

Digital Nomads and Perceived Professionalism

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Summary

The global pandemic led to a reimagining of traditional work structures. The rise of digital nomads was facilitated by technological advancements and a desire for a flexible lifestyle. Digital nomads value their professional image, as it is important for getting projects and maintaining their desired lifestyle. Despite increasing research on digital nomads, there is a gap in understanding the connection between professionalism and the digital nomad lifestyle. Therefore, the research question seeks to explore the measures digital nomads must take to uphold their self-perceived professional image resulting in the following research question.

RQ. What measures needed to be taken by digital nomads to uphold a professional image as perceived by themselves?

A qualitative research method was employed to study professionalism among digital nomads. In-depth interviews were conducted with at least six digital nomads, lasting between 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews addressed sub-questions and were designed to elicit relevant responses. Facebook was used to identify interviewees, and snowballing was implemented to recruit additional participants. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and stored securely to ensure data protection and anonymity. A code tree was created to identify commonalities and differences between interviews, facilitating the analysis of the data. The findings from the interviews helped answer the research questions and contribute to a broader understanding of the topic. Regarding the difficulties faced by digital nomads, reliable internet access is mentioned as an absolute necessity by all interviewees. The ability to find a quiet and focused working environment is also important, with most preferring to work from their accommodation while some others use coworking spaces. Moving to different locations can present challenges in finding suitable working environments and adjusting to new routines. The freedom and independence of the digital nomad lifestyle allow them to focus on the skills they want to improve and learn from the diverse perspectives and knowledge of others they meet. In terms of professionalism, interviewees highlighted the importance of delivering quality work, effective communication with clients, and being well-rounded in terms of skills and interpersonal interactions. Appearance and having a professional background were also mentioned as factors contributing to professionalism. Trust was identified as a crucial element in maintaining professionalism for digital nomads due to the lack of contact moments between them and clients or employers. Despite suggestions in the literature that digital nomads should not mention their traveling lifestyles to maintain a professional image, all interviewees stated that they do not lie about their lifestyles with clients and employers. Being transparent about their location and lifestyle was seen as important for building and maintaining trust, which in turn provides the digital nomads with a professional image. Further research could be done on testing the trust between digital nomads and their employers or clients by conducting in-depth interviews with both digital nomads and employers or clients to experience both perspectives.

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Introduction

In 2020, the global pandemic restrained the majority of workers from accessing the physical workplace and forced these workers to be present and interact with each other only through the digital space. (Smite et al., 2023). The new reality that followed normalized remote working and ensured the adoption of new technologies to be able to sustain working from a distance (Herman, 2020). This phenomenon allowed the further rise of Digital nomads, nomadic workers who move their workplace across different locations to travel nonstop for their enjoyment. Digital nomads use the digital space to interact with peers and to establish possible working places (Nash et al., 2020). They are workers who choose “a leisure-driven lifestyle based on continuous and global mobility.” Furthermore, in contrast to people who work from home, digital nomads experience not only temporal flexibility but also spatial flexibility (Aroles et al., 2022, p. NA). The pandemic limited this spatial flexibility which could have meant the end of the small existing digital nomad movement. However, it was because of this limited spatial flexibility where people could not leave their houses and were forced to work from home that new organizational policies were developed which allowed for an improvement in flexibility in the workplace after the pandemic relative to before the pandemic, attracting a vast amount of newcomers to the digital nomad lifestyle (Bonneau, 2023).

The rise in digital nomadism can not only be attributed to the desire for experiencing more of the world. The fixed schedule lifestyle that can be related to working from a physical office can be limiting because desired activities by people can not be performed as people are bound to the typical nine-to-five structure with forty-hour work weeks (Demaj et al., 2021, p. 237). Personal freedom is a big factor in the reasoning for Digital nomads to separate themselves from normal corporate life. This gives them the possibility to create a flexible life tailored to their own needs (Reichenberger, 2017). However, as Digital nomads are not explicitly associated with an organization and are often freelancers, their professional image is a vital part of them being able to get hired for projects and thus, being able to work from their desired place (Aroles et al., 2022), making it important to research how digital nomads perceive their professionalism, especially in contrast to a traditional job. Furthermore, whereas there is an increasing amount of research being done on the topic of digital nomads there is no research being done on the link between professionalism and the lifestyle that they assume. Therefore, to find out what a digital nomad must do to achieve and sustain their professional image the following research question and sub-questions are proposed:

RQ. What measures needed to be taken by digital nomads to uphold a professional image as perceived by themselves?

Q1: What are the difficulties that occur in the working environment, when moving to a next destination?

Q2: How do digital nomads increase the quality of their work?

Q3: What is the difference between professionalism in the traditional work environment and the environment in which the digital nomad finds himself?

Q4: Should digital nomads not mention their traveling lifestyles to uphold their professional image?

This paper is structured as follows. First, a theoretical framework will be built. Thereafter, a methodology will explain the methods used in research as well as the reasoning behind these methods. Subsequently, results are presented by subquestion and compared to the theoretical framework. At last, conclusions are drawn from the results and the research will be reflected upon.

Theoretical Framework

Demaj et al. (2021) state that digital nomadism is not to be confused with remote working. This is due to digital nomads not being the only type of professionals that work remotely. The difference is that in contrast to other workers who move from one place to another as their employer requires them to do so, digital nomads purely move to travel and for their leisure. Furthermore, the travel aspect of digital nomads is not to be confused with tourists and business travelers. Hall et al. (2019) state that even though digital nomads pursue a leisure-driven traveling lifestyle as well as tourists, they are still bound to their work in the matter of needing to get things done. Despite this combination of work and travel, they are still different from business travelers. Hall et al. (2019) also state that business travelers get their travel expenses covered by their employers whereas digital nomads have to pay for these expenses themselves. Another difference is that while business travelers will most likely only have the time to visit some tourist spots in the area, digital nomads stay longer until they feel like they have seen enough of the place.

Evetts (2013) identifies two different types of professionalism: organizational professionalism and occupational professionalism. Organizational professionalism is the ability to manage and be in control of hierarchical structures and to manage decision-making in combination with the responsibilities that come with this. Occupational professionalism relates to practitioner trust from both employers and clients. It is based on the perceived ability to complete the tasks required and assess situations in the working place accordingly. It relies on common and lengthy systems of education, vocational training and socialization, and the development of strong occupational identities and work cultures. Physical presence seems necessary to show these assets to employers. Digital nomads are more often than not, not employed to a single company but offer themselves to provide services to every company that is willing to pay them. Thus, they are not bound to and involved in the hierarchical structures that these companies have and organizational professionalism does not apply to them. Digital nomads can only be assessed by their occupational professionalism.

Freidson (2001) theorized that professionalism is a third logic next to the logics of the market and logics of the organization. The importance of maintaining this professionalism was also emphasized by him and described by him as a special kind of work in the public service sector. Aroles et al. (2022) identify this kind of work as well with the introduction of the importance of meta-work. Relating to digital nomads meta-work means the efforts and actions that are needed to ensure being able to work remotely. Aroles et al. (2022) furthermore identify four types of meta-work: Resource mobilization work, articulation work, transition work, and migration work. Resource mobilization work resembles the minimum necessities needed to sustain the digital nomad lifestyle, meaning accommodation, a place to work, and the equipment to do so. Articulation work is all the other tasks that accumulate to sustain the lifestyle. Transition work is the effort needed to adjust to the work life differences among different countries. "Spatial distance, jet lag and different time zones generate fundamental incompatibilities that digital nomads have to somehow minimize. This can, for instance, involve adapting their schedules to the needs of their clients/collaborators" (Aroles, 2022, p. NA). Migration work is the work that needs to be done on documentation to be allowed to enter the country in which the nomads desire to work..

Nash et al. (2020) identify the relationship between digital nomads and the spaces they work in. It suggests there are three different types of work that digital nomads perform, each needing a different work environment. The first is 'focus work' where to concentrate a quiet environment is needed. The second is called 'collaboration work' where a quiet environment and a decent background is needed to uphold a professional reputation. The third is called 'socialization work' and it requires a space where the digital nomads can find similar people to cooperate, learn and socialize.

Whereas Aroles et al. (2022) identify types of activities necessary, Nash et al. (2020) mostly look at the workplaces needed and how different types of work require different types of working environments. Both however are forms of meta-work and can be detrimental in the maintenance of professionalism.

Aroles et al. (2022) further argue that it is digital nomads for whom this connection between meta-work and professionalism is most important due to the mass of digital nomads not being bound to one employer and relying on their professional image to get hired for certain jobs. They can also not fall back on having a company behind them to serve them with a basic structure of legitimacy. This image is hurt by the general perceptions of the lifestyles of digital nomads. Bonneau (2023) states that the presence of 'digital nomad

lifestyle promoters' in the online environment can cause a general perception to be created that digital nomads only are leisure driven. As Bonneau (2023, p. 78) indicates these lifestyle promoters can “seriously undermine their credibility, and make it difficult for them to legitimize their status and prove the value of their work to their clients, employers as well as the public.” Even though the meta-work done by digital nomads is of great essence, the purely leisure-driven lifestyle image that digital nomads suffer from results in them making the meta-work invisible. They do not mention the difficulties in being able to work remotely from their location so as not to disrupt their image of professionalism and reliability. This could result in them not mentioning difficulties with for example time difference (Aroles et al., 2022).

Following the literature analysis of all the concepts relating to digital nomads and professionalism the following conceptual model can be made.

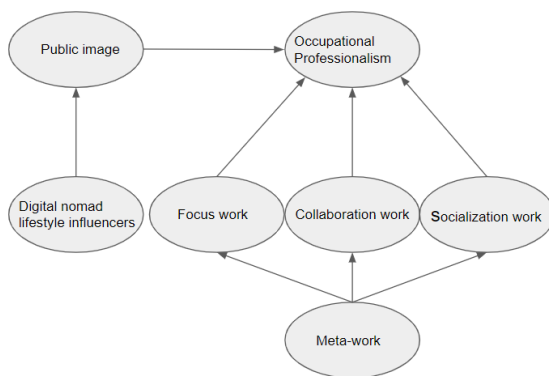


Figure 1: Conceptual model of professionalism in digital nomadism

In the literature, three main types of work were found. These are focus work, collaboration work, and socialization work. The ability to perform these types of work directly affects how their professionalism is perceived and is shown in the model. However, in order to excel or even make it possible to work, meta-work is required. As shown in the literature, the reputation of digital nomads is oftentimes negatively affected by their own public image. The general conception is that this leisure-driven lifestyle is the opposite of what professionalism is perceived to be. This image is sold by digital nomad lifestyle influencers who mostly show the leisure-related aspects of their lifestyle, thus glamorizing it. This means that the digital nomad lifestyle influencers directly affect the public image of digital nomads.

Expectations

Following the literature the following outcomes are expected:

Meta-work is required in order to work. Especially transition work could result in difficulties in changing the working environment, accounting for time zone differences between destinations but also for cultural differences that need to be adjusted to. Being highly mobile signifies going to many different places and having the ability to meet many different sorts of people. Whereas the aforementioned socialization work does not directly increase output compared to the other two types of work, it does allow learning skills from other experienced digital nomads. This improvement in skills is important because although being present and being seen at a 9 to 5 physical job is considered important to be perceived as professional, it is expected that with digital nomads the focus for perceived professionalism relies more on the output and quality of the services provided by the digital nomads. As physical presence is not perceived by employers, only knowing information about the typical digital nomad lifestyle might hurt the professional image that digital nomads have. Thus, it seems it is better to not share this information.

Methodology

Since the research is about professionalism, which is not a clearly defined concept nor easy to measure, it does not allow for a quantitative approach. Thus, a Qualitative research method was adopted. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were held with six self-identified digital nomads that took between 30 and 60 minutes.

At first, the capital cities in the Baltic States were identified as a perfect option as they offer benefits to attract remote workers: cheap costs of living, amenities that are easily accessible, and uncomplicated visa requirements (Brussel times, 2023) as well as reliable internet access. Having high-quality internet access is one of the priorities in the Baltics and since their independence, they have achieved remarkable results (Statista, 2022). In traveling to and through these places and conducting interviews, certain aspects of the digital nomad lifestyle were experienced firsthand. Consequently, when due to their highly mobile lifestyles scheduling conflicts arise, online interviews were also seen as a valid option of conducting interviews. Interviewees who live in the target destinations were identified on Facebook. Other social media platforms were inspected as well but lacked accessibility for an outsider or even disallowed advertisements for locating respondents through these platforms. When the Baltics States Facebook groups did not present a sufficient number of respondents, one other Facebook group was targeted outside of the Baltics. Digital nomads who are actively participating in the online digital nomad community were thought to be more likely to build up connections to other digital nomads. This snowballing was used as a resource for recruiting as well. Highly mobile digital nomads were preferred over less mobile digital nomads as they switch working environments more often and thus have more experience in maintaining their professionalism when switching to a new destination. Interviewee characteristics can be seen in Table 1.

Interviewee #	Interviewee Characteristics				
	Nationality	Age	Sex	Occupation	Independence level
1	Sri Lankan	30	Male	Software Developer	Business Owner
2	Lithuanian	29	Female	Marketing	Employed
3	Dutch	32	Male	Data Management	Employed
4	Colombian	36	Female	Spanish Tutor	Freelancer
5	Colombian	24	Male	Marketing	Freelancer
6	Indian	31	Female	Civil Engineering Insurance	Employed

Table 1: Interviewee characteristics

The interviews were recorded with permission and anonymized during transcribing. Data was stored on a private password-protected drive and data was removed from recording devices to ensure the protection of the data and the identity of interviewees. A code tree was made (Appendix B) based on points made by the literature as well as on the experiences from conducting the interviews. The code tree helped to find commonalities and differences between the interviews that are relevant to answering the research questions.

Results

Working Environments

The way the locations are chosen varies greatly between the interviewees. Among others, motivators in the decision-making process can be the recommendations of other digital nomads, the peacefulness of a location, proximity to and thus the ability to meet clients, the presence of a digital nomad community, or simply a destination having cheap flying tickets. However, an absolute necessity for a digital nomad, and mentioned by all four interviewees, is the presence of reliable internet. Interviewee 1 states, *“well, I think as soon as I have a stable internet, I can work from anywhere. I don't look for much. But you know, as long as I have, you know, access to good internet. That is a must for me.”*

The reliance on internet access indicates that not every destination is suitable for a digital nomad to work from. This means that despite their highly mobile lifestyle, digital nomads are not entirely location independent. This argument is further supported by a quote from interviewee 2 who says that *“so the internet is the first thing, that is for example why I still didn't go to Egypt. Because I really wanted and there is a location where many digital nomads go but the internet is really not reliable and that's to me, like that's the reason I don't go there”*

When asked about the requirements of a working location, all of the respondents mentioned silence or the location to not be too noisy at minimum to truly focus on their tasks. The escape of loudness is most likely why out of the four interviewees, two work mainly from their accommodation, one uses mostly coworking spaces, and the last uses both. This contradicts the stereotypical romantic image of digital nomads working from a cafe, an image also shown in a quote by interviewee 2. She states that *“So I still like a quiet space and quiet place. I personally rarely go to go to coffee places to work. It is too distracting for me. Um, it's funny because like at the beginning, actually that looks very cool. Like, oh my god, this freedom, I can go anytime, anywhere. And I was going to coffee places and sometimes I think so that it helps to get out if you feel stuck. It like, shakes me up if I go to work from a coffee place, but I don't feel that I am as productive as if I work from a quiet place.”*

This relates to the statements said by Nash et al. (2020) about the necessity of being in a quiet working environment when aiming to perform focus work. These three digital nomads all mention that they feel less productive when they work from a cafe instead of home, however, they all mention as well the need to be able to escape their home. This is the reason why interviewee 6 does work primarily from cafes when he does not have video calls. The distracting nature of cafes is not a problem for him *“because I would have my, like, noise canceling headphones. Yeah. And then just work. And it's nice because, like, you know, I don't feel like I'm lonely at home by myself.”* Working from a cafe or even only visiting a cafe offers the opportunity to not stay at home the whole day. Interviewee 3 states that *“I will start the day in a cafe and then at eleven, I will come here, because that is pleasant. A bit of change, a bit of moving, and they have better materials to work here. Moreover, to sit a whole day in a cafe is not that good for your posture.”* He mentions that these materials are important for him to work. *“I just need a good chair, a desk, nothing too fancy. I also like having a view of the outside and otherwise being in a large room with a lot of space.”* Whereas Interviewee 3 prefers to work in large and open spaces, interviewee 1 prefers smaller spaces. *“For example, I went to Nepal, and it was a bit hard for me to find the place that I could work in. So I had to stay in hotels most of the time, because, you know, I like not quite large spaces, but something small for me to work in is yeah. So yeah, so yeah, that is, you know, finding a location that suits my requirements, could be a challenge.”*

Here Interviewee 1 not only mentions a requirement for a working environment but also a potential difficulty that arises when moving to a different city or place. When asked about potential difficulties associated with moving to a different place, four respondents commented that they have no problems adapting to a new environment, only mentioning the scheduling conflicts that might arise when it is time to travel as well as difficulties when dealing with different time zones. The other two digital nomads mentioned that breaking the routine set up in the previous destination and creating a new one as well as traveling can be difficult. Interviewee 2 states that *“technical difficulties I think there are not, but I think it still always requires energy. (...) Like, even for me, in fact, looks like oh, I easily get adopted, I think yes. But like, in fact, like, I think everyone still needs a few days to adapt to a new place.”* Moreover, interviewee 3 comments that *“the switch of locations I had, I had to set up again my routine (...) But when moving to a different destination I think it is important to keep in mind that afterwards you should do less work because you have to rebuild your entire life.”* Interviewee 3 not only states that the switching of routines is difficult but also suggests that on a professional

level you should do less and first get accustomed to the new environment. Interviewee 2 keeps this in mind as well and states that *“I first see when I have meetings, if I have deadlines, then I don't move anywhere during the deadlines, unless it's like some extreme situation. And if I see that I'll actually have less work, it's like nothing urgent. That's the time when I plan my flights and my trips.”* These difficulties and adjustments that need to be made relate to the previously mentioned meta-work theory by Aroles et al. (2022) and more specifically the transition work.

Professional Skills

When asked about how they improve their professional skills interviewees mention different resources. One states that reading books, following courses, and connecting with people is their way of learning. Interviewee 5 states that *“I feel like I improve my professional skills, just getting new projects. You know, working as a freelancer, I get like different jobs that challenge me to do different things.”* Interviewee 2 furthermore says that working is their way of improving their skills and is helped by the digital nomad lifestyle: *“Now I realize we've been spending so much time on not working. On, I don't know, talking, going for coffee breaks going somewhere, something, I don't know, like to stop, you know, and now I spend much more time on actual work. And work makes me learn things right. Because I have this work now where I'm required to learn things constantly and research and that really opens up my mind you know.”* The ability to meet and work with a lot of people is also stated as a way of improving skills because of all the combined knowledge. Interviewee 1 states that *“And we have different ways of thinking and different ways of looking at a specific project. (...) So yeah, of course, we can get two or three different ideas and most definitely improves your skills as well.”* Interviewee 2 further states that *“And because usually in the group, there are people from very different countries, with different backgrounds, with working different things. So each person would know, basically different information and, or, like tools and sources or courses and that's how I learned and that's how I get to know new things.”* Not only the ability to meet and work with a lot of people is an advantage of the digital nomad lifestyle in improving professional skills, but the freedom that comes with the lifestyle is also considered a significant advantage as well. Interviewee 3 states that *“I think that as a digital nomad you have mainly freedom. You are not being held back by a nine-to-five job where you are asked to do things by your boss.”* Moreover, Interviewee 2 says that this freedom of not being dependent on a boss allows digital nomads to truly decide on what skills they want to improve in. Interviewee 1 further confirms this by saying *“So yeah, I mean, like, working remotely. You are your own boss, you get to learn if you want. So I have gained a lot of experience in the areas that I want in. So that's kind of an advantage for me.”* Aside from providing the opportunity to specialize in specific areas of choice, the digital nomad lifestyle also forces you to broaden your skills in areas unfamiliar. Interviewee 4 states that *“I think I have learned more in three years than in, in all my experience that I have. So I'm 36 years old so I started to work when I was like 21 years old or something. (...) being a digital nomad, because you not only are a teacher, so you are a marketer, you have to find clients, you have to do this, you have to do graphic design, you have to do that. And also you have to learn all the things around at the same time.”* Overall, digital nomads are helped by their lifestyle in improving their professional skills by having the freedom to specialize in the areas they are interested in, by meeting other digital nomads with new knowledge, and by being forced into broadening their skills in different areas.

Traditional professionalism and digital professionalism.

After being asked how he made sure to come across as professional in a traditional job, Interviewee 1 believes that professionalism is based on being well-rounded: *“How I want to showcase my skills in what I can do, how confident I was in what I was doing. So I think that you have to improve on all the assets as a person. (...) not just having the skills, but you need to know how to interact with the customers, with the team, how to work with the boss. I think that that's what professionalism is in the workplace.”* Answering the same question, Interviewee 3 corroborates both sides of the argument, performance and communication, by saying that *“actually it comes down to delivering quality work”* and moreover *“I think communication is very important as well, keeping the client up to date on what I'm doing, as you are costing the client a lot of money. What I have learned as well is that as long as you don't say no, everything is good.”* Interviewee 3 ends the quote here with

an important lesson he has learned. This could imply that previous experiences contribute to your professionalism as well. Interviewee 4 endorses this argument by answering the same question with: *“I think experience. This is the only way to be a good professional. Yeah, so I think with experience of course. (...) I didn't have like experience when I started. (...) but with the time so I just started to understand that yes, how to improve my lessons and how to be consistent and also with the clients because before I didn't have to get some clients, but now that I have to, also with my team, so I just learned with experience how is the best way to communicate with them?”*

Another thing that is mentioned is appearance. Appearance is important in both the traditional and the digital nomad lifestyle yet different. Interviewee 4 mentioned that *“But, yeah, I also care about my physical look. So you don't want to look like a lazy person or a person that is not showering every day yourself. Yes, I need to be like this (at a desk). So something like this is professional. Yes because I don't have any strange background and there's no noise around. So it's like, okay, this person is professional.”* She furthermore mentions the importance of having a normal background. This is supported by Interviewee 1 who not only states the importance but also presents the reasoning behind it: *“that's a big thing for me. I usually need to have a white background, having a plain background, it doesn't distract the client, you can have direct contact with the client and a nice conversation”*

When asked about how she would come across as professional as a digital nomad, interviewee 2 stated that *“Okay, so to be honest, I don't see the correlation between digital being a digital nomad and this thing, I think that's highly dependent on the company itself. It doesn't matter if the company is remote or you have to go to the office.”* This would mean that between working remotely and working in a traditional environment there is no difference in how professionalism is perceived. The same things are important in the digital nomad lifestyle as within a traditional job. More interviewees had matching thoughts. Interviewee 1 stated that *“I guess it's the same right. I still apply the same method when I was speaking to clients, in their company working with them directly. (...) I have to show this person this professionalism. Yeah. Yeah, same thing, but it's just that, you know, they don't get to see me every day.”* Although professionalism is perceived the same between different working lifestyles previously mentioned, seeing each other less might be a reason to be why coming across as professional might be more important for a digital nomad than someone who works in a nine-to-five job. When asked this question interviewee 3 confirmed this by answering *“I think because being a digital nomad the contact moments that you have are limited and often through email it is more important. If you are communicating slovenly, or abruptly, that is not good for the image they get of you.”* The image directly affects the trust that the employer or client has in you, and being trusted appears to be important as a digital nomad. Interviewee 3 furthermore states that *“in this digital nomad life, I still think trustworthiness is important.”* Moreover, interviewee 1 supports this argument of trust being vital for a digital nomad and ties it back to professionalism by saying that *“Yeah, of course, I think being a digital nomad, trust is important. That trust issue is always there. Because you're not working in a single place. You don't have people working in a physical location, and that's where professionalism comes in, you have to be professional in order to convince the client.”* The relevance of trust to professionalism was already mentioned by Evetts (2013) as professionalism is based on the perceived ability to complete the tasks required and assess situations in the working place accordingly. In the interviews, it was made clear that for digital nomads maintaining this trust is even more important than in a traditional nine-to-five job.

Digital nomad acceptance

Contrary to what the literature suggests, all of the interviewees tell their clients and employers that they are traveling while working. Interviewee 1 mentions trust again: *“I'm always open, don't lie to them. If I lie to them, and you know, they find out that I'm in a different location, I'm running this company this way, then that's bad for me.”* This implies that a break in trust could affect his professionalism and thus he is honest about his lifestyle. The two interviewees working for a company mention that it is accepted within their companies. Interviewee 2 goes further and says that the acceptance of her lifestyle within a company is very important to her:

“it's really is viewed positively in our company, but that's also something I first of all, that's something I want to do. So I would I look for this company that would support that in a way like, oh, who would be okay with that? Moreover, these requirements are not one-sided as she says that “what I saw when I was looking for the, for the job, was that there are companies that actually they do prefer employees, they do prefer someone who worked remotely before.” this could be because digital nomads are more critically developed as interviewee 3 states: *“I actually think that a digital nomad might be more professional in the long term than someone with a normal job, as this person has so much more life experience, has ‘lived’ so much more, has seen so much more, and can offer different perspectives.”* Interviewee 4 uses being open about her digital nomad lifestyle as a marketing tool to find clients. She states that *“this is also part of my marketing, because I teach Spanish, for example, for digital nomads. And so if another nomad is seeing you, you feel kind of like empathy.”* This shows that being open about their digital nomad lifestyle can also be used as a selling point when potential clients are other digital nomads. The only instance where one of the digital nomads is not open is seen in the case of interviewee 5, who does share his lifestyle with his employer, however regarding his clients he states that *“Because, in my space, in the construction space. The clients are still very old school. (...) They're still, they're still not like the tech space where, you know, it's more trendy to, like, you know, be digital and all that.”* This shows that it is the unfamiliarity with the digital world rather than the stereotypical image of the digital nomads that could affect the trust level between digital nomads and their clients.

Conclusion

To uphold a professional image and to be professional as a digital nomad as perceived by themselves multiple assets are to be considered. As expected before, transition work could result in difficulties in changing the working environment, accounting for time zone differences between destinations but also for cultural differences that need to be adjusted to. This is shown in the results as although digital nomads tend to adapt easily to new places, this study has also found that even a digital nomad can feel exhausted by switching to a different destination. To still come across as professional it is important to take up fewer tasks when the relocation happens or even only move when there is a relatively calm period in work. When picking a destination, reliable internet is an absolute necessity. To truly concentrate on work, digital nomads tend to avoid cafes as a working place, stating it is too distracting to perform focus work. Coworking spaces are a welcome alternative, however, most respondents share that they prefer to work from home. Their highly mobile lifestyle was expected to allow digital nomads to meet many other experienced workers and learn from them. This is corroborated in this paper as digital nomads especially mention that the ability to meet and work with other people helps them greatly in improving their professional skills. However, not only was the ability to work with and meet many other digital nomads mentioned as an advantage, but also the lifestyle that they possess affords them more freedom which allows them to broaden and specialize in the skills that they want. Thus, being a digital nomad makes it easier to improve professionally.

As being physically present is considered important to be perceived as professional in a traditional setting, it was expected that with digital nomads the focus for perceived professionalism relies more on the output and quality of the services provided by the digital nomads than in communication between the digital nomads and their employers and clients. However, this study has found that professionalism is considered the same between the traditional nine-to-five job and the digital working environment that the digital nomads have. Communication, appearance, and experience are found to be just as important in the digital working environment as in a traditional nine-to-five job but come into place in different ways. Despite there being no difference in professionalism, for a digital nomad, it is perceived as more important to uphold this professional image as employees have significantly fewer contact moments with their employers and clients. When contact moments are limited, trust between the digital nomad and their clients and bosses is important. Showing professionalism is considered as a way to build this trust. Beforehand it was expected that the image of the typical digital nomad lifestyle might hurt the professional image that digital nomads have and thus it would be better not to share information about this lifestyle. However, this study has shown that trust is also why it is recommended that digital nomads do not lie about their digital nomad lifestyle. If this lie comes out the trust is broken which directly affects the professional image.

Discussion

As professionalism is not a straightforward concept it could be that the interviewees interpreted the meaning of professionalism differently, even after stating the definition found in the literature, which may have affected the outcome of this research. Facebook groups of digital nomads in the baltics were used for collecting interviewees. However, this proved difficult as perhaps it was not the right season for digital nomads to be in the Baltic states. Furthermore, in general it was hard to find digital nomads in facebook groups as the digital nomad and the expat communities are often intertwined. Eventually a different Facebook group was targeted where more respondents were found. One of these respondents gave two more respondents. Considering this way of recruiting is snowballing it might have affected the outcome of this research by these respondents sharing similarities. Whereas all digital nomads shared about their digital nomad lifestyle with their employers, there was one respondent that did not share this information with his clients. Other interviewees may not have been asked deeply enough about whether they tel their clients instead of whether they teel their employers. Further research could be done on testing the trust between digital nomads and their employers and clients by conducting in-depth interviews with both digital nomads and employers and clients to experience both perspectives and see whether there is a difference in how trust is affected by the digital nomad lifestyle between clients and employers.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Q. What are the measures needed to be taken by digital nomads to uphold a professional image as perceived by themselves?

Introduction questions:

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself? (Age, Nationality)
- What kind of work do you do?
- Are you self employed or a freelancer?
- How often do you move to different locations?

Q1: Is the choice of location more work driven or leisure driven?

- How do you pick your destinations?
- What are the requirements for a destination to be able to work there?
- Are there any other services or attributes that are a necessity for you to pick your location?
- Would you say that the professional aspect or the leisure aspect of a location is more important to you?
- When do you decide to leave a location?
- Is this purely leisure driven?

Q2: What are the difficulties that occur in the working environment, when moving to a next destination??

- How do you find work?
- What is your preferred working environment?
- How do you choose your location to work?
- Are there different types of work that require different types of work environments?
- What kind of accommodation do you require?
- What are other difficulties when transferring to a different location?

Q3: How do digital nomads increase the quality of their work?

- How do you improve your professional skills?
- Do you work together with other digital nomads?
- Do you think being a digital nomad makes it easier or harder to improve your skills?
- Why?

Q4: What is the difference between professionalism in the traditional work environment and the environment in which the digital nomad finds himself?

- Have you worked in a traditional 9 to 5 work setting before?
- If yes, How would you come across as professional in the traditional work environment?
- How do you try to come across as professional being a digital nomad?
- Do you think your professional image is more important as a digital nomad than it is in a traditional environment?
- How do you advertise yourself online?

Q5: Should digital nomads not mention their travelling lifestyles in order to uphold their professional image?

- Do you tell your employer(s) you travel while working?
- Why? / Why not?
- Do you feel like telling your employer about your digital nomad lifestyle affects your professional image?

Closing Questions:

- Do you feel like we have covered everything relating to digital nomads and professionalism?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Code tree

