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How does loneliness affect work motivation among digital nomads?

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Table of contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Literature Review	4
1) Loneliness	4
Digital Communication.....	5
2) Work motivation	7
Workplace motivation	7
Self-Determination Theory	8
Coping with loneliness	10
Problematic and research question	12
Chapter 2: Methodology and context of the research.....	13
1) Research Design	13
2) Research Philosophy	14
3) Research approach	15
4) Research strategy	16
5) Time horizon	16
6) Techniques and procedures	16
a) Data collection	16
b) Sampling	17
c) Data analysis	17
d) Material used.....	18
Questionnaires.....	25
Observations	19
7) Research Limitation	20
Chapter 3: Empirical Findings	21
1) Competence.....	21
2) Autonomy.....	22
Control.....	22
Mobility	23
3) Relatedness.....	25
Chapter 4: Discussion	32
1) Loneliness	32
2) Motivation	33
Conclusion	35
Bibliography	37

Table of figures

Figure 1: Social Media usage using the UCLA loneliness scale (2020 U.S. Report)	14
Figure 2: The three basic psychological needs (Geratz, 2022)	17
Figure 3: The “research onion” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 130)	23
Figure 4: Research philosophies (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 144)	23
Figure 4: Deduction, induction, abduction: from reason to research (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 153)	24
Figure 5: Type of work of the respondents	30

Introduction

This section aims to familiarize the reader with the main subject and the research objectives of this thesis.

The book *Digital Nomad* by **Makimoto & Manners**, first published in 1997, was revolutionary in several ways. It presented a new concept of work and lifestyle that was made possible by advances in technology and connectivity, it also predicted a future where remote work and location-independent living would become commonplace. The book popularized the idea of working remotely, which was a relatively new concept at the time. It presented a vision of a future where people could work from anywhere in the world, as long as they had access to the internet. They also predicted the rise of the gig economy, where workers would be able to take on short-term contracts and work for multiple clients simultaneously. They argued that mobility was an essential aspect of the digital nomad lifestyle, allowing people to travel the world while still earning a living.

Advances in technology are at the core of the digital nomadism lifestyle. The rise of new technologies in the past decades have fundamentally changed the way we work and live. It is important to highlight the fact that the Digital Nomad lifestyle would not be possible without the development of new technologies that enable remote work and wireless communication across borders. From high-speed internet to cloud-based collaboration tools and portable workstations, digital nomads rely heavily on technology to maintain their freedom and independence (**Schlagwein, 2018**). Thus, the link between new technologies and digital nomadism is crucial, and exploring this connection can help us to better understand the implications of technology on the future of work and the way we interact with the world around us. A recent paper by (**Nash et al., 2018**), aimed to provide a clear definition of digital nomadism, and explore the use of digital technologies among digital nomads. The authors of the paper have defined digital nomadism as:

"a form of mobile working that enables professionals to work remotely, with a location-independent lifestyle, by using digital technologies to perform their job and communicate with clients and colleagues."

Digital nomads use these technologies to perform their work tasks, communicate with clients and colleagues, and manage their businesses. The paper highlights that digital nomadism is not limited to a particular industry or job type. Rather, it is a way of working that can be adopted by professionals from various fields, including freelancers, entrepreneurs, and employees of remote companies.

Even though digital nomads do enjoy the freedom to being able to travel while working, it is not an obligation. As mentioned in an interview conducted by **Reichenberger (2017)**

“A lot of people may disagree with me, many connect being a digital nomad to international travel, but why not just go to a coffee shop? Or work underneath a tree in the park? As long as you can pick your location, and actually do it, you’re a digital nomad.

Female, Germany, 45”

While the Digital Nomad lifestyle enable people to have the flexibility to work and travel at the same time, being a digital nomad is not always as glamorous as it may seem **(Mai, 2021)**. This lifestyle comes with its own set of challenges, digital nomads may struggle with work-life balance, as the lines between work and personal life can become blurred when working from anywhere at any time, **May (2021)** also highlights the challenges of navigating different time zones and cultural norms when working with clients or colleagues from around the world. Additionally, she notes that the financial instability and unpredictability of freelancing or running a business as a digital nomad can create stress and anxiety. However, **one major issue** faced by digital nomads is loneliness **(Hermann & Paris, 2020)**, as they work remotely and may not have a traditional workplace community which can negatively impact mental health and motivation. Loneliness has been defined by **Hawkley and Cacioppo (2010, p. 218)** as:

“a distressing feeling that accompanies the perception that one’s social needs are not being met by the quantity or especially the quality of one’s social relationships”

Moreover, this work aims to understand the relationship between loneliness and work motivation among digital nomads. By examining the experiences and perspectives of digital nomads, we seek to gain insights into how loneliness impacts their motivation and identify the factors that contribute to maintaining intrinsic motivation in the face of loneliness.

In the first section of this study, we will provide a comprehensive literature review on the topic of loneliness among digital nomads, particularly exploring the impact of heavy technology use in staying connected with the business world. This will provide a solid foundation for understanding the specific challenges and dynamics associated with loneliness in the digital nomad context. Then our focus will shift towards investigating the link between loneliness and work motivation among digital nomads, using the Self-Determination Theory as a theoretical framework. By utilizing this theory, we will explore how the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness come into play and influence the motivation levels of digital nomads. This theoretical lens will enable us to examine the interplay between loneliness and work motivation in a more nuanced and holistic manner. Finally, we will delve into the existing research and examine the ways in which digital nomads cope with and mitigate feelings of loneliness while working remotely. The literature review conducted in the first section will lead us to the formulation of the research problem and question for this study.

In the second section, we will provide an explanation of the methodology used, including the research approach and design. We will detail the operations conducted throughout the study, encompassing the data collection process and the subsequent analysis of the obtained results. By presenting the methodology and the procedural steps undertaken, this section aims to provide a clear understanding of the research process, ensuring transparency and reliability in the findings.

In the third section of this thesis, we will present the results of the study, incorporating both the responses from the participants and the personal experience of the author as a Digital Nomad. This mixed-method approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the topic at hand.

In the fourth and final section of this work, we will engage in a discussion of the study's results in comparison to the existing literature. This section will involve a critical analysis and synthesis of the findings, considering how they align with or diverge from the theories, concepts, and perspectives presented in the literature review.

Finally, this master's thesis will conclude by synthesizing the key findings, implications, and contributions of the study. The conclusion will recapitulate the main research question and objectives, highlighting how they have been addressed throughout the study. It will summarize the major findings derived from the data analysis and discuss their significance in the context of the research field.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The following chapter will present the theoretical foundation of this thesis. This will allow the reader to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various aspects related to the chosen topic.

1) Loneliness

Despite a significant body of research, it is only since few years back that scholars have started studying the phenomenon of loneliness within the context of the business world (**Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018**) especially into this new phenom known as *Digital Nomadism*. By nature, humans have a fundamental desire to form and maintain positive, meaningful, and enduring relationships with others. Research has shown that social connection is a basic human need that is essential for physical and mental well-being, and that the absence of social connection can have negative effects on both physical and psychological health (**Murray, 1938**). Therefore, humans have a natural inclination towards forming social bonds and mutual caring commitments, which are critical for fulfilling our need for social connection and overall well-being.

Furthermore, the rise of digital nomadism as a new way of working has brought with it unique challenges in terms of loneliness and social isolation. Digital nomads often work remotely from different locations, making it challenging to build and maintain social connections with others (co-workers, friends, family, etc.). While this lifestyle offers many benefits, including flexibility and freedom, it can also exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation. Given the importance of social connectedness and the potential negative outcomes associated with loneliness, it is essential for scholars and practitioners to better understand the phenomenon of loneliness in the workplace and among digital nomads. (**Miguel et al., 2023**)

While social connection is essential for human well-being, some people may choose to be alone and are fine with it (**Russell et al., 2012**) which is different from individuals who feel lonely or socially isolated and would like to have more social connection in their lives. People who choose to be alone often do so for a variety of reasons, they may enjoy spending time alone and find it rejuvenating, or they may value their independence and prefer to rely on themselves rather than others. Some individuals may choose solitude as a means of pursuing personal interests or creative endeavors that require uninterrupted focus and concentration.

However, it is important to note that choosing to be alone is different from feeling lonely or socially isolated. While some individuals may prefer solitude, they still have the option to connect with others if they desire. In contrast, individuals who feel lonely or socially isolated often do not have the social connections they desire and may experience negative emotions as a result. Some individuals may thrive in social settings, while others may prefer to be alone or have a smaller social circle. Ultimately, what matters is that individuals have the social

connections they desire and that these connections promote their overall well-being. In our case, we will solely focus on loneliness.

Digital Communication

Knowing that digital nomads rely on technology to work remotely, social networks such as LinkedIn have become a crucial component of their work. For this reason, exploring the impact of social networks on people and specifically concerning the loneliness issue is an important topic for this thesis.

Social networks have transformed the way we connect with others, providing opportunities for communication, sharing, and social interaction (**Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010**). While social media can facilitate connections and foster a sense of community, it can also contribute to loneliness and social isolation. One of the main ways that social media contributes to loneliness is through a phenomenon called "social comparison" (**Festinger, 1954**) where social media platforms enable individuals to compare their lives and social connections to those of others online, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy, exclusion, and social isolation. The curated and often idealized version of others' lives portrayed on social media can create unrealistic expectations and foster a sense of dissatisfaction with one's own life and social connections, especially among young adults (**Pittman & Reich, 2016**).

Moreover, social media can contribute to a sense of disconnection from others, despite the many connections it provides. This is because social media interactions lack the depth and authenticity of face-to-face interactions and can create a false sense of social connectedness. Individuals may have many online friends and followers, but lack the close emotional connections and support provided by in-person interactions. According to a recent study conducted by **Rajan et al. (2022)**, heavy social media use is linked to increased feelings of loneliness and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among young Indians. Because Digital nomads rely heavily on social media platforms to stay connected with colleagues, clients, and the broader community of remote workers. The constant exposure to social media can also contribute to the experience of Fear of Missing Out which has been defined as:

"a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (**Przybylski et al., 2013, p. 1841**)

The study found that both loneliness and FoMO increased with heavy social media use, but the increase in loneliness was more significant than FoMO. These findings highlight the potential negative impact of social media on mental health, particularly on feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE 2019 VS. 2018

Differences in loneliness based on social media usage are more pronounced than in 2018, due to an increase in loneliness among very heavy users

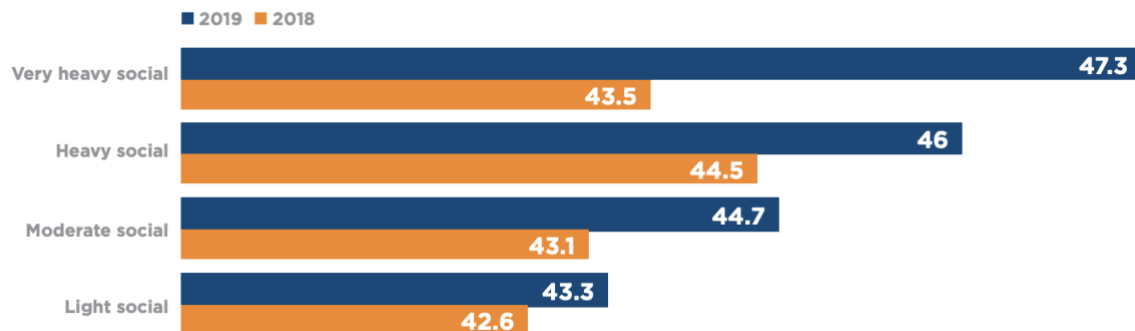


Figure 1: Social Media usage using the UCLA loneliness scale (Cigna, 2020)

The Loneliness and the workplace 2020 U.S. Report shows causal evidence between loneliness and higher use of social media. It doesn't show that high use will lead to loneliness, but it does make us ask ourselves if there is one.

Moreover, the study conducted by **Miguel et al. (2023)** sheds light on some of the negative aspects of digital nomadism, particularly in relation to loneliness and isolation, which have been documented in previous research (**Nash et al., 2018; Thompson, 2019a**). On the other hand, research has shown that social media platforms can alleviate loneliness (**Fox, 2019; Pittman, 2018**), but the ways in which different social media platforms and their affordances enable digital nomads to combat loneliness has been unexplored. The study reveals how digital nomads use a flexible and dynamic repertoire of social media platforms and apps to meet their need for connectedness and to combat loneliness. The study identifies Instagram, Facebook groups, Slack, Meetup, and Tinder as key platforms for digital nomads to connect with others. However, it also highlights the unintended consequences of certain platforms and use modalities, such as addictive potential or FoMO. While the findings are exploratory and based on a specific temporal and geographical context, they have implications for aspiring digital nomads, community managers and content creators, and platform designers.

2) Work motivation

Knowing that the digital nomad lifestyle is gaining in popularity, especially among young adults, the importance of our comprehension in this particular domain is crucial, considering the numerous negative emotional, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral consequences that have been associated with experiencing greater levels of loneliness (**Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010**). Prolonged loneliness can lead to increased stress and anxiety, which may eventually cause mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety disorders. Furthermore, loneliness can also affect cognitive performance, including memory, decision-making, and attention. When an individual feels lonely, they may struggle with concentration, making it difficult to focus on tasks and make sound decisions. Additionally, social isolation can have a profound impact on an individual's physical health, including high blood pressure, heart disease, and other related illnesses. In summary, the negative effects of loneliness on mental and physical health highlight the importance of taking proactive measures to combat social isolation and prioritize social connections (**Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010**).

Concerning Digital Nomads, due to the lack of permanent physical connections and social support they may be more vulnerable to feelings of isolation and disconnection, which can have significant consequences for their mental health and wellbeing (**Thompson, 2019a**). Digital nomads often face a significant challenge when they enter countries where there are few other digital nomads and where the host country's language and customs are different from their own. This situation can be particularly severe and lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. **Thompson's (2021)** research study shows that digital nomads are vulnerable to loneliness, and this vulnerability can be amplified when they are in unfamiliar cultural and linguistic environments.

Workplace motivation

Loneliness is a common human experience that is associated with negative mental and physical health outcomes (**Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010**). Research has shown that loneliness can have a significant impact on motivation and often associated with a decreased in motivation, which can lead to a lack of engagement in activities, reduce productivity, and a decrease in overall well-being. Conversely, social support and positive relationships can increase motivation and lead to a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment. In this way, loneliness and motivation are linked, with loneliness often leading to a decrease in motivation and social support and positive relationships leading to an increase in motivation. Understanding this link between loneliness and motivation can help individuals and professionals develop effective strategies for combating loneliness and promoting motivation. Dr Lindsay McMillan in the 2019 Workplace Loneliness report by Australian HR outlines that issue:

“People who experience loneliness make more mistakes at work, take more sick leave, feel less inclined to join in and are not easily approachable in the workplace.”

The report also highlights few key numbers: 40% of lonely workers feel less productive and 38% of lonely workers report being less focus, hence making more mistakes. That shows the

importance of understanding the phenomenon knowing that 90,000 hours are spent working. It also highlights that women and men experience loneliness the same way.

Building and nurturing relationships with colleagues, superiors, and other stakeholders can positively impact an employee's job satisfaction, productivity, and overall well-being (see report above). A supportive and collaborative work environment encourages employees to share ideas and knowledge, leading to enhanced problem-solving and decision-making abilities. Furthermore, social support from colleagues can serve as a buffer against stress and negative emotions, ultimately reducing employee burnout and absenteeism. In contrast, the absence of a supportive network can lead to feelings of isolation and disengagement, resulting in poor job performance and potentially jeopardizing an employee's long-term career prospects (**Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008**).

However, in the case of digital nomads, motivation might not necessarily be linked to their relationships with colleagues in the same way as it is for traditional office workers. Digital nomads work remotely and may not have regular face-to-face interactions with their colleagues. As a result, the importance of building and maintaining relationships with colleagues may be less relevant or even unfeasible. Instead, digital nomads are often evaluated based on their ability to complete tasks efficiently, meet deadlines, and produce high-quality work independently. Therefore, job performance for digital nomads may be more focused on individual productivity and output rather than interpersonal relationships with colleagues.

Self-Determination Theory

The Self-Determination Theory (**Ryan & Deci, 2000**) is highly relevant to understand work motivation. Especially, the Basic Psychological Need Theory (BNPT), one of the six mini-theories of Self-Determination Theory. The theory suggests that intrinsic motivation arises from meeting individuals' psychological needs: **autonomy, competence, and relatedness**.

Self Determination Theory

by Edward Deci & Richard Ryan



Figure 2: The three basic psychological needs (Geratz, 2022)

The Basic Psychological Need Theory is closely related in the digital nomad's world as it provides a framework for understanding the psychological needs of individuals in a remote work environment knowing that Digital Nomads are self-determined persons (**Macgilchrist et al., 2020**). The autonomy and flexibility of the digital nomad lifestyle are central to fulfill the need for **autonomy**, one of the three basic psychological needs identified. Additionally, the need for **competence** is important for digital nomads, as they are often required to work independently and produce high-quality work without the support of colleagues or a physical office environment. Finally, **relatedness**, or the need for social connectedness, may be more difficult for digital nomads to achieve due to the lack of regular face-to-face interactions with colleagues and social networks as previously mentioned.

In the context of the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BNPT), **Vansteenkiste** wrote on *Selfdetermination.org* that relatedness is seen as a fundamental aspect of human well-being, and research has shown that it is closely linked to various outcomes such as happiness, motivation, and overall life satisfaction. In the context of our study on digital nomads and their work motivation, the concept of relatedness has caught our interest as it appears to be the key factor in understanding the loneliness experience of digital nomads. Specifically, our research has highlighted the potential for digital nomads to experience feelings of loneliness and social isolation, which can have a negative impact on their overall well-being and work motivation. By exploring the role of relatedness in the experiences of digital nomads, we aim to shed light on this important psychological need and its potential implications for the well-being and productivity of this growing group of workers. Furthermore, the concept of relatedness serves as a link between the BNPT and Self-Determination Theory, which we have also incorporated into our study. By examining relatedness within the framework of both theories, we hope to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its role in the experiences of digital nomads and its implications for their work motivation and well-being.

When these needs are satisfied, individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, which refers to the desire to engage in an activity for its own sake and because it is enjoyable, interesting, or fulfilling (**Ryan & Deci, 2000**). In the workplace, providing employees with opportunities to satisfy their psychological needs is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation and enhancing work motivation. For example, allowing employees to have control over their work schedules or providing them with opportunities for skill-building and professional development can increase their sense of autonomy and competence, respectively. Similarly, supportive work environment that values collaboration and social connections among colleagues can enhance relatedness. Furthermore, the SDT suggests that when employees are intrinsically motivated, they are more likely to exhibit positive work behaviors such as persistence, creativity, and innovation. This is because they are engaged in their work for reasons that are personally meaningful, and not simply to fulfill external rewards or avoid punishment.

Limits of the model

Even though The Basic Psychological Need Theory (BNPT) has gained widespread acceptance in the fields of psychology and education, some researchers have questioned whether these three basic needs are sufficient to fully capture the complexity of human motivation and well-being (**Vansteenkiste et al., 2020**). Critics argue that there may be additional needs that are not captured by the BNPT (**Sheldon et al., 2001**), such as security/safety, popularity, self-actualization... Moreover, some researchers have noted that the three basic needs are not always equally important or relevant across all individuals or cultures (**Baxter and Pelletier, 2019**). For example, in some cultures, relatedness may be more important than autonomy or competence.

Another limitation of the BNPT is that it primarily focuses on individual-level needs, rather than broader social or societal needs (**Tay and Diener, 2011**). While autonomy, competence, and relatedness are undoubtedly important for individual well-being, they may not fully capture the complex interplay between individuals and their social contexts. For instance, broader societal factors such as economic inequality, discrimination, or political instability can significantly impact individuals' psychological well-being, even if their basic psychological needs are being met.

Given these limitations, some researchers have argued for expanding the list of basic psychological needs to better capture the complex and multifaceted nature of human motivation and well-being.

Coping with loneliness

Co-working/ co-living spaces which have been increasingly popular in recent years among Digital Nomads as a way to cope with loneliness and isolation but also by increasing motivation, productivity and inspire creativity. These spaces are shared workspaces that offer a range of amenities and services to their members. They can be found in all kinds of locations, from major cities to more exotic destinations. **Jeske and Ruwe (2019, p. 174)** have defined co-working spaces as:

“A shared work environment in which people with potentially different professions and from different companies work alongside each other, using the shared space to work but also finding opportunities for social support and networking which arise in a diverse community of people.”

One of the key benefits of co-working spaces is that they can provide a more productive working environment. By working alongside other professionals in a shared space, you can benefit from the energy and motivation of others. This can help you stay focused and on task and can also provide opportunities for collaboration and networking.

In addition, co-working spaces often offer a range of amenities that can further enhance productivity. This may include high-speed internet, meeting rooms, printing and scanning services, and even on-site cafes or restaurants. By having access to all of these resources in one place, you can save time and stay focused on your work (**Cheng, 2018**).

Another advantage of co-working spaces is that they can be a more flexible and cost-effective option than traditional office space. Many co-working spaces offer membership plans that allow you to pay for only the time and services that you need. This can be especially beneficial for freelancers, entrepreneurs, and small businesses that may not need a full-time office.

“Normally when you arrive to a new location, you have to find a place to live and a place to work,” he said, adding, “For digital nomads and entrepreneurs like me, it is definitely the best existing option.”

said R.Harmel, an entrepreneur in an interview from **The New York Times (2015)**.

Finally, co-working spaces in tourist locations can provide a good alternative working environment. By working in a new and stimulating location, you can break out of your routine and find fresh perspectives on your work.

Limits of co-working spaces

Co-working spaces may not be available in all locations or may not meet the specific needs of Digital Nomads. For example, they may be too expensive or not provide adequate internet connectivity. Additionally, co-working spaces can become crowded and noisy, which can be distracting and disrupt productivity. As one manager of a co-working space explained:

“successful entrepreneurs and well-known nomads rarely go to coworking spaces unless they are selling something, because they get swamped with questions or hounded by the wannabees.” Interview by **Cook (2020)**

Finally, the use of co-working spaces can be expensive, especially for those on a tight budget. The cost of a co-working membership or day pass can add up quickly, particularly for Digital Nomads who travel frequently or work in multiple locations.

Another way to cope with loneliness is **radical acceptance**, a concept in mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral therapy that involves fully accepting a situation or experience, without trying to change it or fight against it. It involves acknowledging and accepting reality for what it is, rather than resisting or denying it. This mind set can be especially helpful for people who are struggling with painful emotions, difficult life circumstances, or mental health issues such as anxiety, depression or in our case loneliness. By accepting things as they are, rather than trying to control or change them, individuals can reduce their emotional suffering and increase their sense of peace and well-being. However, radical acceptance is not the same as passive resignation or giving up. Rather, it involves a willingness to fully engage with reality, to take responsibility for one's actions, and to make choices that are in line with one's values and goals (**Maidenberg, 2022**).

Problematic and research question

The concept of digital nomadism has become increasingly popular in recent years, with advancements in technology enabling people to perform their jobs remotely and making possible to work and travel at the same time. However, the idea that digital nomadism represents the perfect way to merge work and vacation is utopian, indeed digital nomads face numerous challenges induced by this lifestyle such as **loneliness**. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) provides a framework to understand the intrinsic motivation by studying The Basic Psychological Need Theory (BNPT), one of the six mini-theories. These needs are respectively competence, autonomy, and **relatedness**. The theory suggests that meeting these 3 basic psychological needs is crucial for individuals to thrive and feel motivated.

In our study, we try to provide a framework for understanding the underlying psychological needs of individuals in a remote work environment and the importance of social connectedness in breaking the cycle of loneliness and enhancing motivation and overall well-being. Finally, the literature review has led us to the following research question:

RQ: How does loneliness affect work motivation among digital nomads?

Indeed, the literature review has highlighted the negative correlation between loneliness and work motivation among office workers, but does it also apply to digital nomad? Knowing that this specific category of workers have chosen this lifestyle, hence should be motivated to keep it as it is.

Chapter 2: Methodology and context of the research

In this section, we will outline the methodology and approach adopted in the study, along with the details of the sample group. Additionally, we will explain the data collection process and provide an analysis of the results. We will also discuss the context in which the study was conducted. Finally, we will address the limitations of the study.

The methodology use in this research was based on structured interviews which are part of a qualitative approach. According to **Adams et al. (2014)**, qualitative research has been long used in different fields such as education, sociology, anthropology, psychology, management, social work but also works at the border of several disciplines. Indeed, non-quantitative methods aim to explore social relations and to describe the reality as experienced by the respondents. *“These methods have much to offer in studying the health and well-being of people and their daily lives in business and home”* (**Adams et al. 2014, p.6**).

This method fits perfectly in our research for several reasons because we clearly address an issue linked to different areas which are management, anthropology, and psychology thus, this work is related to adequate fields where qualitative research is often used for.

1) Research Design

The design of this thesis draws inspiration from **Saunders et al. (2019)** and their well-known “*Research Onion*” framework (see figure below). This metaphorical model resembles an onion in that it has multiple layers, each representing different methodological choices made by the researcher. These layers should be described in detail in the methodology section of the research.

The methodology employed in this thesis is a “multi-method qualitative study” due to the nature of the collected empirical data. Since the data did not comprise any numerical values, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate. This approach was chosen to achieve high precision and gather in-depth, high-quality information, as emphasized by Saunders et al. (2019). The primary objective of this study was to determine the factors that define a digital nomad and to examine the changes that have occurred in this phenomenon during the pandemic. To achieve this aim, empirical data was collected via structured interviews and observations.

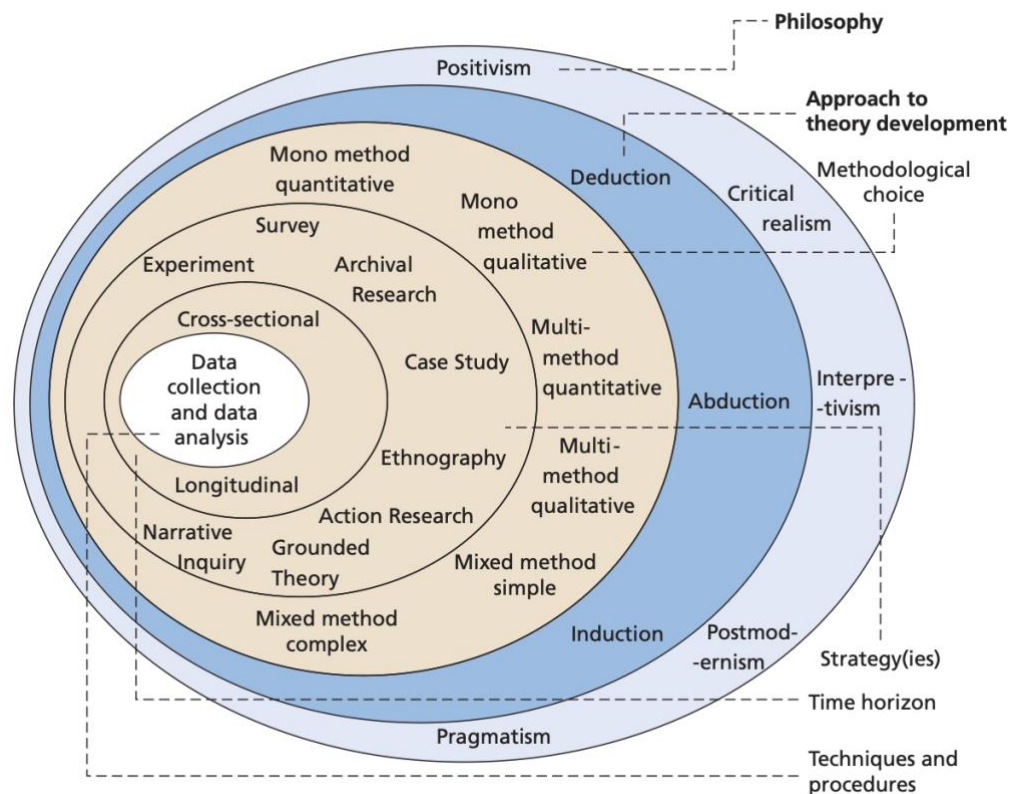


Figure 3: The “research onion” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 130)

2) Research Philosophy

The choice of research philosophy is a critical aspect of any research study as it guides the researcher's perspective and approach to conducting research. In this study on digital nomadism, the research philosophy chosen is interpretivism.

Ontology (nature of reality or being)	Epistemology (what constitutes acceptable knowledge)	Axiology (role of values)	Typical methods
Interpretivism			
Complex, rich Socially constructed through culture and language Multiple meanings, interpretations, realities Flux of processes, experiences, practices	Theories and concepts too simplistic Focus on narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations New understandings and worldviews as contribution	Value-bound research Researchers are part of what is researched, subjective Researcher interpretations key to contribution Researcher reflexive	Typically inductive. Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be interpreted

Figure 4: Research philosophies (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 144)

Interpretivism is a research philosophy that emphasizes the importance of understanding social phenomena from the perspective of the individuals involved in the phenomenon, Saunders et al. (2019, p. 148) stated: *“Interpretivism emphasises that humans are different from physical phenomena because they create meanings.”* Given that digital nomadism is an upcoming and relatively new phenomenon, it is essential to gain an in-depth understanding of it from the perspective of the digital nomads themselves. Thus, qualitative research methods, such as interviews, are well-suited for this study as they allow the researcher to delve deeply into the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of digital nomads. Therefore, the interpretivist research philosophy is an appropriate choice for this study as it aligns with the aim of understanding digital nomadism from the digital nomads' perspectives.

3) Research approach

Following the steps described by Saunders et al. (2019) the research approach chosen in this master's thesis is a hybrid qualitative research methods (Fereday et al., 2006), employing both inductive and deductive approaches.

	Deduction	Induction	Abduction
Logic	In a deductive inference, when the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true	In an inductive inference, known premises are used to generate untested conclusions	In an abductive inference, known premises are used to generate testable conclusions
Generalisability	Generalising from the general to the specific	Generalising from the specific to the general	Generalising from the interactions between the specific and the general
Use of data	Data collection is used to evaluate propositions or hypotheses related to an existing theory	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns and create a conceptual framework	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate these in a conceptual framework and test this through subsequent data collection and so forth
Theory	Theory falsification or verification	Theory generation and building	Theory generation or modification; incorporating existing theory where appropriate, to build new theory or modify existing theory

*Figure 5: Deduction, induction, abduction: from reason to research
(Saunders et al., 2019, p. 153)*

The deductive approach was applied during the creation of the interview guide, which was pre-coded by themes. On the other hand, the inductive approach was used after the data collection phase to identify patterns from the pre-coded theme interviews. This combination of research approaches allowed for a thorough exploration of the research topic, allowing the

researcher to identify patterns in the data while remaining focused on the pre-defined themes. Overall, this approach enabled a more comprehensive and structured analysis of the research data, leading to a more insightful and meaningful conclusion.

4) Research strategy

An auto-ethnographic strategy (author's observations) combine with an ethnographic strategy (additional interviews) have been chosen for this master's thesis. Indeed, the 4-months internship was seen by the author as a unique opportunity to gain practical perspectives on the topic of digital nomadism. The internship component of the research strategy was completed in a digital startup, where the author was able to work in a digital nomad way and gain a first-hand understanding on the phenomenon. The combination of a thesis and an internship provides a comprehensive approach to the research, enabling the author to reflect on their personal experiences while also gathering data from and insights using qualitative research. By doing so, the author has gained a deeper understanding of the matter at hand. Overall, the research strategy of this thesis offers a unique and valuable approach to studying the digital nomad phenomenon, combining both practical and theoretical perspectives to provide a comprehensive analysis.

5) Time horizon

The time horizon is an essential aspect of any research study as it refers to the duration of time over which data is collected (Saunders et al., 2019). For this master's thesis study, a cross-sectional time horizon has been chosen due to the short amount of time available (< 1 year). It involves collecting data at a single point in time from a sample of individuals or entities. In this study, the data has been collected from a sample of digital nomads in **April 2023**, providing a snapshot of their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards loneliness and work motivation. This approach has allowed the researcher to obtain a broad and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon within a specific period. Additionally, a cross-sectional time horizon enables the researcher to make comparisons and identify patterns and trends among a certain number of digital nomads. In summary, the cross-sectional time horizon is a suitable choice for this study as it aligns with the research questions and aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of loneliness on work motivation among digital nomads.

6) Techniques and procedures

a) Data collection

A qualitative questionnaire as the interview method has been used to collect the data (**Rivano Eckerdal & Hagström, 2017**). Indeed, it felt more appropriate from the author than conducting face-to-face meetings. The qualitative questionnaire enables the participants to take their time to think and reflect on their experiences and perspectives on the impact of loneliness on

work motivation. This is particularly important for a sensitive and complex topic like loneliness, where participants may need time to process their emotions and feelings before responding.

Furthermore, the questionnaire allows the participants to answer in a moment where they feel most comfortable, which can facilitate a more honest and authentic response. It also allows for greater flexibility in scheduling, as participants can complete the questionnaire at their own pace and in their own time. This approach can also reduce the pressure and stress associated with a face-to-face interview, especially if it is the first time that the researcher and participant are meeting. In conclusion, the qualitative questionnaire is a valuable tool for collecting data in a non-intrusive and flexible way, and face-to-face interviews can be conducted if needed after the questionnaire has been collected.

b) Sampling

Following the steps from Saunders and his co-authors (2019) this study has employed a non-probability sampling method followed by convenience sampling. Non-probability sampling is a suitable approach for this study as it enables the researcher to select participants based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research questions and aims. This approach enables the researcher to obtain a sample that is representative of the digital nomad population and can provide valuable insights into the impact of loneliness on work motivation. Furthermore, convenience sampling is a practical and efficient approach to recruitment, which allows the researcher to select participants who are readily available and willing to participate in the study. This approach is particularly useful when studying hard-to-reach or geographically dispersed populations, such as digital nomads. The use of convenience sampling can help to ensure that the sample is diverse, and representative of the population being studied and can enhance the external validity of the study.

A selection of 6 participants has been made for this study which some of the participants were already known to the author, while others were recruited using LinkedIn and the keyword "digital nomad" in the search bar. This approach to participant selection is suitable for this study as it enables the researcher to obtain a sample of digital nomads who are willing to participate and can provide valuable insights on the topic. The use of LinkedIn as a recruitment tool can help to ensure that the sample is diverse and representative of the population being studied, as it enables the researcher to reach out to digital nomads from different backgrounds and regions. Moreover, the inclusion of participants who are already known to the author can facilitate the data collection process and enhance the quality of the data collected, as the researcher may already have established trust with these participants.

c) Data analysis

The coding technique (**Rouder et al., 2021**) has been chosen in this master's thesis as a method to analyze the qualitative data collected from interviews with participants. The coding process is an essential step in identifying patterns and themes that emerged from the participants' responses and helped to organize and make sense of the large amount of non-numerical data

collected. By breaking down the data into smaller, manageable pieces, the researcher is able to assign codes that represents the content or meaning of all data collected which then will be compared to identify commonalities and differences among them. The use of the coding technique in this thesis allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the qualitative data and provided valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

d) Material used

Questionnaires

1. Introduction

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- Are you an employee or independent/freelancer?
- What is the type of your work?
- Where are you from? And where are you currently living?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your experience as a digital nomad and what led you to choose this lifestyle?

2. Loneliness

- How would you define loneliness?
- Have you ever experienced loneliness while working as a digital nomad? If so, can you describe the experience?
- Do you think that loneliness is more an issue for digital nomads compared to people who work in traditional office settings?

3. Motivation

- Based on what led you to be a digital nomad, does it affect your work motivation?
 - Following the previous questions, could you describe any personal experience(s) where these advantages kept you motivated despite feeling lonely?
 - Can you describe any mechanisms or strategies you used to deal with loneliness and maintain your motivation? And are they effective? (co-working space, co-living, coffee place, spend time with friends and family...)
-

The first set of questions aimed to explore the motives and drivers that led individuals to pursue the digital nomad lifestyle. Participants were asked about their initial motivations, such as the desire for freedom, flexibility, new experiences, or a better work-life balance. These responses provided insights into the primary factors that influenced their decision to embark on this unconventional career path.

The second set of questions delved into how digital nomads perceived and experienced loneliness. Participants were asked to reflect on their feelings of loneliness and the specific circumstances or triggers that contributed to these feelings. This exploration aimed to understand the subjective experiences of loneliness among digital nomads and how it manifested in their daily lives.

Finally, the third set of questions focused on examining the impact of loneliness on digital nomads' work motivation, drawing upon the Basic Psychological Needs Theory. Participants were asked about their levels of intrinsic motivation, their perceived fulfillment of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This analysis aimed to shed light on the complex interplay between loneliness and work motivation among digital nomads and determine the extent to which the basic psychological needs theory could explain these dynamics.

By addressing these key areas, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind becoming a digital nomad, the experiences of loneliness within this lifestyle, and the impact of loneliness on work motivation. Such insights can contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological and motivational factors that influence digital nomads' experiences and inform the development of strategies to support their well-being and productivity in this unique work context.

Observations

As part of this master's thesis study, the researcher also conducted observations by completing a 4-months internship inside a digital start-up. This provided an opportunity for the researcher to immerse himself in the digital nomad lifestyle and gain a first-hand experience of the impact of loneliness on work motivation. Throughout the internship, the researcher took notes whenever it felt appropriate, documenting observations on how the digital nomad managed to stay motivated despite the potential isolation and loneliness associated with their lifestyle. This close observation allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and rewards of being a digital nomad, as well as the strategies and coping mechanisms used to maintain motivation and productivity while working remotely.

By combining observations and interviews, the researcher was able to cross-check the data and obtain a more complete and nuanced understanding of the impact of loneliness on work motivation among digital nomads. The internship experience also provided an opportunity for the researcher to reflect on his own experiences as a digital nomad and how this has influenced his perspective on the topic. Overall, the combination of observations and

interviews have enabled the researcher to collect rich and diverse data and provided a unique and valuable contribution to the study of digital nomadism.

7) Research Limitation

While the qualitative questionnaire and internship observations method has its strengths, there are also some limitations to consider.

Firstly, the sample size may be relatively small, as in this case where only 10 participants were included in the study. This can limit the generalizability of the findings to a wider population of digital nomads.

Secondly, the use of non-probability sampling methods, such as convenience sampling, may introduce selection bias, as the participants may not be representative of the wider population of digital nomads.

Thirdly, the reliance on self-reported data from the qualitative questionnaire may be subject to social desirability bias, defined by **Bergen & Labonté (2020, p. 783)** as: *“the tendency to present oneself and one’s social context in a way that is perceived to be socially acceptable, but not wholly reflective of one’s reality.”*

Fourthly, the use of the researcher's own internship observations as a data source may introduce researcher bias, where the researcher's own experiences and perspectives may influence the interpretation of the data.

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge these limitations and consider them when interpreting the findings of the study.

Chapter 3: Empirical Findings

In this section, we will be delving into the analysis of qualitative questionnaires pertaining to the three significant themes in this master's thesis.

As previously mentioned, the questionnaires administered to digital nomads in this study focused on three key areas: the reasons behind their decision to become digital nomads, their perception of loneliness, and the impact of loneliness on their work motivation. Which will be analyzed through the lens of the Basic Psychological Needs Theory:

1. Competence
2. Autonomy
3. Relatedness

1) Competence

The first basic psychological need, **competence** which can be an important factor in the motivation of digital nomads as they rely on unique skills and competencies to make a living. In fact, many digital nomads are entrepreneurs, freelancers or remote workers who possess specific skills or knowledge that allow them to work remotely and independently. The following figure indicates that digital nomads in our study were predominantly involved in jobs that required specialized knowledge and proficiency in specific technical areas.

<i>Type of Work</i>	
<i>Digital Nomads</i>	1 Business Development Representative
	2 Digital Marketing/ Web Marketing
	3 Cryptocurrency Investor
	4 Independent Marketing Consultant
	5 Communication 360°
	6 Multimedia Designer

Figure 6: Type of work of the respondents

Having a sense of competence and effectiveness in their work can lead to feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction, However, it is also possible that some digital nomads choose

specific jobs that allow them to maintain their autonomy and flexibility, regardless of whether it fully utilizes their competencies. As mentioned by one of the digital nomads:

"I've already wondered if I didn't want to stop my activity, because originally, I wanted to do events and that's what I will do in a few years. But for today, the freedom that digital nomadic lifestyle brings me pushes me to continue my work." (Digital Nomad 5)

From the analysis of the respondents' answers, it appears that the competence component may not be the primary driver of intrinsic motivation among digital nomads. While competence was acknowledged as an important aspect of their work, it did not emerge as the central factor that fueled their personal motivation.

2) Autonomy

Throughout the research, the respondents consistently highlighted various aspects related to **autonomy**. The foremost aspect emphasized by the participants was the job flexibility afforded by the digital nomad lifestyle. This flexibility encompassed two equally significant components. Firstly, it entailed the freedom to make decisions and have control over their own work schedules. Digital nomads expressed a strong desire for autonomy in choosing when and where to work, enabling them to align their professional activities with their personal preferences and priorities. Secondly, the respondents emphasized the importance of having the freedom to select their work location and travel to different places, all while fulfilling their professional obligations. This aspect of autonomy allowed them to experience new environments, embrace diverse cultures, and maintain their professional responsibilities simultaneously.

Control

Upon analyzing the responses provided by the participants, it became evident that flexibility was one of the key driving factors that led individuals to adopt the digital nomad lifestyle. The desire to escape the rigid confines of the classic 9-5 office hour structure was a recurring subject in many of the responses. The ability to work remotely and on one's own schedule was highly valued, enabling individuals to balance their work and personal life in a way that suited them the best.

"It's a great job if you are looking for a flexible schedule. I had to learn to manage my time, organize my own space and silence distractions, this is usually not easy when you work in different spaces, but after you get it, it's a great opportunity to move around the world working at the same time." (Digital Nomad 6)

“I met the right person who gives me the opportunity to become a digital nomad and live abroad while working with just my computer, as you can see, I took it without second thought. Moreover, it enables me to organize my day as it suits me best which is quite nice to be honest.” (Digital Nomad 4)

Author’s observation:

“As part of my internship, the ability to work flexibly helped to foster a sense of trust and mutual respect between my supervisor and I, as it demonstrated that I was capable of managing my own workload and delivering high-quality work without the need for constant supervision. This autonomy was empowering and motivating and helped me to feel more invested in the success of the company and the projects I was working on. However, such flexibility can also be overwhelming without a clear sense of structure and organization. That’s why it is crucial to develop effective time management and organizational skills.”

Mobility

Digital nomads highlighted the importance of having the freedom to choose their work location and travel to different places while still being able to fulfill their professional responsibilities. Respondents expressed a desire for adventure and exploration, and the opportunity to work while traveling was seen as a major draw. With modern technology making it possible to work from anywhere with an internet connection, many individuals felt that they could enjoy the best of both worlds - a fulfilling career and the chance to see the world. The freedom to travel and work simultaneously was seen as a significant advantage of the digital nomad lifestyle, enabling individuals to expand their horizons and experience new cultures and perspectives.

“Funny story I actually didn’t choose to be digital nomad, it was not an option as we are only 3 persons in France working for that company. But at the end It enables me to travel whenever I want with my girlfriend who’s working as a freelancer. I must say it is quite nice, for example I was in Portugal last week.” (Digital Nomad 1)

“After my bachelor, I decided to dedicate myself to crypto currency, the idea of staying in France did not suit me but I did not really know where to go. Back then I had 2 friends who went to live in Bali so 1 month and a half after they left, I decided to join them. I chose this way of life because it allows me to be free, to visit different cultures while working.” (Digital Nomad 3)

Indeed, it is interesting to see how the ability to move freely impacts our work perception, whether it involves traveling or simply having the option to work from different locations. For digital nomads, the ability to work remotely from anywhere in the world provides a sense of liberation and adventure that is often lacking in traditional office environments.

"I have started living as a digital nomad from October 2022, I made a tour of Europe and now I've settled for a few months in Malta. I chose this lifestyle because I am passionate about travel, plus I feel like I don't need a holiday because my life looks like a holiday. Not that I don't work far from there, but I can spend my free time discovering new cultures and exploring new places that enrich me as much as each other. I love the novelty and freedom that this lifestyle offers." **(Digital Nomad 5)**

In contrast to the traditional approach where people typically wait until the end of the week or for holidays to go somewhere and enjoy their free time, the digital nomad lifestyle allows for a much more flexible and integrated approach to work and leisure. With the ability to work from anywhere with an internet connection, individuals can choose to combine work and travel, effectively turning any location into a potential workspace. This allows individuals to take advantage of the opportunities presented by their environment, whether that involves exploring a new city, taking a hike in the mountains, or simply enjoying a change of scenery. By blending work and leisure in this way, digital nomads can create a more fulfilling and dynamic lifestyle that is tailored to their individual needs and preferences.

"I worked for a travel company; it was a very good experience. It allowed us to travel and work from everywhere, you are your own boss, so you manage yourself. That's why I wanted to be a digital nomad." **(Digital Nomad 2)**

Author's observation:

"I have experienced the benefits of being able to work from anywhere in the world. The ability to seamlessly integrate work into my travel plans was simply amazing, I went to Algeria, Switzerland, France, Netherland, Canada, and Colombia which would not have been possible in a traditional internship setting. However, it is important to recognize the potential downsides of this level of freedom. Without clear boundaries and self-discipline, it can be easy to become distracted or to prioritize leisure activities over work responsibilities. In order to be successful in a mobile work environment, it is important to establish clear limits and to set realistic expectations for yourself in terms of productivity and work-life balance. The hardest for me was to say no because you I had to work; it is really frustrating."

Furthermore, our findings indicated that for many digital nomads, the lifestyle and freedom associated with their chosen path were strong motivators. The ability to have control over their work, schedule, and location was often cited as a significant driving factor in maintaining intrinsic motivation. Digital nomads valued the autonomy and independence that their lifestyle afforded them. They relished the freedom to structure their work according to their preferences and to have the flexibility to choose when, where, and how they worked. This autonomy allowed them to align their work with their personal values, interests, and priorities, creating a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. However, it can paradoxically be

counterproductive, by being in an exciting location may distract from work and decrease motivation to work efficiently. The allure of a beautiful location may be a hindrance to productivity, as one may not feel motivated to work when surrounded by so many opportunities for leisure and exploration.

"Yes and no, of course being your own boss enables you to decide when you start and when you finish but at the same time no one force you to start... And in my case, I love surfing and as you can imagine in Bali its perfect for that. You must be disciplined otherwise you will never get the job done." **(Digital Nomad 3)**

"At first this affected my motivation. Having so much freedom and autonomy when you are used to a structured job. But you get used to it, and you adapt to it, there are tools for this." **(Digital Nomad 6)**

3) Relatedness

Many described loneliness as a feeling of isolation or disconnection from others. Some mentioned a lack of social connection, while others talked about feeling unfulfilled or unsupported in their personal relationships.

"For me the loneliness is just the fact to be alone, or to living experiences that cannot be shared with family and friends, where we feel de facto alone when we can be surrounded sometimes. But the fact of not sharing our experiences makes us feel lonely."
(Digital Nomad 3)

It's a common misconception that loneliness is the same thing as being alone (Russel et al., 2012) While it's true that being alone can sometimes lead to feelings of loneliness, they are not the same thing. Loneliness is a subjective feeling of social isolation or disconnection, regardless of whether someone is physically alone. In fact, some people may feel lonely even when surrounded by others, while others may feel content and fulfilled spending time alone. It's important to recognize the difference between being alone and feeling lonely in order to better understand and address our own feelings of loneliness.

"I would say feeling alone, cut off from the world, without social interaction or not feeling understood" **(Digital Nomad 5)**

It's important to recognize that loneliness can be a temporary or transient feeling, rather than a constant state of mind. People may experience periods of loneliness for various reasons,

such as a change in their social environment, a breakup or loss of a loved one, or a stressful life event.

“For me loneliness is a sentiment that you feel when someone or something is missing in your life. For me this sentiment is limited in time, it occurs from time to time.”

(Digital Nomad 1)

Indeed, the feeling of loneliness was a prevalent theme among the respondents. Many individuals expressed experiencing periods of loneliness while working as digital nomads. Especially, when they are entrepreneurs or if they work alone.

“Yes, it already happened. There was a time when I had certain problems related to my business, I had no one to share my problems with or the people I shared them with were not necessarily able to understand them.” **(Digital Nomad 3)**

“It’s not every day easy cause we work alone which can make thing more complicated and even if we fix our own objectives... sometimes we need help to stay focus and motivate. So when these moments happen, I usually try to get in touch with my family or friends which usually cheers me up.” **(Digital Nomad 2)**

Moreover, those who had experienced loneliness often attributed it to the transient nature of their lifestyle, which made it challenging to build and maintain long-term relationships.

“Yes, during my tour of Europe, when I regularly changed countries but also clients because I had "short-term" projects, I felt alone, I had no reference points or as soon as I created some, they disappeared quickly. Eventually no one really knew what I was going through.” **(Digital Nomad 5)**

Indeed, the study found that many digital nomads reported feelings of loneliness when they lacked meaningful relationships, either with friends or romantic partners. This highlights the importance of social connections and emotional support in the lives of digital nomads, as well as the need for strategies to foster and maintain these relationships in a lifestyle characterized by frequent travel and transience.

“Yes I did experience loneliness, even though I moved to Mexico with my girlfriend, the biggest challenge for me was to make friends, the beginning was the hardest when I first arrived because I was barely speaking Spanish... and at the same time I was seeing my friend grabbing some drink at our usual bar back in France.” **(Digital Nomad 4)**

Remote work can lead to a different kind of social experience compared to in-person work, especially when it comes to interactions with coworkers. When working in a physical office, there are typically opportunities for spontaneous conversations, lunch breaks, and other forms of social interaction that can help to build a sense of camaraderie and connection among coworkers. In a remote work context, these types of interactions may be more limited, and may need to be intentionally facilitated through digital channels or scheduled events. While virtual meetings can help to facilitate communication and collaboration among remote team members, they may not always fully replicate the experience of in-person interaction

“I would say that if you don’t have a lot to do at work for a period, it is at this moment that you can feel lonely. For example, at work you can discuss with coworkers of everything making the time less long, on the other hand working alone from home lead you to do other stuff to occupy yourself such as cooking or whatever... Another example is that for example when you have a question regarding something at work you can easily ask someone to answer you in a regular office. Remotely you are asking yourself if you are not going to bother someone with your questions if you ask them by phone or mail...” (Digital Nomad 1)

“Yes, I did. I have felt loneliness in end-of-year meetings, in group workspaces or in integration activities, because our entire team was far away, and these dates are not celebrated in the same way from a screen. It's hard to bond with your coworkers.” (Digital Nomad 6)

Author’s observation:

“Indeed, there were moments where I felt completely alone in my work, particularly when I was still in the learning phase. I didn't want to appear incompetent, so I hesitated to ask for help, which only intensified my sense of isolation. Sometimes we tend to assume that our colleagues or supervisors are too busy to help or that my question isn’t worth their time... When I finally asked for help, my supervisor was always happy to assist, he used to remind me that he was available to help and that I shouldn't hesitate to reach out. It highlighted the importance of building strong connections with those you work with, especially when working remotely.”

As we delve deeper into our research, we turn our attention to the critical topic that we are studying: the relationship between loneliness and work motivation among digital nomads. This area of inquiry is of significant importance as it sheds light on the complex dynamics between isolation and the drive to succeed in a remote work environment. Through our investigation, we hope to uncover valuable insights into how loneliness affects the motivation of digital nomads. For instance, having the autonomy that this lifestyle brings might keep one motivated even if the work itself is not particularly fulfilling. On the other hand, if one became

a digital nomad out of necessity rather than choice, it may have a negative impact on their motivation to work.

"If you are a full remote worker as I am you need to have goals and motivation to start to work every day. In my situation I would say that I'm glad to be working for such an innovative and interesting company and the more you have an impact the more the company grow which is joyful daily. Also, the fact that we are organizing our work as we want to do it allows me to be more flexible regarding my vacations for example. I can work from where I want which is a big advantage to the office hours."

(Digital Nomad 1)

"I've always been more or less motivated to work, but being freelance means that I must have a certain rigor because if I don't work, no one will do it for me, and my life depends on my activity, if I don't make money, I can't continue this lifestyle. Then I think I don't have any difficulty getting to work because I decide to work when I want and where I want."

(Digital Nomad 5)

As we already know from the earlier questions, many digital nomads have experienced loneliness, and therefore raises the importance to understand how they manage to stay motivated during those times. Several respondents highlighted that they remained motivated to work because of the sole purpose of maintaining the lifestyle that drew them to become digital nomads in the first place.

"In these moments when nothing is going well, I always try to remember why I'm here and all the advantages it gives me to be a digital nomad. And of course, if I want to keep living like this I must work as well." **(Digital Nomad 3)**

"I've already wondered if I didn't want to stop my activity, because originally, I wanted to do events and that's what I will do in a few years. But for today, the freedom that digital nomadic lifestyle brings me pushes me to continue my work." **(Digital Nomad 5)**

"Sometimes I trade loneliness at work with the freedom to go wherever I want. So, I travel to visit my family, friends or see new places." **(Digital Nomad 6)**

Despite the respondents' willingness to work even during moments of loneliness, the answers given did not provide conclusive evidence regarding the initial motivation to become a digital nomad as the primary source of work motivation. While the desire for a location-independent lifestyle and the freedom it brings may have initially sparked their interest in pursuing the digital nomad path, other factors seemed to play a more significant role in sustaining their motivation.

Most of the respondents highlighted that working with other people was their primary strategy to stay motivated while feeling lonely. It is interesting to note that many digital nomads, who initially chose to work remotely to escape traditional offices and co-workers, now seek companionship and camaraderie while working. This seems to indicate that while the freedom to work from anywhere is attractive, the need for social connection and a sense of community is equally important to maintain motivation.

"To deal with loneliness and maintain my motivation I go surf, I go out with some friends, or I'm going to work with my friends. Most of the time these strategies are working for me, because when you see other people working you feel motivated as well."

(Digital Nomad 3)

"An important one is not to use your room to work, since it is your resting place. Going to share offices also helps to have contact with more people, even if they are not from your same job." **(Digital Nomad 6)**

"I prefer to be in my bubble when I work, but when I felt alone, I tried a little to tell what I was experiencing to relatives, friends or family. Although no one could really understand what I was going through, sharing anecdotes or situations makes me feel less alone. I also decided to take interns with me for the next few months, so this will allow me to share my work and make it a little more humane and less isolated."

(Digital Nomad 5)

"In my case, I am living with my girlfriend which is also a digital nomad. We are actually working together, from our Airbnb. When one is less motivated the other one helps. And we often go out for a drink with some friends that we met." **(Digital Nomad 4)**

One respondent shared interesting insights; he suggested that being a digital nomad can lead to a mindset that is more accepting of solitude. He mentioned the idea of constructing a shell, or a psychological barrier, to protect oneself from loneliness and create a sense of personal space. While this may be a coping mechanism for some, it is important to note that this mindset could also contribute to further isolation and disconnection

"I would say that if you don't have other option than full remote you already constructed something in your head that limit loneliness as you think it is. You don't have other options which means that you need to deal with it. And it clearly motivates you to see some friends after work, go easily on vacation etc. to continue having these important interactions with the people. Unfortunately, in my job I cannot really work from an open space because I'm a lot of time on the phone. But it happens sometimes"

that some friends or my girlfriend are working remotely so we can have some good times working together.” (Digital Nomad 1)

Author’s observation:

“I think that in a way loneliness comes with the job, you can’t be on the move all the time and working behind your screen without difficult moments. While the freedom to travel and work from anywhere was exciting, the lack of social interaction and camaraderie with coworkers made it difficult sometimes to stay motivated to work. I noticed that the feeling of loneliness had a significant impact on my work motivation, especially during prolonged periods of working alone. I easily see the parallel with my life as a student, the study period before the exams is quite similar, we used to gather with some friends to study together instead of staying apart and feeling lonely and not motivated.”

Finally, the results showed that while loneliness can be experienced in both traditional office setting and as a digital nomad, the degree and nature of loneliness differed. Digital nomads reported feeling more isolated and cut off from social interaction compared to traditional office settings. The lack of physical proximity to colleagues and the absence of casual conversations were among the reasons cited for this feeling of isolation.

“Clearly, I would say that it is related to remote or nomad workers. I used to work in an office, and it obliges you to have interaction with your co-workers, that’s something that you are missing as a remote worker even though you can have tools such as Teams or Slack to exchange news, messages etc. with your team. But it does not have the same feeling.”

(Digital Nomad 1)

“Yes, in my opinion, the fact of being abroad, far from our relatives or working independently, puts us in a position more conducive to loneliness while on the contrary people working in France for example are more likely to share moments more easily with their relatives or with their colleagues.” (Digital Nomad 3)

“YES! Definitely yes. In my case and because of my personality, I don't think remote work will be sustainable for many years. It is an experience that I must live but it is not sustainable. I need to be surrounded by my coworkers...”

(Digital Nomad 6)

However, loneliness can be present in any work setting regardless of whether it's traditional office-based or remote. Factors such as social isolation, lack of meaningful connections, and feeling disconnected from others can contribute to feelings of loneliness in both settings. It's important to recognize that loneliness is a complex issue and can stem from various factors

beyond the work environment, such as personal life circumstances, mental health, and other social factors. Addressing loneliness in the workplace requires a multifaceted approach that includes both individual and organizational strategies.

“It can be but not necessarily. The firm I was working for was making gateways and travel tours which was like team building. At these moments you met the founder and your colleague, also you was able to create link by yourself with the social medias when you was working and meet other coworkers.”

(Digital Nomad 2)

Author’s observation:

“I am personally more conflicted on this topic, working remotely as a digital nomad has its perks - the luxury of not having to commute to the office every day and just needing a computer and an internet connection to work is simply amazing. However, it's a double-edged sword because as much as I love the flexibility that it offers, I did often find myself feeling isolated behind my screen. It's a strange paradox where the same advantages that make remote work so appealing can also be a disadvantage.”

Chapter 4: Discussion

In this section, a comprehensive discussion will be conducted to explore the findings and their implications, connecting them back to the research question.

To fully address the research question, the discussion will be divided into two parts. The first part will focus on the issue of loneliness among digital nomads. The second part of the discussion will shift towards exploring work motivation, with a specific focus on how the Self-Determination Theory can be used to understand the relationship between loneliness and work motivation among digital nomads. By analyzing the research findings through the lens of the Self-Determination Theory, the researcher aims to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between these two concepts among digital nomads.

1) Loneliness

The study highlighted an important issue induced by the fact that digital nomads rely heavily, if not entirely, on digital communication tools to interact with their business world, including clients and colleagues. This dependence on digital communication can put digital nomads in a more difficult position, as it limits their ability to form meaningful and deeper connections with others. As we discussed earlier, there is a growing body of research suggesting that individuals who rely heavily on social media and digital communication are at a higher risk of experiencing loneliness (**Rajan et al., 2022**).

Therefore, the digital nomad lifestyle, which relies so heavily on digital communication, could potentially exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation. This is an important factor to consider when exploring the relationship between loneliness and work motivation among digital nomads.

Furthermore, during the study, the researcher aimed to investigate whether loneliness was a specific issue for digital nomads or if it was already a prevalent problem in traditional work organizations. This question arose from the previous literature on loneliness in the workplace (**Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018**) and the growing popularity of the digital nomad lifestyle especially since the Covid-19 pandemic (**Lund et al., 2021**).

From the respondents, loneliness was indeed seen as a significant issue among digital nomads, as their unique lifestyle usually involves constant traveling and working independently, which can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection.

One interesting point that emerged during the study was the idea of accepting loneliness and being fine with it (**Russel et al., 2012**), which was raised by one of the digital nomads. For those who are able to accept loneliness and be fine with it, they may adopt strategies such as self-reflection, mindfulness practices, or engaging in hobbies and activities that bring them joy and fulfillment. They may view loneliness as an opportunity for self-growth, introspection, and creativity. This mindset allows them to maintain their work motivation despite occasional feelings of isolation. This is in line with what some scholars have highlighted in the literature review, which suggests that accepting the state of loneliness can help individuals to move forward and even find meaning in their solitude (**Maldenberg, 2022**). This finding underscores the importance of exploring individual coping mechanisms and perspectives when studying the relationship between loneliness and work motivation among digital nomads. It also adds complexity to the understanding of the role of relatedness as a basic psychological need in the Self-Determination Theory, and how it may differ among individuals with different coping strategies.

Indeed, the study showed that the respondents' answers align with the findings from the literature review on coping mechanisms for loneliness among digital nomads. As a result, there is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to coping with loneliness while working remotely. Some scholars have suggested that co-working spaces are a keyway to combat loneliness and maintain motivation among digital nomads (**Cheng, 2018**).

However, the respondents' answers also suggest that this may not be the case for everyone (**Cook, 2020**). Some digital nomads may prefer to work in solitude as stated by **Digital Nomad** *"I prefer to be in my bubble when I work"* while other prefer other configuration based on work style, lifestyle preferences or even living arrangement.

2) Motivation

Now that we have gained a better understanding about the issue of loneliness among digital nomads at work, with a particular emphasis on the over-reliance on digital communication tools to connect with the business world, and have compared it with traditional office settings, we can now turn our attention to the core topic of this analysis: the impact of loneliness on work motivation among digital nomads. As previously mentioned, we will approach this analysis through the Basic Psychological Needs Theory, which is one of the six mini theories from the Self-Determination Theory (**Ryan & Deci, 2000**). Through this framework, we will explore the ways in which loneliness can impact an individual's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and the potential consequences for their motivation to work.

Before going any further here is a quick reminder of the Basic Psychological Needs Theory: It proposes that there are three basic psychological needs that are essential for human well-being and optimal motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

- **Autonomy:** refers to the need to feel in control of one's own actions and decisions.
- **Competence:** is the need to feel capable and effective in one's pursuits.
- **Relatedness:** is the need to feel a sense of connection and belonging with others.

When these three needs are satisfied, individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, meaning that they are driven by internal factors such as enjoyment and personal satisfaction rather than external rewards or pressures (**Ryan & Deci, 2000**)

It is possible that digital nomads can maintain intrinsic motivation even when they experience a lack of **relatedness**, but this may depend on the individual rather than the Basic Psychological Needs Theory itself. The importance of relatedness in the motivational equation may indeed vary depending on the individual and the specific context in which they work. This finding aligns with the observations made by **Baxter and Pelletier (2019)** in their work, where variability in the significance of relatedness suggests that while some individuals may have a strong need for social connection and interaction, others may be more self-reliant and less dependent on external relationships for motivation. In our study, we have identified an additional issue that warrants attention. It is important to acknowledge that digital nomads may prioritize other needs, such as self-actualization, which could be perceived as equally or even more important than other needs as mentioned by **Sheldon and his co-authors (2001)**.

Based on our findings, it appears that many digital nomads value **autonomy** as a crucial factor in maintaining their intrinsic motivation to work. Indeed, the ability to have control over their work and lifestyle is a significant factor in their motivation to continue living as Digital Nomads. They have the freedom to work from anywhere and to set their own schedules, which can lead to greater satisfaction and a sense of autonomy. This can be a significant motivator, even if they sometimes experience a lack of relatedness in their work environment.

Moreover, it is paradoxical that **competence**, although crucial for digital nomads to establish themselves and sustain their remote work lifestyle, may not be perceived as the primary motivator. While digital nomads rely on their unique skills and competencies to make a living and achieve the freedom associated with their lifestyle, the intrinsic motivation they derive from autonomy and the pursuit of their desired lifestyle may overshadow the direct influence of competence. As mentioned by one of the digital nomads:

“I’ve already wondered if I didn’t want to stop my activity, because originally, I wanted to do events and that’s what I will do in a few years. But for today, the freedom that digital nomadic lifestyle brings me pushes me to continue my work.” (**Digital Nomad 5**)

Throughout the discussion, we have compared our findings with the existing literature review to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. By doing so, we were able to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between our results and the previous studies. While the Basic Psychological Needs Theory has provided a useful framework to understand motivation, it is important to note that the relationship between the three basic psychological needs is complex and may vary depending on the individual and their specific context .

Conclusion

Based on our findings, it is evident that **loneliness** (cf. relatedness) does seem to have a negative impact on the work motivation of digital nomads. However, the magnitude of this impact appears to be relatively smaller compared to other workers in traditional settings. Despite experiencing a sense of loneliness and a lack of relatedness, digital nomads demonstrate resilience and are able to maintain their intrinsic motivation, as suggested by the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (**Ryan & Deci, 2000**). Also, it is important to note that while our study found evidence that loneliness is an issue among digital nomads, we cannot definitively claim that it is a greater problem for them than for workers in traditional office settings. Loneliness is a subjective experience, and individuals may experience it differently depending on their personal circumstances, personality traits, and other factors (**Miguel et al., 2023**). Furthermore, traditional office workers may also experience isolation or a lack of social connection in their work environments (**McMillan, 2019**). Therefore, while our study highlights the potential challenges of loneliness for digital nomads, more research is needed to fully understand the scope and impact of this issue across different work contexts.

Moreover, while **competence** contributes to the ability to pursue the digital nomad lifestyle, it may not have the same direct impact on motivation as autonomy does. It is possible that once individuals have acquired the necessary competence to work remotely, their motivation becomes more influenced by the autonomy and freedom they experience rather than the specific skills they possess. This aligns with the findings from our study and suggests that for digital nomads, **autonomy** (flexibility) holds greater importance in driving their motivation compared to competence. The freedom to choose when and where to work, and the ability to align their work with personal preferences and priorities, contribute significantly to their motivation. The inherent sense of control over their actions and decisions fosters a strong drive to continue their digital nomad journey. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the relative importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in motivating digital nomads may vary among individuals and across different work contexts. Some digital nomads may place a higher emphasis on autonomy and competence, finding fulfillment and motivation through their independent work and skill utilization. Others may prioritize relatedness and actively seek ways to foster social connections and community engagement despite the challenges posed by their nomadic lifestyle.

Indeed, while the Basic Psychological Needs Theory provides valuable insights into the motivation of individuals, including digital nomads, it is important to keep in mind that other factors might influence motivation in specific contexts. As mentioned earlier, one limitation is the scope of the basic needs identified in the theory, which only focuses on autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the case of digital nomads, additional factors may come into play and contribute to their motivation. For example, the sense of adventure and exploration that comes with the digital nomad lifestyle may be a significant motivator for some individuals. The opportunity to travel, experience new cultures, and engage in unique experiences can provide a sense of novelty and excitement, which can enhance their motivation to work.

Moreover, the digital nomad community and the sense of belonging to a distinct group can also impact motivation. Interacting with like-minded individuals, sharing experiences, and

forming connections within the digital nomad community can provide a sense of social support and enhance motivation.

Furthermore, individual preferences and values can vary among digital nomads, and these personal factors can influence their motivation. For example, some digital nomads may prioritize work-life balance, personal growth, or making a positive impact through their work. These individual values and aspirations can shape their motivation and drive them to work towards specific goals.

Therefore, it is essential to consider these additional factors alongside the basic psychological needs when examining the motivation of digital nomads. Further research is needed to explore the interplay between the basic psychological needs, individual preferences, the digital nomad lifestyle, and other contextual factors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of motivation in this specific context.

In conclusion, our findings suggest that while loneliness does impact the work motivation of digital nomads, their intrinsic motivation may remain intact due to the emphasis they place on **autonomy** and competence or even another basic psychological need. The ability to control their work and lifestyle, combined with their unique skills and competencies, provides a solid foundation for sustaining motivation in the face of loneliness. However, it is important to recognize the individual differences and contextual factors that shape the motivational experiences of digital nomads. Further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics and to explore strategies for effectively addressing the relatedness aspect of motivation among digital nomads.

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