying clients that have a strong desire to scale, grow, and develop. Quinn saw a large decline of clients since surf photography was not possible anymore due to precautionary measures. He decided to spend the 'gained' time using his skills to create videos as a volunteer. This has so far resulted in much appreciation and career-wise, it has helped him to develop skills and build his portfolio. These examples illustrate how the interviewees have taken an opportunistic approach to look at this as a business opportunity and to use this to make a fresh start. It has been an identity struggle to some as to how to behave during this crisis. In this sense, COVID19 has functioned as an identity trigger from a business perspective.

Another way in which business opportunities were explored was by thinking worst-case scenario, as this quote by Christian illustrates:

> *"Three weeks ago, it was really hard. So it's like zero, but now it's, I'm starting again, so we can still get new clients, but probably less than before. (…) We had nothing and you can't lose more than nothing. So for us, even if you, even if we would lose (…) everything, it would be fine. Then I could start something new."*

Other participants had similar experiences, with all the staff already laid off or their income already at zero. Founder of an e-commerce store Isabel, for example, realised that her company would be able to survive the delay in the shipping. Once she realised this was the worst-case scenario, she was able to overcome the tensions and anxiety that COVID19 provoked. This adds to the previous notion of looking at it as a business opportunity but highlights this optimistic approach, as the participants showed strength and flexibility by taking this opportunistic approach.

Being confronted with oneself

The retainment of an opportunistic approach in times of crisis and identity problems became apparent in the expression of being confronted with oneself. COVID19 caused a confrontation with the self that manifested in a few different ways. The participants expressed COVID19 as an opportunity to explore personal interests and coming back to the core of identity. It turned out that this time of crisis functioned as an occasion to get to know oneself better. Participants said that corona was leaving them alone with themselves and confronting them with their own behaviour. For example, Emma said she realised she had been too busy working for clients and put herself on the background, which she then changed.

On the note of social pressure, the participants claimed that they experienced high performance pressure because of the high expectations from their home countries – may it be from the entrepreneurial culture (such as in the Netherlands) or their peers back home. They had been working extremely hard. This confrontational moment made them question themselves, social identity, and their own identity. Marek explains how he had such an identity realisation moment a few years ago:

> *"If you are successful and do your hobbies, save money, have a successful career, then you start thinking like, 'what is that whole hustle?' In especially countries as in West of Europe, what is it all about? What is the purpose? I would never say things like that before I came here [in Indonesia]. But when you come here and I think that is an answer to your question, you start thinking about who you were before, what was in your head, you can actually do stuff differently. And that can make you a bit sad. Like you can go abroad, still be successful, you do stuff that you love. And then you can get sad. Because I was living in mistake for some time, you know? (…) "And don't get me wrong, I love the Netherlands and I like the people. But the rush and everybody kind of thinking about themselves... (…) I was earning a lot of money but spending it a lot on rent too. (…) For where I come from, it is impressive to work in a*

country like the Netherlands. And I was like 'no I am not impressing anyone. Why am I working so much?' So this specific moment was when I went to Berlin, to a company very close to my city, a place I know really good and I love. And I went out of the car and I thought 'I love it here, why am I in the Netherlands?' I felt myself there, not in the Netherlands. I felt like I belong. It was one moment. And at this moment, I am writing an email to my landlord and to my accountant friend. And I cancelled all the contracts that I had in the Netherlands just in one hour. I wrote to like ten people to cancel everything. And next week I am driving a big bus to the Netherlands to move out. This was the moment I know I can feel good in a lot of places. I don't need to do work I don't want to do. When I moved out, I was in Poland living with my parents and saved a lot of money and then I thought: 'let's do something with this.' And that was when I bought a ticket to Bali. And that is it." (Marek, 23, Polish, currently in Indonesia)

Going back to identity work and identity struggles in general, another way in which the opportunistic approach became apparent was by their confrontation with privilege and risk. Although this might appear to be negative and horrific at first, the influence on identity and solving identity struggles has been positive. For example, Quinn had a shoulder accident and realised his destructibility. He describes this as an important identity struggle as the recovery process forced him to stay physically inactive, travel back to the Netherlands, live with his parents again, and be confronted with his own thoughts. For him, it marked the end (or at least, a deduction) of his careless lifestyle, as he first-hand experienced that it could have consequences.

By the same token, participants claimed to be confronted with privilege in their journey of digital nomadism. One interesting identity struggle was that of Pieter. He explained how he received a message of a woman he had been intimate with without further romantic intentions, telling him she was about to give birth to his child. It heavily decreased his productivity and happiness. Ultimately, it turned out the child was not his and it felt to him like a new life had started. Consequently, he started his business and started living as a digital nomad. As he explains the relation to privilege:

"(...) it was fucking insane. (...) I don't want to call it privileged but such a light-hearted existence that you can just even have a family with one person that you really really like or even love and have like kids with like - that's just so precious. (...) I keep thinking like - before that, I didn't know how miserable someone could feel, probably. Or how situations - like personal situations can affect everything in your life. Everything. That's so blocked. Probably just even more grateful for all the

privileges, I guess. This really light-hearted - like, I have a good family, born in the Netherlands, we get university for free almost." (Pieter, 26, Dutch, currently in Indonesia)

Changing society

Zooming out from personal identity development, a retainment of an opportunistic approach became apparent in the interviewees' realisation of being able to change society. Focussing on digital nomadism specifically, some interviewees claimed this to be a boost for remote working. For example, Marek noticed a lot of people changing their mindset towards remote working and communicating through Zoom. Likewise, Mario pointed out that this could function as an opportunity for modernising companies, as many companies are allowing their employees to work from home now. He is optimistic about the long-term effects of COVID19 on companies and digital nomads.

In a broader sense, some participants have argued that this could be an opportunity to create a new future and change society for good. On the note of identity development specifically, interviewees noticed a raise in understanding and awareness as a result of COVID19. As Marek puts it:

> *"People got nicer to each other. People understand that there is a situation that we cannot control. Normally everybody was being jealous. I can see a difference in that. (…) I had before problems with working with some people and that changed, now I enjoy working with some people." (Marek, 23, Polish, currently in Indonesia)*

Practising self-love

An interesting finding in the theme of having and preserving an opportunistic attitude becomes evident in their aim to practise self-love. This manifested in both physical and mental self-love. Some participants claimed to tackle the corona crisis by staying active, for example by practising yoga, going surfing, or doing cross-fit. Also, mental problems or identity crises were solved by doing sports.

Elaborating on the note of seeing business opportunities, the participants used the time wisely to invest in themselves. If they felt insecure about something, had become aware of a lack of knowledge, or their identity got criticised by others, they perceived this as a sign that their identity had to change. Although this might appear as something negative, this motif is once again positive.

Jos, for example, spent this time to write, read, and watch new materials. Emma practised self-care by nurturing her brain with educational videos as well. Larissa stayed optimistic and saw this as a learning opportunity where she will get out better.

Doing Stoian ethics

The last motif of the last theme concerns Stoian ethics. In Appendix A, more information on Stoian ethics is provided. In this research, it manifested in the realisation of the ability to control one's own behaviour and not letting the unfamiliar affect you. They realised that freaking out about COVID19 was not helping and changed their behaviour accordingly. In sum, they only worried about the things they could control and dealt with anxiety and negativity in an opportunistic way. As Mario puts it: *"You don't know or you are going right but you can always react to circumstances. If tomorrow something happens, you just react to it." (Mario, 29, German, currently in Cambodia)*

In the same way, participants have seen this as an opportunity to practise not being afraid and being strong. Juliette decided to go back to South Africa as she realised where she would be in March would be the place that she would be until September. She explained:

> *"It's funny how quickly you adapt to being in different places and how you just learn to like just get on with it and not let like the unfamiliar like affect you. Like the fact that I had to, like, I came back to South Africa, I made that decision in like a day and then now I've been living in this random apartment in quarantine by myself for like six weeks." (Juliette, 29, South African, currently in South Africa).*

5.   Discussion and Conclusion

The previous chapters have functioned as a funnel towards answering the research question. In this final chapter, the focus is broadened again. It will be discussed what the findings and results mean and general and how they relate to broader tendencies by comparing them with the findings of the theoretical framework. As is the case with all academic qualitative research, this discussion and conclusion chapter also includes the implications or contributions (both theoretical and practical), limitations, and some suggestions for further research.

Comparison with the Literature

Digital media entrepreneurship

In sum, all four concepts of entrepreneurship, media entrepreneurship, digital media entrepreneurship, and digital nomadism were drawn up as complex (e.g. Davidsson, 2003), context-dependent (e.g. Hang & van Weezel, 2007), and fluid or dynamic (e.g. Compaine & Hoag, 2012). Concluding the findings of the interviews, this concurs and has led to varying definitions and interpretations of the concepts. Generally speaking, the descriptions in the theoretical framework and the findings of this study correspond. However, there are fundamental differences that can be outlined. Both the resemblances and differences will be outlined to get an insight understanding of the concepts, topics, and relations between the phenomena.

In the literature on entrepreneurship, the three different theoretical lenses or approaches as differentiated by Edwards-Schachter, García-Granero, Sánchez-Barrioluengo, Quesada-Pineda, & Amara (2015) have functioned as the backbone of this literature review of entrepreneurship. The second theory, the behavioural theory, was often the way among the interviewees described entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. For example, on the question 'what is an entrepreneur to you?', interviewees replied with the actions of being fully focused on the business, creating solutions for problems, sorting their own clients, generates incomes from identified occasions and opportunities, or does things differently than others. Other participants described an entrepreneur among what they *are* instead of what they *do,* which fits more in the psychological traits theory. Interviewees described an entrepreneur as someone who is willing to take risks, is in control of their own choices, sees opportunities, and starts their own business. The differentiation as outlined by Edwards-Schachter et al. (2015) was that of the socio-constructivists, which describes how individuals and entrepreneur act in interaction with the environment. This finding is less present in the results of this study.

Elaborating on the conceptualising of entrepreneurship, one key resemblance is that of the competences for an entrepreneurial mindset outlined by the European Union (2018) and the findings. The fifteen competences that are outlined by the authors overlap with the mindsets that the interviewees described and showed to have. This corresponds with the first them of having, developing, and upholding a specific mindset. For example, in the motif of being eager to learn, the competences of spotting opportunities, vision, and learning through experiences fit in.

On the note of the dynamic character of media, the media that the interviewed digital nomads used as well as how this was used differed significantly. While the previous literature looked at the traditional media such as magazines (e.g. Hang & van Weezel, 2007), popular media such as social influencers (e.g. Horst & Hitters, 2020), or complex media such as artificial intelligence (e.g. Paoloni et al., 2019), the results of the interviews highlight more entrepreneurial and social media such as SEO, e-commerce, photography, videography, and online platforms. This could have to do with the fact that these are digital media entrepreneurs that by definition add to the independent voice of the media marketplace (Hoag, 2008, p. 74). A distinction can be made between the media that digital nomads consume and the media they produce. Indeed, it becomes apparent in the interviews that media plays an essential role in the life of digital nomads, especially during the times of COVID19. Examples are online courses they follow, books they read, or videos they watch in the light of self-care, self-love, identity development, or (maintaining) mental health.

Identity work

As already became apparent in the theoretical framework, identity and identity work are difficult to define and context-dependent (Côté, 2006). Indeed, on the question 'how would you define identity?', the participants did not have an answer straight away and their responses varied widely. They commonly related it to a mindset; the literature suggested that the relationship between a dominant discourse as a narrative and a personal narrative of identity can provide access to social reproduction and change as a process (Hammack, 2008). In the results of the interviews, this manifested in having a strong mindset, being different, and even being rebellious. COVID19 was seen by them as an opportunity to change themselves, society, and entrepreneurship. On this note of entrepreneurial identity, they agreed that entrepreneurial identity is strongly related to their personal identity. While they might change their personality and attitude (as extensively described in the mindset motif of 'being flexible'), their identity stays consistent and consequent. By the same token, Horst, Järventie-Thesleff, & Perez-Latre (2019) have described how digital media entrepreneurs refine, fine-tune, develop, and revise their self-conceptions and self-presentations –

which manifests in this research in the sense that the interviewees want to continue learning, are acting opportunistic on COVID19, and appreciate their cleared agendas for it allows them to develop and grow personally and professionally.

The concept of collective identity was not touched upon literally by the interviewees but can be read between the lines. Following the definition outlined by Wry, Lounsbury, and Glynn (2011) collective identity refers to the set of characteristics that is intrinsic to a specific group, i.e. digital nomads. The preidentified characteristics were making money while travelling (Kong et al., 2019), having an uncertain return date (Thompson, 2019), and travelling from home long and frequent (Reichenberger, 2018). In the interviews, it became apparent that effectively making money (and not just being a social influencer or an aspiring digital nomad) was an important part of digital nomadism as a collective identity. Furthermore, the identified mindset of being flexible, independent/strong, ethical/compassionate, eager to learn, and open-minded are a conceptualisation of, solution for, and way to focus on identity tensions and struggles of identity work – but these are also 'predefined essential characteristics' that can delineate membership. While a person can be independent and flexible without being a digital nomad or a digital media entrepreneur even, this set of characteristics for the digital nomad mindset defines the most important character aspects that are needed for digital nomadism, which are then part of the collective identity of digital nomadism. One afterthought that will be elaborated on later in this chapter is the fact that the interviewees were all very different people; while some were organised, secure, or optimistic, others were chaotic, insecure, or pessimistic.

In the literature, some cases studies of media and identity work among the collective identities of drinking identity and LGTB(Q) identity were given. Summarising the results of the interviews, the findings of the case studies could be applied to digital nomads, to a certain extent. Self-portrayal and group identity/culture did have an influence on social media for digital nomads, as was the case for drinking identity (Westgate & Holliday, 2016); it turns out there is a wrong idea of the 'group identity' since digital nomads are all very different people and being a digital nomad is a lot more difficult than outsiders think.

A study by Gomillion & Giuliano (2011) found that the LGBT community used role models to view their identity more positively. In the interviews, the digital nomads also claimed to used role models on social media to view their own identity more positively, for example by watching inspiring videos on YouTube during COVID19, following motivational speakers that they met on (offline) conferences, or hiring a coach/psychologist. However, it is important to mention that they thought this 'role model' idea could also cause insecurity, as social media can be perceived as 'fake' as well. These role models might then be presenting a different life on social media than in real life –

consciously (the role model/influencer being aware of sending across a deceptive message) or unconsciously (the digital nomads perceiving the images in a different way than intended). One contrasting finding on that note was that Back et al. (2010) claimed that individuals were not using their social media profiles to promote an idealised virtual identity. A predominant theme found in the interviews was that the digital nomads perceived social media as fake and used it a lot for their personal branding as well. This then relates more to their entrepreneurial identity.

The abovementioned comparisons relate to individual identity, which is only one of the four levels that identity can be addressed on, as distinguished by Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003). Another level is social identity, i.e. the identity to the outside world. This was not often talked about in the interviews. Looking at it from a more social angle, identity work can be triggered by changes in the workplace, disruption of social relationships, cultural changes, or other work-life alterations (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003, p. 1178). Relating this to the findings of the current research, these triggers have all been the case for COVID19. It has been kind of a change in the workplace indeed as the way business is done is changing – both negatively and positively. Disruption of social relationships has been the case as they are looking for deeper connections and have claimed relationship issues as an identity trigger. 'Social media as fake' can also be seen as such a trigger, as described earlier. Cultural changes have to do with the mindset of being open for other cultures, the open-minded character/mindset. This has triggered people to think about their own culture and how that affects work. Finally, work-life alternations have been the case for COVID19, taking into account all the security measures and subsequent social isolation. It has forced people to stay inside, the contents of work have changed, and companies have gone bankrupt – as was the case for one interviewee.

Struggles of identity work

While the findings on digital media entrepreneurship and identity work largely match the findings in the theoretical framework, the struggles of identity work differentiated substantially. For example, Beech et al. (2012) described the tension between being creative versus being commercially successful. This was not named by the interviewees and cannot be found in the themes. A reason could be the growing importance and value of media entrepreneurship that the digital nomads engage in, contrary to the declining popularity of opera rehearsals. Digital nomads take advantage of technological developments, which allows them to be pioneers and contributes to commercial success. Another outlined tension is one between a traditional identity and those of a hybrid work-related identity for immigrants (van Laer & Janssens, 2014). Applying this to digital

nomadism, we can conclude that this is present in the sense that their identity from home (the traditional identity) has changed into another identity with different goals and mindset (the hybrid work-related identity). This then refers back to the aim for freedom and desire to travel that are part of the collective identity of digital nomads. Jorgenson (2002) has identified a tension between a career or mother identity. This does not apply to digital nomads.

Two dominant struggles of identity work, then, were that of insecurity and loneliness, in the broadest sense. As Liegl (2014) already outlined, the relatively short duration and financial hinder of the work that digital nomads engage in can entail insecurity in terms of career and the self. Indeed, financial insecurity and general instability have been an issue for the interviewed digital nomads. One specific struggle they named was the constant look for clients. This is the case for freelancers and media entrepreneurs alike, however, digital nomads have this extra layer of general insecurity on top of financial insecurity, as they have to look for new friends and 'find their way' in every new place they visit. Looking at romantic relationships specifically, the literature suggests that uncertain living conditions make relationships or other forms of love difficult (Thompson, 2019). In the interviews, it became apparent that a relationship break-up had been an identity struggle for many. For some, it functioned as the trigger to become a digital nomad, while for others it triggered their realisation of having to be independent and strong.

Interrelated with the general insecurity and romantic relationships is the notion of loneliness. Brown and O'Hara (2003) have pointed out the feeling of loneliness and isolation that being a mobile worker entails. Indeed, the significant growth of co-working spaces and its popularity among digital nomads can be seen as a result of the search for a solution to loneliness, isolation, and the desire for and need to build a community. By the same token, the results of the interviews suggest that self-doubt was caused by a misunderstanding of the people at home, the current situation of COVID19, relationship issues, the need to be flexible, and the negative effects and perceptions of (social) media. This correlates with the findings of Svensingsson and Alvesson (2003), who claim self-doubt and self-openness to be motives that make people engage in identity work.

A final note on the struggles of identity work is that of the unconscious aspect of it, as outlined by Thompson and McHugh (2002). The interviewees struggled to name one specific identity trigger and often considered their identity as something natural that did not require specific work, development, investment, or cause. Given the novelty of COVID19 as a frame through which identity work and identity tensions are viewed, it might be interesting to research these concepts when the COVID19 period is over. An indicator for this unconsciousness was the fact that they claimed their self-identity and social identity to be the same or at least largely overlapping. The interviewed digital nomads claimed to be adjusted to certain situations and maintaining a flexible mindset.

Entrepreneurial struggles during COVID19

Interestingly, COVID19 was not as negatively perceived as formerly assumed and suggested by the literature. Previously outlined reflections regarding the contextual effect of COVID19 were suggesting that it was a "plague" against which to fight was "the greatest challenge since the Second World War "or "COVID19 as the invisible enemy" (Hunter, 2020). This level of fear, anxiety, or negativity could not be found in the interviews. Especially the predicted anxiety was not significantly present. COVID19 was predicted to be a trigger for distress, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem (Moser & Paul, 2009), resource scarcity, problems for building their network, psychological stress, and many other structural, socio-economic and existential problems (Institute of Medicine, 2012). In the results of this research, however, the anxiety and negative emotions were primarily at the beginning of the COVID19 transmission and the lockdown.

In the interviews, it became apparent that the media played a significant role in the spread of fear and anxiety, as predicted by Molla (2020). Media coverage sets the agenda for public debate (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). The interviewees claimed that fear was mostly spread through fake news and an overflow of news, more specifically, negative news. Reading between the lines, the interviewees were from rich countries and could make themselves comfortable in the countries they were at. Some participants took advantage of their wealth by going back to their own countries, where they were ensured of proper governmental precautions and health care. This avoided the feeling of negatively. What also helped in stopping, avoiding, and overcoming the fear was to stop following news at all, which is what some participant did. Additionally, a Stoian way of thinking was applied. Stoics resolve anxiety with the idea that a situation will be painful and tough indeed but will ultimately be okay, as one is stronger than originally thought (Adam, 2014). Indeed, the participants applied this way of thinking and only worried about what they could influence. This is extensively covered in the theme of retaining an opportunistic approach.

All in all, COVID19 and its effect on identity and entrepreneurship was perceived positively and opportunistic. One way in which COVID19 has operated as an identity trigger is that of the security measures. In many countries, a lockdown and quarantine were taken as security measures to avoid the spread of COVID19 and lessen the economic impact (International Monetary Fund, 2020). The impact of this isolation was predicted to impact our sense of identity, as it makes us question what kind of worker we are, how we can contribute, and how we can support the people around us (Naidu-Ghelani, 2020). Indeed, it has influenced their identity and made them question who they are. A result of this is their growing interest in personal and professional development

through online courses, podcasts, videos, and books, among others. In terms of work specifically, some interviewees felt something of the rising unemployment (directly or indirectly) but it has motivated them to develop and expand on different revenue streams, related work, or new business ideas. The long-term effects of COVID19 yet must be researched and could indicate otherwise.

Connection Between the Themes

In the fifth step of the thematic analysis, a Venn diagram was created. However, in the process of refining the themes and writing the research report (second half of step 5 and step 6), some themes and motives were moved and adjusted. Figure 11 gives an overview of the updated Venn diagram. Zooming out and maintaining a broader view, we will now look into the broader connections of the themes as well as the timeline in which they occur. At the end of this section, a visual summary will be made and explained.
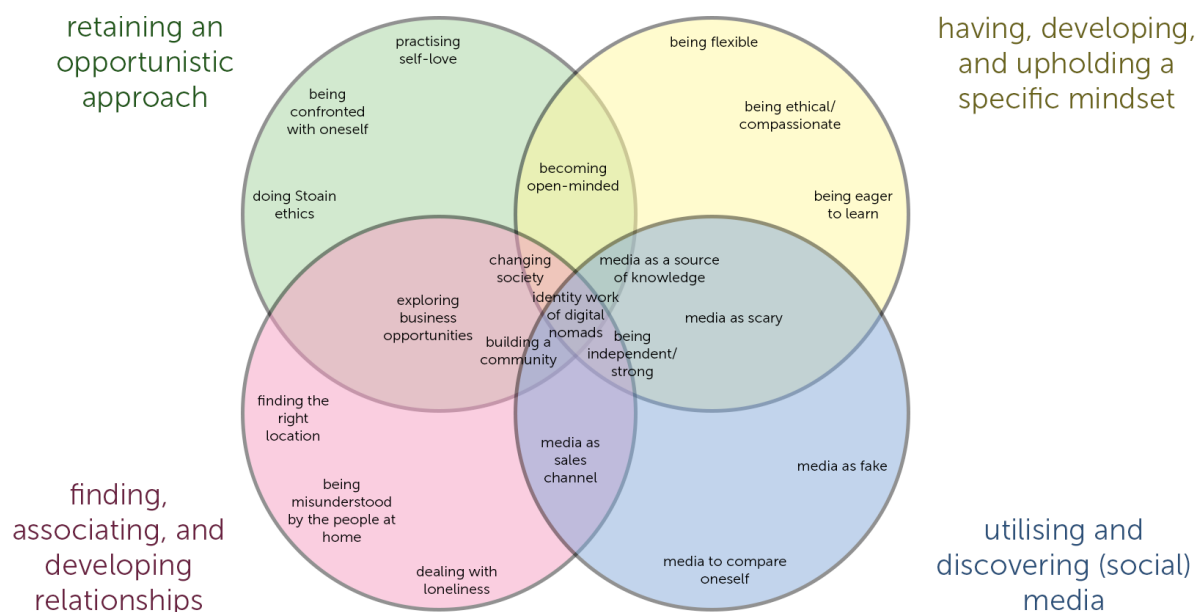
Figure 11: Updated Venn graph outlining the overlap of the themes.

Broader connections and importance

In the broader process of conceptualising and tackling identity work and identity tensions, three connections between the themes are important to point out. First of all, not all digital nomads are created equal. Although a 'digital nomad' is a collective identity, the people within the group differ significantly. There is some overlap, as discussed in the previous paragraph, but they also have

a different mindset, character, (identity) struggles, tensions, problems, and way to solve these identity issues. For example, Juliette is strikingly organised while Quinn lives 'by the day'.

Secondly, identity tensions are not always negative. In the interviews, it became apparent that these struggles can support the entrepreneurial identity development. Examples of struggles that were brought up in the interviews were a relationship break-up, unsatisfaction with the current job, or feelings of loneliness. Although the struggles are negative and other struggles can be negative as well, these serve a positive function too. For example, using media to compare oneself can be used to see how one can change; growing apart with friends or people back home can trigger the realisation of who and what is truly needed in life (and in entrepreneurship); and the struggle to find the right location or place might bring one to people that share the same values. Broadly speaking, COVID19 was perceived as something positive. Because of their mobility, flexibility, and specific mindset, out of all the sub-groups of entrepreneurs, digital nomads are presumably least negatively affected by COVID19. However, further investigation is required to confirm such claims or assumptions.

Finally, zooming out to digital media entrepreneurs in general, media turned out to be of essential importance. It appears to be in the name (digital *media* entrepreneur), however, that refers to the media they produce, not the media they consume. It became apparent that podcasts, books, e-courses, social media, and videos were important types of media for digital nomads to compare oneself, make sales, and use it as a source of knowledge. Media, then, played an important role in their entrepreneurial development, confidence increasement, identity development, and way to solve identity struggles.

Comparing the themes to each other and critically analysing them, they appear to differ as well as concur in some respects. What all themes agreed on was the application of the themes to different groups. The group of digital nomads is chosen as a sub-group of digital media entrepreneurs that is characterised by mobility, flexibility, and constant desire to travel (Reichenberger, 2018). However, some of the outlined themes are not limited to digital nomadism specifically. For example, in the theme of having, developing, and upholding a specific mindset, the second-order themes of being flexible, ethical, and eager to learn apply to digital media entrepreneurs in general, media entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs, and ultimately to everyone pursuing a career. The same applies to the second theme of utilising and discovering (social) media; 'normal' people can also use media to compare oneself, perceive it as scary or fake, use it as a sales channel, or take advantage of it as a source of knowledge. In sum, the themes are interrelated. A second agreement, then, is the fact that how they solve, conceptualise, tackle, perceive, and learn from

identity tensions and struggles can be applied to multiple situations, contexts, and themes. This research has focused on the frame of COVID19 but the learnings can be used more widely.

Timeline

What does differ is the timeline of the themes. It is difficult to draw up a detailed timeline since identity work is an ongoing process, identities are fluid, and the interviews were conducted through the temporary frame of COVID19 and the current security measures. The spread of the virus, research on vaccinations, and how security measures are drawn up and adhered to are changing by the day. Therefore, the period when the four themes apply differs.

For example, finding, associating, and developing relationships is something that is always important in the process of conceptualising, focusing on, and tackling identity problems and issues. Although it might be of greater importance during COVID19, it is something that digital nomads consistently use in the process of their identity work.

Having, developing, and upholding a specific mindset is always important but is especially important now. For example, being ethical and compassionate has always been important for digital nomads – but during COVID19, it has become even more important, since people are encouraged to do voluntary work for the local community or feel the need to put their staff or employees first. By the same token, being flexible is always important given the need to adjust to a certain person or context – but has gained increased importance since the security measures have affected the ability to take flights and travel. Hence, the mobility aspect of digital nomadism was affected and required extra flexibility of the digital nomads.

The two other themes (utilising and discovering (social) media and retaining an opportunistic approach) were of significant importance now. While the role of social media and an opportunistic way of thinking are of slight importance for digital nomads at all times, these ways of developing and undertaking identity issues are of compelling importance during COVID19. For example, fake (unverified) news is no new phenomenon but became problematic because of the increased news consumption of the interviewed digital nomads as well as the negative influence media can have on fear, anxiety, and other negative emotions (Keegan, 2015). These negative emotions were of negative influence on their identity development and successfulness of solving their identity struggles. By the same token, retaining an opportunistic approach became of increased relevance because of the confrontation with oneself and opportunity to practise self-love, among others. For example, exploring business opportunities is something digital nomads generally do, as per the

definition of entrepreneurship – however, during COVID19, this was especially a way to tackle the identity struggles, tensions, problems, or issues that COVID19 entailed.

Proposed model for describing identity work of digital media entrepreneurs and their management of identity tensions

Summarising the comparison with the literature and connection between the themes, Figure 12 introduces a model to describe identity work that is based on this empirical research. Although this model is developed based on the findings of this research with digital nomads as a target audience, it may be relevant for the broader audience of digital media entrepreneurs, media entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs, or ultimately even everyone pursuing a career for understanding how the management of identity tensions might be connected with ongoing practices of identity work. At the 'heart' of the model, the four themes are visualised in the updated Venn diagram (see Figure 11). As identity work is a continuous process, the model is a continuous cycle. One element that is outside of the cycle is COVID19, which is the context in which identity work this current identity took place and from which many struggles for the entrepreneurs emerged.

The model emphasises that two contextual elements (themes), namely "COVID19" and "normal life" impact positive and negative identity struggles. In turn, many of these struggles then influence the continuous practice of identity work, which can occur in a conscious or unconscious way. Subsequently, both the digital nomads (which were the focus of this research) and the digital media entrepreneurs more generally are shown to uphold their identity through identity work and thereby continue their process of identity development through different situations, which again define and effect the situations and perceptions of situations in which they find themselves in.

At the centre of the graphic are the four practices of managing and coping with struggles of identity work, which are employed by the digital media entrepreneurs in this case (digital nomads), which are part of the continuous practice of identity development and identity work. This research shows that these practices of identity work enable the digital nomads to cope with situations in the labour market and emotional tensions stemming from stress and anxiety to remain positive and flexible despite these difficult times. Through developing and upholding relationships, and (re)discovering and using social media, the digital nomads balance tensions and create new business opportunities for further projects and future work. The last box before the continuation of the cycle summarizes generically the situations and results they co-create from the actions before. The learnings, solutions, conceptualisations, different ways to tackle, and various perceptions could then be applied to different situations, themes, and contexts.
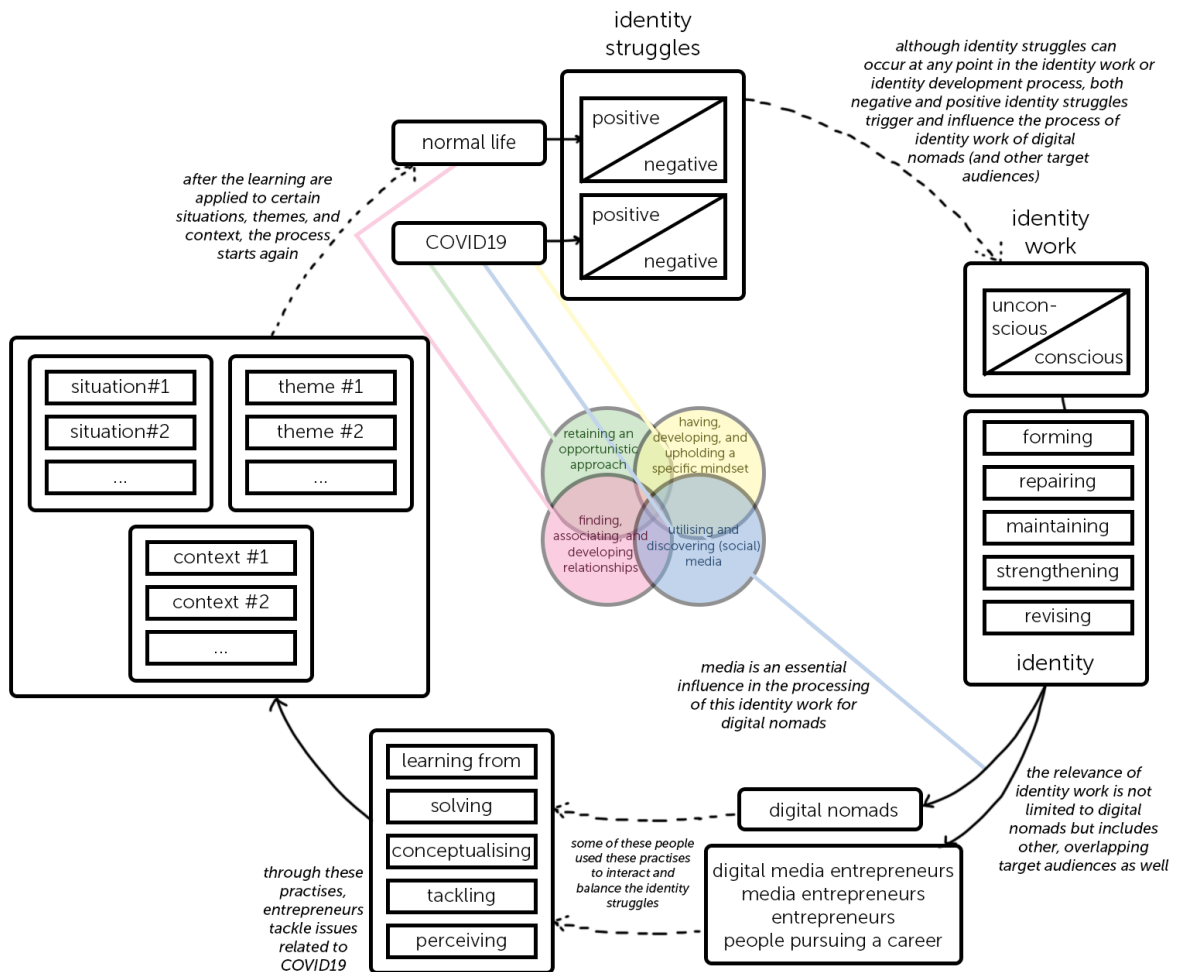
Figure 12: This model describes how digital media entrepreneurs conceptualise, focus on, and tackle tensions and problems of identity work. At the centre of the model are the four practices of managing identity tensions for digital media entrepreneurs (specifically digital nomads), around which the continuous practice of identity development and identity work takes place. An important side note to make with regards to the model is that the reality is not as black-white as this model makes it appear, since identity struggles can occur at any time, the themes can be applied to different situations and processes, and identity work is a fluid and ongoing process.

Theoretical Contributions

The results of this research have shown that digital nomads conceptualise, focus on, and tackle problems and struggles of identity work by having, developing, and upholding a specific mindset, utilising and discovering social media, finding, associating, and developing relationships, and retaining an opportunistic approach. We found that the concepts that this research entails are complex, multifaceted, and context-dependent. For example, what entrepreneurship is and what entrepreneurs do varies in the literature and among the interviewed digital nomads. A side note to make on the collective identity of digital nomads is that the shared characteristics that delineate membership do not mean that all digital nomads are the same. Furthermore, contrary to what the literature suggested, identity tensions are not always negative and can fuel entrepreneurial identity

development. At the core of this (entrepreneurial) identity development was the production and consumption of media. All in all, these themes could be applied to different contexts as well.

Taking these findings and comparisons to the literature into account, this research contributes to our understanding of digital nomads, identity work, identity tensions, and the relationship between those concepts and COVID19 in three significant ways. First of all, given the novelty of COVID19, this research has shed a light on the effect of the coronavirus on identity in the broadest sense. The identity tensions that COVID19 entailed were not researched yet, especially not among digital nomads. In this research, it became apparent that COVID19 entailed a few identity tensions, such as increased mobility, confrontation with the self, increased loneliness, the scary side of media, and the need to be flexible and compassionate. COVID19 and its security measures had an impact on the economical state of the world and increased the global unemployment rate, which some of the interviewees also experienced. While being impacted by the economic effects of COVID19, the social isolation as part of the security measures taken by the governments had a larger effect on their identity. Since this research is of qualitative nature, the size of the effect and the extent to which it differs from non-digital nomads cannot be defined. However, it became apparent that the social isolation triggered their identity in the sense that they focused on having a certain character, constructing relationships, and embracing an opportunistic approach.

Secondly and intertwined is the fact that this research has revealed the interconnectedness of struggles of identity work, the way such struggles are solved, and the timeframe in which they occur. For example, 'becoming open-minded' is a sub-theme originally derived from the theme of having a specific mindset but this also applies to retaining an opportunistic approach. The Venn diagram that resulted from the thematic analysis shows more overlapping areas up to the point where three themes are overlapping. An example of that is of 'media as educational', which applies to having, developing, and upholding a specific mindset (being eager to learn and this manifests in using media for educational purposes), utilising and discovering media (media as a source of knowledge), and retaining an opportunistic approach (using media to develop oneself during COVID19, perceiving it as an opportunity to personally and professionally grow). Previous literature had already pointed out the fluid and ever developing nature of identity and subsequent identity work. The results of this research added to that a notion of unconsciousness. The participants struggled to name a specific point in time where their identity was triggered, where they had solved an identity struggle or issue, or when their identity was changed. However, they were able to confirm that their (entrepreneurial) identity had changed and developed over the past few years.

Finally, focusing on digital nomadism specifically, previous research had not shed a light on identity work yet – especially not through the frame of COVID19. After all, digital nomadism is a

relatively new concept as well (Liegl, 2014). Previous literature had shed a light on relationships difficulties for digital nomads (Thompson B. Y., 2019), the struggles of gig work and freelancing (Barley, Bechky, & Milliken, 2017), loneliness among digital nomads (Brown & O'Hara, 2003), and an unhealthy work-life balance (Kong, Schlagwein, & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2019). However, no academic literature so far has looked at digital nomadism in times of COVID19. Although the long-term effects are yet to be researched, this study has contributed to media scholarship by choosing a modern frame and analysing a very specific sub-group of digital media entrepreneurs.

Practical Implications

Apart from a theoretical purpose, this researched has social and practical relevance as well. As expected, social media use has increased among digital nomads and digital nomads have taken advantage of media developments. For example, they are using videos to develop their skills or develop as an entrepreneur in general, which is something that would be less common and straightforward 10 years ago (Jagongo & Kinyua, 2013). This research has given insight into the different media platform digital nomads use, the reasons for using behind it, the pros and cons of each platform/channel/form of media, and its influence on identity. Digital nomads can use this knowledge to take advantage of media in the most useful way – specifically, to tackle their identity struggles.

In the practical relevance, it was expected that this research would help to better understanding how to manage identity tensions and identity threats as an entrepreneur. For entrepreneurs and digital nomads, a key take-away in this area is the unconscious notion of identity. In this research, it became apparent that digital nomads are having difficulties to define identity, point out an identity trigger, reflect on their identity development, describe identity work, and indicate identity tensions, struggle, issues, and moments where they had solved such a problem. The practical implication is to be more aware of identity, in the broadest sense. Indeed, after conducting the interviews, some participants approached me (in an entrepreneurial relationship) to discuss how it had made them aware of their identity, role as an entrepreneur, life as a digital nomad, or media consumption/production. This research has provided an extensive description of the concepts of identity, identity work, and identity tensions as well as a detailed analysis of how this relates to digital nomads and concerns COVID19. Now knowing this, we could use this theoretical framework and the core of this research to be more conscious of our identity work to be able to identify and effectively tackle identity struggles and problems of identity work.

Another practical implication concerns the rise in remote working that COVID19 entailed. Due to security measures, many people were forced to work from home instead of in their office. This has fuelled remote working. A key difference between remote employees and digital nomads is this notion of constant travelling and entrepreneurship; while a remote employee could be someone working from home all the time, a digital nomad has an uncertain return date to the home country (Thompson, 2019) and travels from home long and frequent (Reichenberger, 2018). Additionally, a remote employee is often not an entrepreneur by definition, since entrepreneurship refers to the processes by which individuals discover, evaluate, and exploit business and for-profit opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). As became apparent in the interviews, the digital nomads predicted growth in remote working, since employees and employers now realise remote working is possible. Consequently, it could be a spark to explore the options for starting a co-working space where remote employees and digital nomads could meet (building a community as a part of finding, associating, and developing relationships) and work (exploring and exploiting business opportunities). Especially after COVID19, perhaps opening such a place could help to rebuild and foster some innovation in this area. From my experience as a digital nomad and entrepreneur, I would highlight this trend of remote employment (that was already on the rise before COVID19) as an opportunity to invest in the co-working industry.

Limitations

The context of this study raises questions about the reliability of the research as a result of the limitations of the methodology and the researcher. Four methodological limitations can be differentiated. First of all, COVID19 and the security measures have made face to face interviews practically impossible. It was planned to have half of the interviews face to face and half online, given the intended spatial setting of Sri Lanka and Nepal. This lack of physical presence has limited the research in the sense that it allowed for less control, missed non-verbal communication, and reduced intimacy and spontaneity (Brennen, 2017). The risk of making authentic interaction and having setup issues was less present, as digital nomads are used to communicating online and having meetings in the form of video calls. Secondly, snowball sampling resulted in a less diverse audience than could have been. Seven out of the eleven participants were Dutch and four out of the eleven were in Bali when the interviews were conducted, with two other participants just having left Bali. Although representativeness is not the goal of qualitative research, the quality of the study and theoretical and practical value could have benefited from a more diverse sample size. Elaborating on this sample, the sample size could have been larger. Saturation was occurring to a certain extent, but

it might have been valuable to include some more interviewees. Finally, the language forms the final methodological limitation of this study. All interviews were conducted in English, while only one out of all eleven participants had English as a first language. This might have influenced the answers given by the participants, as they perhaps were not able to express themselves in the way they would have done in their native language.

Three limitations of the researcher can be named. Firstly, the fluency of the language has also been a limitation for me as the researcher. Since English is my second language, I do not speak the language natively and this might have been an issue in interpreting the answers. I personally do not think this has been the case, given my extensive experience in both interviewing and English speaking and writing, but I think it is important to acknowledge this deficiency. Secondly, my role as a digital nomad and entrepreneur and my personal interest in identity development and media could be a limitation. Unconsciously and unintendingly, this might have influenced the people I gained for my sample, the answers they provided, and ultimately the writing up of the results and discussion. Lastly, the given limited time frame is a limitation. The longitudinal effects cannot be measured in the few weeks in which this interview was conducted. The deadline of June 2020 has constrained the time available to examine the research problem and to measure change or stability over time.

Suggestions for Further Research

This research posits possibilities for further research flowing from the comparison with literature, connections drawn between the themes, contributions/implications, and limitations. One proposed direction for further research is the impact of COVID19 on the variation of the media landscape. Investigating entrepreneurial opportunities in the field of co-working has been one of the practical implications of this study. Future research could explore this influence of COVID19 on media, media entrepreneurship, types of media, and variation in the media landscape. As this regards an influence of X on Y, quantitative survey research could be the research design for such research (Babbie, 2011).

A second suggestion is research focussing on the longer-term effects on entrepreneurship, digital nomadism, remote working, identity, and identity work. As outlined in the limitations part, this research was limited to the provided time frame and could therefore not measure any effects longer than the sample time of two weeks. Further research could explore the longer-term effects on the relevant concepts. For example, is there a difference between the identity tensions among digital nomads in March 2020 and March 2021 (i.e. at the start of the outbreak versus when the

shape of COVID19 and its impact on society and identity has changed)? How has digital nomadism as a phenomenon changed as a result of COVID19? Further research could be of longitudinal nature to measure change or stability through in-depth interviews or focus groups.

Conclusion

This study shows how entrepreneurship and digital nomadism can be exciting but are not always easy. In their identity regulation, development, and work, digital media entrepreneurs struggle and grow. While these identity struggles are not always conscious and while not all digital nomads are created equal, we can conclude that COVID19 has had a severe impact on their life as digital nomads, mobility, level of freedom, identity, future, career, mental state, and resourcefulness. Let us take this research as an opportunity to find out what can be done about COVID19 from a media perspective and how entrepreneurship is done.

• References

Achtenhagen, L. (2008). Understanding Entrepreneurship in Traditional Media. *Journal of Media Business Studies, 5*(1), 123-142. https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2008.11073463.

Adam, M. (2014, September 7). *PHILOSOPHY - The Stoics*. Retrieved May 2020, from YouTube: The School of Life: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yu7n0XzqtfA

Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond Neopositivists, Romantics, and Localists: A Reflexive Approach to Interviews in Organizational Research. *Academy of Management Review, 28*(1), 13-33. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2003.8925191.

Alvesson, M. (2010). Self-doubters, strugglers, storytellers, surfers and others: Images of self-identities in organization studies. *Human Relations, 63*(2), 193-217. https://doi.org/0.1177/0018726709350372.

Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control. Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies, 39*, 619–644. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00305.

Alvesson, M., Ashcraft, K. L., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: Reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies. *Organization, 15*(1), 5–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508407084426.

Babbie, E. (2011). *The Basics of Social Research* (5th Edition ed.). Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.

Back, M. D., Stopfer, J. M., Vazire, S., Gaddis, S., Schmukle, S. C., Egloff, B., & Gosling, S. D. (2010). Facebook profiles reflect actual personality, not self-idealization. *Psychological Science, 21*(3), 372–374. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797609360756.

Barley, S. R., Bechky, B. A., & Milliken, F. J. (2017). The changing nature of work: Careers, identities, and work lives in the 21st century. *Academy of Management Discoveries, 3*(2), 111-115. https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2017.0034.

Beech, N., Gilmore, C., Cochrane, E., & Greig, G. (2012). Identity work as a response to tensions: A re-narration in opera rehearsals. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 28*(1), 39-47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2011.12.005.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Brennen, B. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for media studies: Second edition.* New York, London: Routledge.

Brown, A. D. (2015). Identities and Identity Work in Organizations. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 17*(1), 20-40. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12035.

Brown, A. D. (2017). Identity Work and Organizational Identification. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 19*(3), 296-317. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12152.

Brown, A. D., & Coupland, C. (2015). Identity threats, identity work and elite professionals. *Organization Studies*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840615593594.

Brown, B., & O'Hara, K. (2003). Place as a practical concern of mobile workers. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 35*, 1565–1587. https://doi.org/10.1068/a34231.

Brubaker, R., & Cooper, F. (2000). Beyond 'identity.'. *Theory and Society, 29*, 1–47. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007068714468.

Brush, C. G. (2008). Pioneering strategies for entrepreneurial success. *Business Horizons, 51*, 21-27. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2007.09.001.

Buss, P. M. (2009). Public health and world economic crisis. *Journal of Epidemiol Community Health, 63*(6), 417-417. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2009.089235.

Clark, R. A. (2016). *Business continuity and the pandemic threat : potentially the biggest survival challenge facing organisations.* Ely: IT Governance Publishing.

Clement, J. (2019, August 14). *Number of global social media users 2010-2021 Published by J. Clement, Aug 14, 2019 How many people use social media in the world? Social media usage is one of the most popular online activities. In 2018, an estimated 2.65 billion people were using social*. Retrieved March 2020, from Statista: https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/

Compaine, B., & Hoag, A. (2012). Factors supporting and hindering new entry in media markets: A study of media entrepreneurs. *International Journal on Media Management, 14*(1), 29-49. https://doi.org/10.1080/14241277.2011.627520.

Côté, J. E. (2006). Identity studies: How close are we to developing a social science of identity? An appraisal of the field. *Identity, 6*, 3–25. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532706xid0601_2.

Coupland, C., & Brown, A. B. (2012). Identities in action: Processes and outcomes. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 28*, 1-4. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2011.12.002.

Craig, S. L., & McInroy, L. (2014). You can form a part of yourself online: The influence of new media on identity development and coming out for LGTBQ youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health, 18*(1), 95-109. https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2013.777007.

Davidsson, P. (2003). The domain of entrepreneurship research: some suggestions. In J. A. Katz, & D. Shepherd, *Advances in entrepreneurship, firm emergence, and growth. Cognitive approaches to entrepreneurship research* (Vol. 6, pp. 315-372). Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Dávila Calero, M. S. (2020, March 19). An X-Ray of Pandeconomics A Look at Pandemics Past Puts Coronacrisis into Perspective. *Caribbean Business*, pp. 8-11.

Downing, S. (2005). The Social Construction of Entrepreneurship: Narrative and Dramatic Processes in the Coproduction of Organizations and Identities. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 29*(2), 185-204. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2005.00076.x.

Ducharme, J. (2020, February 7). *News Coverage of Coronavirus in 2020 is Very Different Than it Was For Ebola in 2018*. Retrieved April 2020, from Time Magazine: https://time.com/5779872/coronavirus-ebola-news-coverage/

Edwards-Schachter, M., García-Granero, A., Sánchez-Barrioluengo, M., Quesada-Pineda, H., & Amara, N. (2015). Disentangling competences: Interrelationships on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 16*, 27–39. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2014.11.006.

European Union. (2018). *EntreComp: The European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Falagas, M. E., Vouloumanou, E. K., Mavros, M., & Karageorgopoulos, D. (2009). Economic crises and mortality: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Clinical Practice, 63*(8), 1128-1135. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1742-1241.2009.02124.x.

Fauchart, E., & Gruber, M. (2011). Darwinians, Communitarians, and Missionaries: The Role of Founder Identity in Entrepreneurship. *Academy of Management Journal, 54*(5), 935-957. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.0211.

Figueiredo, B. G. (2017). The construction of qualitative research articles: a conversation with Eileen Fischer. *Consumption Markets & Culture, 20*(4), 297-305. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2016.1222658.

Finney, M., & Yip, R. (2020, March 19). *Coronavirus impact: Why shoppers are hoarding toilet paper, supplies and groceries*. Retrieved May 2020, from 7 News: https://abc7news.com/hoarding-buying-frenzy-empty-grocery-shelves-toilet-paper-shortage/6025373/

Fornäs, J. &. (2013). Mediated Identity Formation. *Javnost - The Public, 20*(2), 11-25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2013.11009112.

Garfinkel, J. A., & Sa-Aadu, J. (2011). A Decade of Living Dangerously: The Causes and Consequences of the Mortgage, Financial, and Economic Crises. In R. W. Kolb, *Lessons from the Financial Crisis: Causes, Consequences, and Our Economic Future* (pp. 103-107. https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/9781118266588.ch14). Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

Gioia, D. A. (2012). Identity as process and flow. *Constructing identity in and around organizations, 3*, 50-62. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199640997.001.0001.

Gioia, D. A. (2013). Organizational Identity Formation and Change. *The Academy of Management Annals, 7*(1), 123-193. https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2013.762225.

Giorgi, G., Arcangeli, G., Mucci, N., & Cupelli, V. (2015). Economic stress in the workplace: The impact of fear of the crisis on mental health (Research Article). *51*(1), 135-142. https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-141844.

Goleman, D. (1996). *Emotional intelligence : why it can matter more than IQ.* London: Bloomsbury.

Gomillion, S. C., & Giuliano, T. A. (2011). The influence of media role models on gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity. *Journal of Homosexuality, 58*(3), 330-354. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2011.546729.

Government of the Netherlands. (2020, April). *The approach to tackling coronavirus in the Netherlands*. Retrieved April 2020, from Government of the Netherlands: https://www.government.nl/topics/coronavirus-covid-19/tackling-new-coronavirus-in-the-netherlands

Griffin, M. A. (2007). Editorial: Specifying Organizational Contexts: Systematic Links between Contexts and Processes in Organizational Behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 28*(7), 859-863. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.489.

Guest, G. M. (2014). *Introduction to applied thematic analysis.* London: Sage.

Hammack, L. P. (2008). Narrative and the cultural psychology of identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 12*(3), 222-247. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868308316892.

Hang, M., & van Weezel, A. (2007). Media and entrepreneurship: What do we know and where should we go? *Journal of Media Business Studies, 4*(1), 51-70. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2007.11073446.

Hjorth, D. J. (2008). Introduction for 'Recreating/Recontextualising Entrepreneurship'. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 24*(2), 81-84. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2008.03.003.

Hoag, A. (2008). Measuring Media Entrepreneurship. *The International Journal on Media Management, 10*, 74–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/14241270802000496.

Holstein, J. A. (1997). Active interviewing. In D. Silverman, *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice* (pp. 113-129). London: Sage.

Hoogendoorn, B., & Pennings, H. P. (2010). *What do we know about social entrepreneurship: An analysis of empirical research (No. ERS-2009-044-ORG).* ERIM report series research in management.

Horst, S.-O., & Hitters, E. (2020). Digital Media Entrepreneurship: Implications for Strategic Identity Work and Knowledge Sharing of Beginning Entrepreneurs. *Nordic Journal of Media Management, 1*(1), 23-44.

Horst, S.-O., & Murschetz, P. C. (2019). Strategic Media Entrepreneurship: Theory Development and Problematization. *Journal of Media Management and Entrepreneurship, 1*(1), 1-26. https://doi.org/10.4018/jmme.2019010101.

Horst, S.-O., Brouwers, T., & Hitters, E. (2020). *How should I ever become a freelance journalist?! Milestones and ambiguities of entrepreneurial identity work in the creative industries.* EGOS Colloquium 2020.

Horst, S.-O., Järventie-Thesleff, R., & Perez-Latre, F. J. (2019). Entrepreneurial identity development through digital media. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2019.1689767.

Hunter, D. (2020, April 1). *Coronavirus: If we are in a war against COVID-19 then we need to know where the enemy is*. Retrieved May 2020, from The Conversation: https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-if-we-are-in-a-war-against-covid-19-then-we-need-to-know-where-the-enemy-is-135274

Institute of Medicine. (2012). *Crisis Standards of Care: A Systems Framework for Catastrophic Disaster Response: Volume 1: Introduction and CSC Framework.* Washington DC: The National Academies Press.

International Monetary Fund. (2020, April 17). *Policy responses to COVID-19*. Retrieved April 2020, from International Monetary Fund: https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19

Jagongo, A., & Kinyua, C. (2013). The Social Media and Entrepreneurship Growth. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 3*(10), 213-227. Retrieved from: https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Social-Media-and-Entrepreneurship-Growth-(A-New-Jagongo-Kinyua/2c31e9e5cddc63c01c73c3602dd895c4a7dddb52.

Jansen, L. (2018, August 31). *Mister Digital Nomad*. Retrieved January 2020, from Financieel Dagblad: https://fd.nl/morgen/1267396/mister-digital-nomad

Jaokar, A., Jacobs, B., Moore, A., & Ahvenainen, J. (2009). *Social Media Marketing: How Data Analytics Helps to Monetize the User Base in Telecoms, Social Networks, Media and Advertising in a Converged Ecosystem.* London: Futuretext.

Johns, G. (2006). The Essential Impact of Context on Organizational Behavior. *Academy of Management Review, 31*(2), 386-408. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2006.20208687.

Jones, R. L. (2008). Narrative construction of the social entrepreneurial identity. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research, 14*(5), 330-345. https://doi.org/10.1108/13552550810897687.

Jorgenson, J. (2002). Engineering selves: Negotiating gender and identity in technical work. *Management Communica- tion Quarterly*, 350–380. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318902153002.

Karatas-Ozkan, M. A. (2014). Understanding Entrepreneurship: Challenging Dominant Perspectives and Theorizing Entrepreneurship through New Postpositivist Epistemologies. *Journal of Small Business Management, 52*(4), 589-593. https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12124.

Kavanagh, B., Perkmann, M., & Phillips, N. (2020). Collective identity and the limits of innovation: a review and research agenda. *Innovation*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/14479338.2020.1742127.

Keegan, S. (2015). *The Psychology of Fear in Organizations : How to Transform Anxiety Into Well-being, Productivity and Innovation.* London/Philadelphia: Kogan Page.

Kemp, S. (2020, January 30). *Digital 2020: 3.8 billion people use social media*. Retrieved March 2020, from We are social: https://wearesocial.com/blog/2020/01/digital-2020-3-8-billion-people-use-social-media

King, B. G., Clemens, E. S., & Fry, M. (2011). Identity realization and organizational forms: Differentiation and consolidation of identities among Arizona's charter schools. *Organization Science, 22*(3), 554–572. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0548.

Knight, D. M. (2012). Cultural proximity: Crisis, time and social memory in central Greece. *Journal of History and Anthropology, 23*(3), 349-374. https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2012.697064.

Kong, D., Schlagwein, D., & Cecez-Kecmanovic, D. (2019). Issues in digital nomad-corporate work: An institutional theory perspective. *Proceedings of the 27th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS)* (p. https://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2019_rp/98). Stockholm & Uppsala: ECIS 2019 Proceedings at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL).

Kreiner, G. E., Hollensbe, E. C., & Sheep, M. L. (2006). Where is the 'Me' among the 'We'? Identity work and the search for optimal balance. *Academy of Management Journal, 49*, 1031–1057. https://doi.org/10.2307/20159815.

Lacey, N. (2020, April 1). *More concerned for those vulnerable to COVID-19 than for their own health, poll shows*. Retrieved May 2020, from Ipsos: https://www.ipsos.com/en/more-concerned-those-vulnerable-covid-19-their-own-health

Lamont, M. &. (2014). Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing. *Qualitative Sociology, 37*(2), 153-171. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-014-9274-z.

Leitch, C. M. (2016). Identity, identity formation and identity work in entrepreneurship: conceptual developments and empirical applications. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development, 28*(3-4), 177-190. https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2016.1155740.

Levels, P. (2015, August 1). *"There will be 1 billion digital nomads by 2035"*. Retrieved March 2019, from Levels: https://levels.io/future-of-digital-nomads/

Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A., & Futing Liao, T. (2007). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Liegl, M. (2014). Nomadicity and the care of place: On the aesthetic and affective organization of space in freelance creative work. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW), 23*, 163–183. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-014-9198-x.

Mallett, O. &. (2012). Mediating ambiguity: Narrative identity and knowledge workers. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 28*(1), 16-26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2011.12.001.

Manto, G. C. (2010). Managing creatives: Paradoxical approaches to identity regulation. *Human Relations, 63*(6), 781-805. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709342929.

Miljeteig, R. (2014, January). *9 Philosophies That Will Change The Way You Look At Life*. Retrieved May 2020, from Lifehack: https://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/9-philosophies-that-will-change-the-way-you-look-life.html

Miltiadis, E. (2020, April 24). *Coronavirus: could emotional memories of this crisis affect our future behaviour?* Retrieved May 2020, from The Conversation: https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-could-emotional-memories-of-this-crisis-affect-our-future-behaviour-135597

Molla, R. (2020, March 17). *It's not just you. Everybody is reading the news more because of coronavirus.* Retrieved April 2020, from Vox News: https://www.vox.com/recode/2020/3/17/21182770/news-consumption-coronavirus-traffic-views

Moser, K., & Paul, K. I. (2009). Unemployment impairs mental health: Meta-analyses. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 74*(3), 264-282. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.01.001.

Naidu-Ghelani, R. (2020, April 3). *Coronavirus pandemic: What are the psychological effects of self-isolation?* Retrieved May 2020, from Ipsos: https://www.ipsos.com/en/coronavirus-pandemic-what-are-psychological-effects-self-isolation

Nambisan, S. (2018). Digital Entrepreneurship: Toward a Digital Technology Perspective of Entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 41*(6), 1029-1055. https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12254.

Nielsen, S. L., & Gartner, W. B. (2017). Am I a student and/or entrepreneur? Multiple identities in student entrepreneurship. *Education+ Training, 59*(2), 135-154. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-09-2014-0122.

Oliver, D. (2015). Identity work as a strategic practice. In D. Golsorkhi, L. Rouleau, D. Seidl, & E. Vaara, *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice* (pp. 331-344). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Orel, M. (2019). Coworking environments and digital nomadism: Balancing work and leisure whilst on the move. *World Leisure Journal, 61*(3), 215-227. https://doi.org/10.1080/16078055.2019.1639275.

Paoloni, P., Secundo, G., Ndou, V., & Modaffari, G. (2019). Women Entrepreneurship and Digital Technologies: Towards a Research Agenda. In P. Paoloni, & R. Lombardi, *Advances in Gender and Cultural Research in Business and Economic* (pp. 181-194). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Pipyrou, S. (2016). Adrift in time: Lived and silenced pasts in Calabria, south Italy. *Journal of History and Anthropology, 27*(1), 45-59. https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2015.1111210.

Pratt, M. G. (2008). itting Oval Pegs Into Round Holes: Tensions in Evaluating and Publishing Qualitative Research in Top-Tier North American Journals. *Organizational Research Methods, 11*(3), 481-509. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428107303349.

Ravasi, D. &. (2013). How Do I Know Who You Think You Are? A Review of Research Methods on Organizational Identity. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 15*(2), 185-204. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12008.

Reichenberger, I. (2018). Digital nomads – a quest for holistic freedom in work and leisure. *Annals of Leisure Research, 21*(3), 364-380, https://www.doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2017.1358098.

Reis, R. (2020, April 3). *How do countries differ in their response to the coronavirus economic crisis?* Retrieved April 2020, from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/03/coronavirus-economic-crisis-financial-impact

Rushe, D., & Aratani, L. (2020, April 2). *Coronavirus batters US economy as 6.65m file for unemployment last week*. Retrieved April 2020, from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/apr/02/us-unemployment-coronavirus-economy

Rushe, D., & Aratani, L. (2020, May 7). *US unemployment rises another 3m, bringing total to 33m since pandemic began*. Retrieved May 2020, from The Guardian:

https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/may/07/us-unemployment-jobless-coronavirus-economy

Rynes, S. &. (2004). From the Editors: Qualitative Research and the "Academy of Management Journal". *The Academy of Management Journal, 47*(4), 454-462. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20159596.

Schachter, E. P., & Rich, Y. (2011). Identity Education: A Conceptual Framework for Educational Researchers and Practitioners. *Educational Psychologist, 46*(4), 222–238. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2011.614509.

Schultz, M. M. (2012). Constructing Identity in and around Organizations: Introducing the Second Volume of "Perspectives on Process Organization Studies". In S. M. M. Schultz, *Constructing Identity in and around Organizations* (pp. 1-18). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sen-Crowe, B., McKenney, M., Benova, D., & Elkbuli, A. (2020). A state overview of COVID19 spread, interventions and preparedness. *American Journal of Emergency Medicine*, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajem.2020.04.020 .

Shane, S. (2012). Reflections on the 2010 AMR Decade Award: Delivering on the promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review, 37*, 10-20.

Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2000). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 217–226. https://doi.org/10.2307/259271.

Steyaert, C. (1997). A Qualitative Methodology for Process Studies of Entrepreneurship. *International Studies of Management & Organization, 27*(3), 13-33. https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.1997.11656711.

Storey, J., Salaman, G., & Platman, K. (2005). Living with enterprise in an enterprise economy: Freelance and contract workers in the media. *Human Relations, 58*(8), 1033-1054. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726705058502.

Sutherland, W., & Jarrahi, M. H. (2017). "The Gig Economy and Information Infrastructure: The Case of the Digital Nomad Community.". *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *1*, p. Article No. 97.

Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human Relations*, 1163-1193. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267035610001.

Tavor, T., Gonen, L. D., Weber, M., & Spiegel, U. (2018). The effects of income levels and income inequalities on happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 19*, 2115–2137. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-017-9911-9.

Thomas, G. (2010). Doing Case Study: Abduction Not Induction, Phronesis Not Theory. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(7), 575-582. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410372601.

Thompson, B. Y. (2019). 'I get my lovin' on the run': Digital Nomads, Constant Travel, and Nurturing Romantic Relationships. *The Geographies of Digital Sexuality*, 69-90. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-6876-9_5.

Thompson, B. Y. (2019). The digital nomad lifestyle: (Remote) work/leisure balance, privilege, and constructed community. *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure, 2*, 27–42. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41978-018-00030-y.

Thompson, P., & McHugh, D. (2002). *Work organisations.* Houndsmill: Palgrave.

United Nations. (2020, March 18). *Coronavirus may make 25 mn jobless, workers to lose $3.4 trn in income: UN*. Retrieved May 2020, from Business Standard: https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/covid-19-pandemic-could-make-another-25-million-jobless-un-120031801445_1.html

van Laer, K., & Janssens, M. (2014). Between the devil and the deep blue sea: Exploring the hybrid identity narratives of ethnic minority professionals. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 30*, 186–196. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2013.08.004.

Verduijn, K. (2013). Questioning dominant entrepreneurship assumptions: the case of female ethnic minority entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development, 25*(7-8), 612-630. https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2013.814718.

Voglis, P. (2008). Review of the book Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941–1944. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 499-501. https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.0.0033.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2020, February 14). *Coronavirus: how media coverage of epidemics often stokes fear and panic*. Retrieved April 2020, from The Conversation: https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-how-media-coverage-of-epidemics-often-stokes-fear-and-panic-131844

Watson, T. J. (2008). Managing Identity: Identity Work, Personal Predicaments and Structural Circumstances. *Organization, 15*(1), 121-143. https://doi.org/:10.1177/1350508407084488.

Watson, T. J. (2009). Entrepreneurial action, identity work, and the use of multiple discursive resources - The case of a rapidly changing family business. *International Small Business Journal, 27*(3), 251-274. https://doi.org/0.1177/0266242609102274.

Watson, T. J. (2013). Entrepreneurship in action: bringing together the individual, organizational and institutional dimensions of entrepreneurial action. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development, 25*(5-6), 404-422. https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2012.754645.

Welter, F. (2011). Contextualizing Entrepreneurship—Conceptual Challenges and Ways Forward. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 35*(1), 165-184. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00427.x.

Westgate, E. C., & Holliday, J. (2016). Identity, influence, and intervention: The roles of social media in alcohol use. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 9*, 27–32. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.10.014.

Wiklund, J. D. (2011). The Future of Entrepreneurship Research. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 35*(1), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00420.x.

Winkler, I. (2018). Identity work and emotions: A review. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 20*, 120-133. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12119.

Worldometer. (2020). *World Population by Year*. Retrieved March 2020, from Worldometer: https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/world-population-by-year/

Wry, T., Lounsbury, M., & Glynn, M. A. (2011). Legitimating nascent collective identities: Coordinating cultural entrepreneurship. *Organization Science, 22*(2), 449–463. https://doi.org/ 10.1287/orsc.1100.0613.

Ybema, S. K. (2009). Articulating identities. *Human Relations, 62*(3), 299-322. https://doil.org/10.1177/0018726708101904.

Zahra, S. A. (2007). Contextualizing theory building in entrepreneurship research. *Journal of Business Venturing, 22*(3), 443-452. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2006.04.007.

Zahra, S. A. (2011). Entrepreneurship's Next Act. *The Academy of Management Perspectives, 25*(4), 67-83. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2010.0149.

Zahra, S. A. (2014). Contextualization and the advancement of entrepreneurship research. *International Small Business Journal, 32*(5), 479-500. https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242613519807.

- ## Appendix A: Background Information on Stoian Ethics

An interesting way of solving an identity struggle, tension, or problem is by maintaining a Stoian point of view e.g. applying Stoicism. Stoicism is a philosophy that is helpful for understanding and dealing with emotions, in particular, anxiety (Adam, 2014). Stoics resolve anxiety with the idea that a situation will be painful and tough indeed but will ultimately be okay, as one is stronger than originally thought. Additionally, emotions like anger and frustration are based on one's own faults instead of a response to the outside influence (Miljeteig, 2014). As a result, Stoics do not respond to provocation, as they consider it unproductive. Consequently, the negative expressions of identity work can be solved by taking this Stoical approach and not worrying about emotions that cannot be influenced (Adam, 2014).