

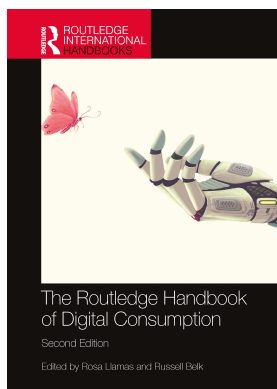
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### Digital nomadism as temporal privilege

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## 2

# DIGITAL NOMADISM AS TEMPORAL PRIVILEGE

*Aleksandrina Atanasova, Fleura Bardhi,  
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### Introduction

Modern life is a hurried life (Davis 2013) shaped by a “nowist” culture of speed (Bauman 2007), perpetuated by the instantaneity of action and reaction that technology affords and demands. Blurring the boundaries between work and leisure, technology has played a crucial role in transforming our mode of being in time, both vastly increasing the opportunities for how one’s time can be spent and contributing to the social acceleration of our everyday lives (Rosa 2013). Time is at a premium (Wajcman 2015), and, like any other valuable commodity, it is appropriated by actors in the marketplace in various ways, including as a marker of privilege.

Consumption of time as a status signifier in consumer society is not new. Since the classic work of Veblen (1899/1994) on conspicuous consumption, leisure, as a non-productive consumption of time, constituted a status signal. In contrast, recent works (e.g., Bellezza et al. 2017; Keinan and Kivetz 2011; Sullivan 2008) have established that, in an accelerated consumer society (Rosa 2013), status comes from fast-paced, busy, and productive lifestyles. Yet, others argue that the ability to experience decelerated time via control over technology has also become an aspirational status symbol (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019).

We contribute to this debate on time as a status symbol in contemporary consumer society by arguing that prior research has adopted a binary lens (slow vs. fast). We suggest that liquidity and digitalization complicate consumers’ experience of time beyond the slow/fast dichotomy. Time in liquidity is perceived as episodic – that is, neither lived through directionally nor linearly, but in short fragments and bursts of disconnected “pointillist” nodes (Bauman 2007; Maffesoli 2003). We have yet to examine how consumers living in liquid, digitally enabled lifestyles may articulate temporal dynamics to project status.

To that end, we leverage Sharma’s (2014, 8–9) perspective that we currently live in an “economy of temporal worth” where “the temporal operates as a form of social power and a type of social difference” to illuminate how consumers in liquidity appropriate time. Sharma argues that our understanding and experience of time is not uniformly dictated by ubiquitous digitalization, but by social differences (e.g., labor structures) that produce a multiplicity of privileged and unprivileged temporalities within the global capitalist system (Sharma 2017, 138). We draw on Sharma’s notion of privileged temporality as a signal of temporal

worth to extend the construct of temporal privilege in consumer research and outline it as an emergent form of status and distinction.

To understand time-based status attainment in a liquid consumer society, we ethnographically study digital nomadism, an emergent liquid lifestyle that is inherently mediated by technology. Digital nomads are lifestyle migrants (O'Reilly and Benson 2016) who take advantage of portable computing technologies and widespread Internet access to work remotely and use this freedom to roam the world (Mancinelli 2020). Living unrooted lives with few owned possessions and without a fixed abode, digital nomads maximize the conveniences afforded by the digitalization of work, accessible airfare, and cross-national global mobility to seek affordable and exotic places which they live in for relatively short periods of time before moving on to the next destination (Aroles et al. 2020; Cook 2020; Green 2020; Mancinelli 2020). Through exploring their lifestyle motivations as well as the role of technology in their daily lives, we study the new forms of temporalities that emerge in this lifestyle space.

Our contribution is in introducing the notion of temporal privilege as a new form of status, which is achieved through a digitized and global alternative consumer lifestyle. Our findings contrast with prior scholarship which suggests that lack of time, busyness, and hyper-productivity are often coveted status signals, consumed conspicuously in a modern-day context where action-packed and high-speed lives have come to signal affluence and prestige (Bellezza et al. 2017; Keinan and Kivetz 2011; Gershuny 2005; Sullivan 2008; see also Wajcman 2015). Instead, we propose that, in a shifting economy of temporal worth (Sharma 2014, 2017), for some, liquidity positions time abundance and time sovereignty (control over how and to what end time is spent) as alternative measures of success and status. As exemplified by Tim Ferriss (2009), the guru of digital nomadism, maximizing free time via minimal effort is how the New Rich achieve the luxury life:

The New Rich are those who abandon the deferred-life plan and create luxury lifestyles in the present using the currency of the New Rich: time and mobility. [...] Make no mistake, maximum income from minimal necessary effort (including minimum number of customers) is the primary goal. [...] The objective is to create freedom of time and place and use both however you want.

*(The 4-Hour Work Week 2009)*

Unlike previous conceptions which suggest that digitalization is at the heart of an incessant and unmanageable acceleration of life, we build on these notions and show that, paradoxically, through digitalizing and liquifying their lives, digital nomads circumvent the dominant temporal rhythms and value systems of mainstream society, and instead create a form of temporal privilege.

## **Literature review**

### ***Conveying time as a status symbol***

The speeding up of transportation, communication, and production drives modernity's temporal acceleration, alongside the acceleration of social change (increase in the rate of social transformations) and of the pace of everyday life (increase in the speed and number of actions and experiences per unit of time) (Rosa 2013). This creates a paradox where, despite technological acceleration resulting in less time being required to perform a given action,

the pace of everyday life keeps speeding up and we continuously find ourselves living busier, even more hurried lives (Rosa 2017). This paradox is central to consumer researchers' study of time as a status symbol. The question of time as a status symbol is typically structured by the contrast between productive time, i.e., time dedicated to work and production, and leisure, i.e., non-productive time dedicated to consumption (Veblen 1899/1994). In consumer research, the relationship between time and status in our contemporary society has been examined from two points of view.

One stream of research shows that long work hours and lack of leisure time have become positive status signals as they infer that busy individuals possess desired human capital characteristics leading them to be viewed as scarce and in demand (Bellezza et al. 2017). In a culture obsessed with speed, where the rich are fast and the poor are slow (Wajcman and Dodd 2017), action-packed, high-speed lives have come to signal affluence and prestige (Gershuny 2005; Sullivan 2008; Wajcman 2015). It has been suggested that even leisure consumption can be driven by a productivity orientation as the impulse to use time productively can also underline consumers' desire for unique/unusual experiences (Keinan and Kivetz 2011).

In contrast, recent works have shown that the ability to experience deceleration and slowness is becoming aspirational (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2020; Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). In a context of burnout, time-poverty, and overwork, the new privileged are those who can slow down in their daily lives, where the usage of technology is controlled and reduced, the amount of activities per day is lessened, and the body itself is slowed down (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). This is often achieved via consumption of the analog rather than the digital, and via new, craft forms of work, like giving up a Wall Street job to become an artisanal butcher or a beeswax candle seller (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2020). To be able to consume or work in this way takes resources. Thus, generally, only those of high status and means can afford to do so, suggesting that slowness is a new status symbol.

### ***Liquidity's pointillist time***

We engage with this debate by considering how time as status is perceived and experienced in a liquid modern context. Prior understandings of time as status rest on a conception of time along two poles – fast and slow. Yet, liquidity (Bauman 2000) complicates one's experience of time beyond the fast/slow binary (Bauman 2007; Maffesoli 2003). Described as pointillist (Maffesoli 2003), instantaneous (Urry 2000), timeless (Castells 1996), or punctuated (Aubert 2003), time in liquid modernity is theorized as flowing un-uniformly, fragmented, and in bursts, with a profusion of ruptures and discontinuities, with intervals separating successive spots and breaking the links between them (Bauman 2007). In a pointillist time, life is inexorably quickened as new technologies continue to seduce with the possibility to allow us to do faster, so that we can move to the next modular point in time. At the same time, digitalization reconfigures time differently for different people or in different instances – the same technology can help both speed up or slow down; it enables the enactment of different time allocations, depending on how time is valued, by whom, and to what ends (Wajcman 2015). As such, time sovereignty valorizes privilege and inequality: having discretionary control over one's time and sufficient leisure time are considered important indicators of a good life (Wajcman 2015), yet not everyone is able to achieve such sovereignty.

The heterogeneity of individuals' experiences of time is thus related to the fragmentation of the temporal structuring of life driven by technology and digitalization that spans beyond a fast/slow dichotomy (Sharma 2014). To investigate time as status, we therefore need to recognize the uneven lived experiences of time in a liquid society. We do so by leveraging

Sharma's (2014) understanding of the multiple temporalities that are interdependently experienced and yet structurally tied in our contemporary society. Sharma argues that how we understand and experience time does not inhere in technologies (e.g., ubiquitous digitalization) (see also Wajcman 2015; Wajcman and Dodd 2017). Rather, she shows that infrastructures of power and social difference produce these multiple temporalities. In her critical analysis of the global capitalist system, Sharma (2017) shows that the busy lifestyle of high-status individuals, those who experience privileged temporality, relies on the labor of unprivileged others. We build on this notion to understand how individuals embracing digitally enabled, liquid consumer lifestyles construct temporal privilege, which we argue is an emergent form of status and social difference.

### **Context: the liquid lifestyles of digital nomads**

To investigate how temporality transpires in liquidity, we focus on the context of digital nomadism – a growing global phenomenon born out of a globalized and digitalized modern world. Described as a new breed of wanderers (Chayka 2018) enabled by technology and cheap airfare, digital nomads serially relocate from one place to another in search of novelty and adventure in affordable, and often exotic, places to live for short periods of time (Aroles et al. 2020; Cook 2020; Green 2020; Mancinelli 2020).

One of the key motivations for adopting this lifestyle lies in the desire to renegotiate established 9–5 work-life structures and build an alternative lifestyle outside of traditional norms where homeownership, career progression, and secure retirement are increasingly unattainable ideals (O'Reilly and Benson 2016). Disenchanted with the prospects of stable work-to-retire life trajectory and disillusioned by an increasingly challenging socio-economic context, many long for alternative visions of the good life – a life freed from material goals, expectations, and incessantly changing circumstances (Atanasova 2021; O'Reilly and Benson 2016). We conceptualize digital nomadism as a form of liquid lifestyle where to enact alternative visions for betterment, digital nomads embark on a process of life redesign which entails letting go of most material possessions, rejecting notions of ownership or rootedness and instead embracing liquid everyday living that is enabled and mediated by an ever-expanding digital ecosystem. While prior research has studied time as status through a solid, binary lens, we know little about how liquid forms of living, detached from solidity and rootedness, influence consumers' perceptions of time and how temporality transpires and influences consumption. Tethered to their devices but untethered from much else, digital nomads are thus a context that can illustrate the intercept between time as a valuable commodity and liquid living enabled by digitalization.

### **Method**

To explore our research question, we conducted 16 depth interviews with a diverse sample of digital nomads where we sought to gain understanding of digital nomadism as a lifestyle and delve into their use of and conception of time. We used both purposive and snowball sampling (Miles and Huberman 1994) when recruiting our informants, drawing the majority of our sample from one of the largest Facebook groups for digital nomads "Digital Nomads Around the World" (over 140,000 members). The ensuing interviews were conducted via Skype or Zoom and followed an interview guide which covered topics such as life history and motivations for adopting the lifestyle, daily experiences as a digital nomad, work and leisure practices and routines, consumption experiences, perceived benefits and drawbacks

Table 2.1 Participant Profiles

<i>Informant pseudonym</i>	<i>Age/ gender</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Yearly income</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Location at time of interview</i>	<i>Years as nomad</i>
Neil	37/M	Ireland	€40,000–€60,000	Blogger/Life-coach	Bali, Indonesia	3
Martin	37/M	Germany	€125,000 +	Software engineer	San Francisco, CA, USA	4
Amy	51/F	USA	€125,000 +	Writer	Italy	3.5
Lary	57/M	USA	€125,000 +	Law consultant	Italy	3.5
Ema	35/F	The Netherlands	€40,000–€60,000	Digital marketer	Chiang Mai, Thailand	8
Tom	28/M	China/Mongolia	€40,000–€60,000	Blogger	Mongolia	4
Brandon	43/M	USA, Canada, Czechia	€60,000–€80,000	Software developer	Oakland, CA, USA	2.5
Ian	20/M	Germany	€40,000–€60,000	Copywriter	Doha, Qatar	4
Sonja	39/F	UK	€20,000–€40,000	Copywriter	Cahuita, Costa Rica	1.2
Miles	27/M	Canada	€40,000–€60,000	Writer	Montreal, Canada	5
Karin	33/F	Philippines	€20,000–€40,000	Entrepreneur	Philippines	10
Audrey	35/F	Romania	€20,000–€40,000	Fitness coach	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	4.5
Lena	30/F	USA	€40,000–€60,000	Entrepreneur	Buenos Aires, Argentina	1
John	26/M	France	Less than €20,000	IT specialist	France	0.3
Alan	39/M	USA	€80,000 +	Investment broker	Seattle, USA	1
Kristina	32/F	UK	€20,000–€40,000	Social media manager	France	10+

Source: own elaboration.

of nomadic living, how their time is structured, as well as plans for the future. The final sample consisted of 7 women and 9 men aged between 20 and 57 years old, representing 13 nationalities (see Table 2.1).

Following interpretivist methods for data analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994), the interview transcripts were subject to iterative part-to-whole analysis where the dataset was interpreted through a hermeneutical movement between the analytic reduction of the empirical data and a resulting interpretive re-structuration (Spiggle 1994; Thompson 1997). Emergent thematic categories and codes were recorded cyclically and compared continuously until no recurrent differences were observed and a coherent theorized storyline (Golden-Biddle and Locke 2007) was developed. Next, we outline our findings.

### How temporal privilege becomes a status symbol

We find that in lifestyles where liquidity and dematerialization are prioritized, such as in the digital nomadic lifestyle studied here, “having time” emerges as an aspirational ideal, a valued currency, and a symbolic marker of privilege and status. Based on our analysis, we introduce the concept of temporal privilege, defined as a marker of distinction based on perception of time abundance and time sovereignty that is created and enacted through:

(1) *rejection of productivity orientations*, where consumers seek to gain status through time efficiency; and (2) *projection of temporal control* via leveraging digital technologies, platforms, and consumption practices to achieve a “nowist” (Bauman 2007) present-oriented experience of time.

### ***Rejection of productivity orientations***

In today’s economy, productivity is a central value, pushing consumers to be disproportionately concerned with striving to use time productively and efficiently, driving them not only to allocate more time to work but also influencing the kinds of activities consumers pursue in the spare time they allocate to leisure and vacation (Keinan and Kivetz 2011). For many, life in this fast lane of over-productivity has come to be perceived as rewarding, and busyness has been dubbed a badge of honor for a growing class of cash-rich, but time-poor, consumers (Gershuny 2005; Sullivan and Gershuny 2004).

In contrast, we suggest that with the rising precarity and volatility of the contemporary socioeconomic context, and with the flexibility afforded by the digital overhaul of nearly all aspects of everyday life, different logics and aspirations have emerged where time is no longer seen as a currency to be traded now for eventual rewards in the future. We propose that time abundance rather than scarcity is valued in a liquid modern context and preoccupation with productivity is replaced with emancipatory dreams of escaping the fast productivity culture.

Digital nomads perceive themselves as a new aspirational class of digitally enabled moderns, the New Rich (Ferriss 2009), who have decoupled income from time, work minimal hours, and live in the present instead of pursuing “deferred-lives” that are postponed to a distant future. Many of the digital nomads in our study spoke of an eye-opening revelation, pushing them to unroot from solidity in the promise that, through automating or outsourcing their labor, digitalizing their work, and dematerializing their lives, they too can join the New Rich and escape the time famine and creeping dread of 9–5 living. The essence of this lifestyle lies in a rejection of the notion of productivity – the goal is to cut work hours as much as possible and do the minimum necessary to earn enough income, thus gaining time to live life now instead of postponing it (Ferriss 2009). Success and status thus inhere in time abundance and emancipation from the temporal structures of corporate life. As Tom stresses, he “*would never think about going back to the deferred lifeline [where] you work to retire and to receive your pension.*” He continues:

It’s not just about having the financial freedom people are trying so hard to achieve. That’s just about money. But I realized [...], maybe I could make a lot less money but have more time that could be in my own terms. The new rich is all about having, not just money, but also time that you can spend on your own terms. Your wealth is measured by not just money but also time. Right now, I’m not making as much money as I used to, but I have way more time that I can spend on doing things I’m interested in or things that are more meaningful to me. So right now, yeah, I’m working less than four hours a day.

Working the fewest hours possible and de-prioritizing productivity whilst prioritizing free time in exotic locations are foundational orientations for many digital nomads. Notably, space and time are not decoupled but bound to a particular type of privilege that inheres in the ability to be in share-worthy, envy-inducing places. Thus, the goal is not merely to have free time, but to have free time that lends itself to be consumed conspicuously. As such,



nomads' privileged temporal orientation stems from a sense of autonomy and control over the temporal order and its appropriation within their lives (Sharma 2014), which those living deferred and solid lives do not have. Audrey is a Romanian fitness trainer who, disenchanted with the lack of prospects in her homeland, decided to shift her practice from face-to-face to online instruction, so that she can make a living without being tethered to a certain location. As a digital nomad, she revels in the freedom her liquid lifestyle affords her and is proud of her skillful management of the temporal nodes within her day and the minimal time she spends on work:

I start my day usually at 8, waking up, doing some stretching and exercises, and then journaling... Then, reading, 15 minutes, 20 minutes of reading, and then I start my workday. I try to work around 50 minutes focused work and then have a 15-minute break. And I have three sets of this focused work, or chunks of time. I finish my workday around 2-3, I do a workout and then explore the city, go for a nice dinner with friends, and that's about it. But definitely routines and having this structure in my day helps a lot to be focused on the work when I have the work hours and then to enjoy the place that I am in.

(Audrey)

Even for those digital nomads who do not work for themselves but work remotely, digitalization allows them to escape the temporal structure and productivity expectations imposed by work institutions and watchful eyes of hyper-productivity-expecting employers. As we see here, Audrey mixes work and leisure frequently in a typical day. Digitalization of work serves as a tactical means to offset and subdue the temporal demands of work life, fragmenting what would have been a long and monotonous workday into episodes of valuable discretionary time. Alan, a broker for an investment firm shares a similar schedule to Audrey:

[Living like this] allows me to work only a portion of the market hours while still doing my job and nobody really knows it. In Europe, because of the time difference, I'd have the mornings to myself. I wake up on my own schedule. I can exercise, I can go for a long walk, I can go to the market, get a lunch, and only then I am working from say 2pm.

To a large extent, liquid, unrooted living is what allows digital nomads to renegotiate the temporal structures of daily life. Living in inexpensive locations, where the cost of living is only a fraction of what it is in global cities, and that would typically be vacation locations, allows digital nomads to reduce the need for long working hours measured by hyper-productivity and regularly mix work and leisure. As such, nomads' privileged temporality is overtly juxtaposed to the multiple, unprivileged temporalities of others (see Sharma 2014). This informs a vantage point from which they feel a sense of distinction and enlightenment which they believe others do not have. Tom reflects:

We can live life differently. And that's what I'm doing right now. I'm just trying to raise the awareness for people. You know, they are not happy living, a lot of people are working so hard, working in Beijing and paying \$500 rent. And I will tell them, hey, why don't you try Chiang Mai instead for a month [where it is so much cheaper].



In rejecting productivity orientations where consumers measure their self-worth through time efficiency and performance, digital nomads leverage their global mobility and access to affordable locales and embody a distinct ethos of temporal privilege, one where flexibility and time abundance rather than time scarcity and busyness are valued. Rejecting productivity, however, is only a part of enacting this temporal privilege. Projection of temporal control, which we discuss next, is also essential to claiming status and distinction.

### ***Projection of temporal control***

Temporal privilege emerges when one has both abundance of time and time sovereignty; that is, control over how and to what ends time is spent. Unlike in the temporal rhythms of a 9–5 work life, the digital ecosystems that support and mediate the daily life of digital nomads are strategically leveraged to renegotiate their lived experience of time. This allows one not to do more in less time, but to control and circumvent the temporal demands in daily life toward a more temporally emancipated living. Karin, a Filipina and former manager at a local corporation, turned an online project assistant working freelance, shares how putting herself on digital platforms for remote work has allowed her financial opportunities and time sovereignty which she lacked before:

My financial earnings are a lot better, way, way better compared to when I was still an employee and earning your minimum or above the minimum salary. [...] When I started working online, because I work with US companies that pay me in dollars, I have more value for my money. It is a lot easier to scale as a freelancer. I have more time freedom and I am earning a lot just through these online gigs. So I would say that it's very rewarding.

Digital nomads' lifestyles are profoundly dependent on the affordances of the digital landscape, which provides them with knowhow, sources of income, and flexibility in how they choose to manage the temporality of their day. The rejection of productivity and over-achievement is reinforced and enabled by the flexibility afforded within the digital domain. As John reflects:

I don't have to wake up at 5:00am. I don't have to take buses, trains for hours per day. This for me is really great. The good thing also is that if you have work, you don't have to do it during the day, you can do it any time, even at night. If I want to work at 2am, I can. I am free - I have no limitations. I mean, you just have to organize yourself.

In maintaining and enacting control of their time, digital nomads voraciously consume an abundance of digital platforms, tools, and resources weaved within the fabric of everyday life. Control over time is closely mediated by a disciplined and structured use of technology and digital services (see also Cook 2020). However, the aim of digital nomads is not to increase productivity but to isolate and minimize the demands on their free time. Indeed, for many, the rejection of busyness and the ability to work only a few hours a day is possible thanks to opportunities in the digital marketplace for generating passive income, which is income that requires minimal time investment. Nomads, thus, use the digital marketplace not just for consumption, but for conspicuous production (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2020), leveraging their flexibility and claiming superiority and distinction on

the basis of the value (temporal and monetary) which their lifestyles generate. Tom illustrates this in detail:

For the first two years as a blogger I wasn't making that much money and that got my parents worried. People were asking how can you really make money by writing articles online? But most of them slowly realized that whatever I'm doing is scalable unlike most normal jobs. So, I may be making \$600 a month at the beginning, but maybe in two to three years I'll be making \$6,000 and it could be \$60,000 in the future by having my courses and my work available online indefinitely. Whereas most people wouldn't get such an exponential growth if they're doing a normal job. So, for me, the most important thing is not just to make money, but to make a stable passive income, which is superior to active income where you have to trade your time for money. [...] People pay me about \$130 a year to be in a premium group where they can talk to other nomads. So that's a paid group and I don't have to do much. I also have online courses. Apart from the nomad blog, I have a side project to teach Chinese people English. And out of that content I created several courses that are paid and just generate income. So that's the course income. And also right now I do some promotion copy for some different companies, where I insert affiliate links and that's entirely passive too. So, every day I'm laying groundwork for more and more passive income.

Tom's narrative illustrates how digital consumption and production are central to digital nomads' enactment of temporal privilege. While traditionally technology and digitalization are seen as acceleratory forces perpetuating the mainstream hyper-productivity mentality, for digital nomads, they enable alternative sources of financial *and* temporal value as an outcome of nomads' rejection of conventional productivity orientations. Importantly, a sense of control over one's lived experience of time is claimed and projected as a point of distinction and difference from "others," who are perceived as captive to an endless race after productivity and deferred rewards. As such, temporal privilege treads parallel to digital nomads' pronounced orientation toward the present and their focus on living in the now (Atanasova 2021). By prioritizing time abundance and time sovereignty instead of busyness and productivity, digital nomads shift their gaze to being in the moment. By using "geographical arbitrage" (Ferriss 2009) to optimize their resources, and the digital marketplace to build location- and time-independent sources of income, digital nomads are able to claim status and distinction rooted in what they perceive as "seeing through" the illusions of the mainstream speed culture. As Alan asserts:

I see so many people who get caught in this trap of putting up with horrible lives right now and suffering now, hoping for a better future. You know, hoping that things will be much better later, but it's ridiculous. [...] A ton a people would be better off spending time figuring out what makes them happy, doing stuff that makes them excited now rather than doing what they absolutely hate doing, but doing it only because of some uncertain future that may never come.

Temporal privilege thus manifests in both control of time and availability of time, perceived through an emancipatory nowist lens. Brandon sees his emancipation from the temporal trap of corporate and solid living as a point of stark difference between himself and others:

It's so funny to be back in America. I've noticed this even more in the last weeks hanging out with friends, just how prevalent the mindset is and the attitude of everyone's

working, working, working for the future. Like all of my friends. They admire what I'm doing, but they don't quite understand how I'm able to do it. And I'm simply trying to live a life.

Distinguishing themselves from those who have no time or are trapped by the temporal demands of securing a certain future, digital nomads find security in the autonomy that comes with owning their time. This orientation is enabled by the instantaneity of resources and solutions which their digital presence allows. Audrey, for instance, expresses her comfort with being in the moment, confident that security is just a few clicks away thanks to the trouble-proof business which she savvily built online:

I don't save for bad days and stuff like that, no. Say I would need an influx of money next week, yeah? I could do a monetization campaign on my [subscribers] list, and I can generate that amount of money. It's like sending people four emails in three days, "Hey, if you buy this course today, you'll get this bonus and limited offer for four days", and I send them the email today, I send it tomorrow, and...the business can generate that. You can just create any life that you want and especially with technology and Internet these days, literally anything is possible.

Audrey's narrative illustrates the notion that, in liquid lifestyles enabled by the digital, time is perceived as neither fast or slow but in the now, pointillist, and fragmented (Bauman 2007; Maffesoli 2003), where planning for the future is unnecessary since the instantaneousness of digital production and consumption affords a suspension of established temporal concerns. Control of liquidity's pointillist time beyond the fast/slow binary and the ability to maintain the resulting privileged temporality thus emerge as primary signifiers of status in liquidity. Eckhardt and Bardhi (2020) suggest that having the flexibility to embrace and adopt new identity positions, projects, and possibilities and the ability to attract attention are emerging as new resources for gaining status. We propose that temporal privilege is an additional way of claiming distinction in liquidity. Distinction inheres in the ability to assert temporal privilege where both time abundance and time sovereignty are maintained and leveraged toward status signaling conspicuous consumption of discretionary time in desirable ways and locations.

## **Discussion**

In this chapter, we contribute to the literature in three ways. First, we introduce the notion of temporal privilege as a new form of distinction in liquidity and define it as a marker of status based on a perception of time abundance and time sovereignty. We demonstrate how temporal privilege is achieved in liquid lifestyles enabled by digital technology and digital consumption, and we detail the ways in which it is enacted through rejection of productivity orientations and projection of temporal control as sources of distinction. Second, we contribute to the ongoing debate on time as status by highlighting a third way for achieving it, beyond the fast-slow binary. Last, we introduce temporal status as a new form of distinction which has not been recognized in the literature yet.

First, by advancing the construct of temporal privilege in the domain of consumer research, we extend the understanding of privileged temporality (Sharma 2014) to capture a process of enacting independence from the sped-up rhythms of life in the fast lane. Sharma (2014, 2017) focuses on the "temporal architectures" (comprising technologies and human

labor) tasked with the maintenance and enhancement of the fast-paced, hyper-productive time of a privileged few. In contrast, we show that temporal privilege can emerge through an opportunistic adaptation to the conditions of global neoliberalism (Mancinelli 2020) that celebrate the New Rich's entrepreneurial ethos for emancipation from the normative ordering of life. We illustrate how through liquifying their lives, escaping 9–5 work structures, and rejecting productivity, some consumers can build new temporal logics that circumvent the institutionally imposed rhythms of life and position one's lived experiences of time beyond a fast/slow binary. We thus detail a process through which temporal privilege is repurposed as a sign of ultimate emancipation from the race for speed and productivity. Yet, despite their rejection of normative notions of productivity, digital nomads enact a lifestyle that is underlined by new orders of worth and personal responsibilities which, at face value, depend on the ability to maximize productivity in less time so that the rest of one's time can be spent to leisure-oriented ends. Furthermore, prioritizing non-work time in exotic locations requires rejecting normative stabilities and protections and depends on particular conditions that enable the pursuit of entrepreneurial projects of the self. Temporal sovereignty is privileged, structurally dependent on visa access to desirable locations most readily offered to certain nationalities, allowing them to negotiate a flexible position with respect to the rights and duties of specific nation-state regimes (Mancinelli 2020).

Second, we contribute to the debate on whether speed or slowness confers status in contemporary society (e.g., Bellezza et al. 2017; Eckhardt and Bardhi 2020; Husemann and Eckhardt 2019; Keinan and Kivetz 2011) by outlining a different way in which time is used to claim distinction. We show that liquidity alters consumers' experiences of time and productivity, such that social distinction inheres not in busyness, performance, slowing down, or even leisure, but in the notion of having ownership over one's time and control over its fragmented composition. We build on Husemann and Eckhardt's (2019) work by showing that what is increasingly valued is not only slowness over busyness but also a deliberate emancipatory structuring of time in liquidity. Ultimately, in contrast to Husemann and Eckhardt (2019), digital nomads are not looking for slowness in their lives per se. They are seeking out a life which does not revolve around productivity logics, and which affords them an abundance of free time. For those who achieve this, they have gained a temporal privilege. We thus suggest that time as a status symbol does not manifest only at the junctures between elite vs. working class (Sharma 2014), or American vs. European work ethics (Bellezza et al. 2017; see Veblen 1899/1994), but also at the intercept of liquid vs. solid.

Finally, we introduce temporal status as a new form of distinction that evolves from liquidity. We thus extend prior work (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2020) which outlines emergent forms of status and distinction in liquidity but does not address the temporal nor the enabling role of digital consumption and production in the process of claiming distinction. Importantly, temporal privilege is not about idleness or slowing down, but about time sovereignty and rejection of productivity as a logic. In this realm, having free time and working the minimum amount possible is valorized and achieved via geographic arbitrage and passive income generation through the digital marketplace. In many ways, digital nomads have found a way to achieve what was promised when the digital age first emerged: working less to live more. This way of living is materialized via a focus on the now rather than on the future. Achieving this is projected as a conspicuous and aspirational marker of social standing and success; digital nomads identify as the New Rich (rich in time) and feel privileged compared to those stuck in the solid ways of the time-poor but cash-rich (Sullivan and Gershuny 2004). This new form of status and distinction is a uniquely liquid one and demonstrates how liquid consumption affects the ways in which time is used symbolically and aspirationally.

### Further reading

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### Note

- 1 All authors contributed equally.

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