

# What is contemporary global nomadism and how does it affect materialism?

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Is John Lennon's line "imagine no possessions" not as idealistic as it once seemed? According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, globalization has led to a new class of "global nomads" who are less attached to material objects.

"No one has studied contemporary global nomads and their relationship to [possessions](#), and we can learn so much about how deterritorialization affects consumer culture from this unique and growing group of people," write authors Fleura Bardhi (Northeastern University), Giana M. Eckhardt (Suffolk University), and Eric J. Arnould (Bath University). "As possessions are seen as bumps on the road during geographical movement, the nomadic perspective challenges our existing views of possessions as central to consumer identity."

The authors conducted in-depth interviews with "elite global nomads," most of them from the United States, but several from the United Kingdom, Canada, Turkey and Romania. According to the authors, these nomads travel more than 60 percent of the year and tend to work for global institutions like the UN, IMF, World Bank, and global NGOs.

"Global nomads tend to form situational attachments to objects, appreciate objects primarily for their instrumental use-value, and value immaterial or 'light' possessions as well as practices," the authors write. And they need their possessions to be portable, like [portable electronics](#). They also value objects that help them stay connected to networks, like e-books and digital photos. "It is not the [object](#) per se that is valued, but rather its accessibility. Thus, possessions are replaceable and are not salient or part of the individual's extended self." Unlike migrants and expatriates who long for a home and relationships they left behind, global nomads are liberated from emotional, social, and physical obligations.

"Globalization theorists argue that global nomadism will become more prevalent in the future, and thus the liquid relationship to possessions that we identify will become an important lens in which to understand the new role of objects in people's lives, as consumers will seek to temporarily access objects rather than own them over long periods of time," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Fleura Bardhi, Giana M. Eckhardt, and Eric J. Arnould. "Liquid Relationship to Possessions." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2012. [ejcr.org/](http://ejcr.org/)

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