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**Citation:** Sharifonnasabi, Z., Mimoun, L. & Bardhi, F. (2024). Home and psychological well-being in global consumer mobility. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 35(3), pp. 415-433. doi: 10.1002/jcpy.1440

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE



# Home and psychological well-being in global consumer mobility

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## Abstract

Home is typically understood as a singular place that provides a sense of groundedness, belonging, and well-being. Yet, this singular notion of home is challenged in global mobility, where consumers live and travel across borders and relocate internationally frequently. We expect globally mobile consumers to experience multiple and multilayered notions of home with significant psychological consequences for their sense of well-being, ownership, and identity. In a qualitative study of 40 globally mobile consumers, we examine what it means to have multiple homes and how consumers cope with it. We identified four types of home that coexist in global mobility: emotional home, home away from home, base of operation, and home on the road. These types are characterized by different degrees of permanence and serve different psychological benefits that are at times in opposition or complementary (respectively, belonging and ontological security, functioning and psychological ownership, productivity, and flexibility). We also explored how this home portfolio provokes emotional, social, and cognitive consequences with which globally mobile consumers cope through strategic use of marketplace resources.

## KEY WORDS

consumer well-being, coping strategies, global mobility, home

I have a flat in London that I rent and that is really where my primary home is. I spend nearly 60-70% of my time in London. In Berlin, I am in a house that we built in 1966. We have been married for 35 years. So that's where home is, that's where my wife is. In Dubai, I do not have a place even though I am a resident of [the] UAE. I am in a hotel... For me, home is where [my] heart and job [are]. That is currently London, where I work and spend 60% of my time, Berlin is my emotional home and where I [would] like to retire, and Dubai is just a temporary feeling of getting the job done...however, it can be challenging...When I'm in London or Dubai, I don't have much social life. It was quite shocking at the beginning. It is an isolated life because everyone is so concentrated on

their work. I try my best to connect. Today I had coffee with a colleague, it was nice. I have also involved myself in the choir and have my contacts there. It helps.

(Adam, consultant, German, 62 years old)

Globally mobile individuals, like Adam, who work and live across two or more countries represent a considerable and growing consumer segment. They account for part of the 281 million international migrants globally or 3.6% of the world's population (UN Migration, 2022). Examples of globally mobile individuals include corporate expatriates (Thompson & Tambyah, 1999), transnational consumers (Sharifonnasabi et al., 2024), long-distance transnational families (Rhodes, 2002), and contemporary nomads (Atanasova et al., 2022; Bardhi et al., 2012). In the opening vignette, Adam notes that living across multiple countries means that

Accepted by David B. Wooten, Editor; Associate Editor, Eileen Fischer.

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he must live across multiple homes in different countries. These homes are associated with distinct implications for consumer behavior (e.g., home being owned vs. accessed; outsourced domestic activities or not) and create distinct psychological benefits for consumers (e.g., functional vs. symbolic needs; safety vs. belonging needs). Such a globally mobile lifestyle constitutes a precarious and resource-heavy endeavor (Sharifonnasabi et al., 2024) which is emotionally, socially, and cognitively challenging.

The home is a central consumption space (Douglas, 1991), a significant driver of psychological ownership (Pierce & Peck, 2018), and the domain of important consumption activities and routines that consumers strive to sustain and restore in case of disruption (e.g., moving, children leaving, divorce) (Epp et al., 2014). The home is extremely important for identity signaling and can serve both to showcase one's unique identity and as a tool of social distinction (Grant & Handelman, 2023; Pierce & Peck, 2018). Home plays an important role in consumer psychological well-being as it provides a sense of groundedness and belonging (Eichinger et al., 2022; McCracken, 1989). Having a home motivates ownership (Peck & Luangrath, 2023), fosters well-being (Hill, 1991), anchors identity as a key component of the extended self (Belk, 1988) and family identity (Epp et al., 2014), and enhances one's ontological security—that is, one's unconscious need to feel existentially secure (Giddens, 1990). Thus, making sure that one's home meets both individual and societal standards is deeply valued by consumers who invest extensively in domestic activities that create, maintain, and improve their homes. However, the multiplicity of homes experienced by contemporary globally mobile individuals like Adam challenges the traditional assumptions around the role of home for consumer well-being and identity and questions the concept of home in consumer research.

Indeed, prior consumer research conventionally perceives home as a singular and sacred place, often tied to a place (e.g., the house) and a nation-state. Further, to foster the psychological benefits of home, prior literature argues that consumers must dwell for a long time and develop an attachment to their home. Indeed, home is where individuals “feel in control of their environment, ... free to be themselves and at ease, in the deepest psychological sense” (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998, p. 25). Thus, without a home, prior research has assumed that consumers feel rootless, disoriented, and lacking an anchor for key social connections and identity, thus experiencing a diminished sense of ontological security and well-being (Eichinger et al., 2022; Hill, 1991; Mehta & Belk, 1991). Moreover, home is an important domain for consumer psychology because of its significant implications for consumer well-being. For example, frequent relocations are costly in terms of psychological well-being, physical health, and happiness (Burrell et al., 2006) and can

prevent the formation of social support networks, thus leading to stress and loneliness (Girard, 2014; Stokols et al., 1983).

Yet, in global mobility, developing a single, singularized place to call home is challenged as Adam indicates. Rather, as we find, globally mobile consumers develop and maintain multiple homes some of which lack the materiality, emotional attachment, and sense of ownership typically identified as essential elements of a home. Moreover, their sacred possessions and social and familial connections are spread across multiple, at times transitional and commodified, homes. The different meanings, practices, and psychological benefits that may emerge in these different homes remain understudied. Thus, we ask: What are the meanings of home for globally mobile individuals, especially in relation to consumption practices, possessions, and ownership? How does the multiplicity and fragmentation of home in global mobility impact consumers' well-being and identity? How do consumers cope with the psychological consequences of this multiplicity and fragmentation?

We study globally mobile consumers who live and travel across borders and relocate internationally frequently. Our context excludes traditional migration (in which people have moved to a country where they hope to settle in the long term, raise their family, and even gain citizenship, e.g., Peñaloza, 1994), temporary travel (e.g., touristic, business, and student travels), and involuntary mobility (e.g., refugees). Our context is ideal for studying home and well-being because it challenges prior assumptions of dwelling and developing an attachment to a place.

We first explain how prior consumer research informs our understanding of home in global mobility as well as our method. Next, we present our findings in two sections. First, we identify a portfolio of four types of home, which differ by their degree of permanence, inhabited by globally mobile consumers: emotional home, home away from home, base of operation, and home on the road. We observe that each home distinctively impacts consumer well-being and identity by serving a particular psychological benefit, respectively, belonging and ontological security, functioning and psychological ownership, productivity, and flexibility. Second, we find that individuals cope with the emotional, social, and cognitive consequences of having a portfolio of homes through marketplace resources (e.g., specialized services) and strategic consumption practices (e.g., commercial friendships, selective consumer acculturation).

We contribute to a multilayered conceptualization of home in consumer research by moving away from the assumption of home as a single and singularized place. Rather, we demonstrate that home can be multiple and developed in manifold ways as consumers develop a portfolio of homes, each bringing different psychological benefits. We identify and bridge the three different conceptualizations of home (i.e., home as a place,

a space, and a set of practices) by highlighting that different, and at times contradictory, meanings of home can coexist.

## CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

### Home and consumer mobility

The home is traditionally conceived as a safe and sacred place, separated from the outside world, and providing security, comfort, and a sense of belonging to a place and a nation-state (McCracken, 1989). Having a place one can call home is seen as necessary for consumers' ontological security and well-being (Hill, 1991). For example, Hill's (1991) study of homeless women highlights the importance of home as a source of stability and emotional support. While shelters may offer many basic components of home, the absence of personal space and general loss of control make shelters unlikely to provide a sense of hominess, rootedness, and identity.

Global mobility shapes consumers' relationship to places and spatially, temporally, and socio-culturally disrupts the home (Bardhi et al., 2012; Figueiredo & Uncles, 2015; Peñaloza, 1994). Prior research has not examined consumer's meaning of home in global mobility directly. Yet, we observe that prior research conceives the home as disrupted and/or inaccessible for traditional migrants (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Peñaloza, 1994) and contradictory to cosmopolitan values and temporary for expats and nomads (Bardhi et al., 2012; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999).

For traditional migrants, the home has been conceived as a place and source of identity and rootedness. Because migrants' identity is viewed as territorialized, defined by the country, nationality, or ethnicity anchored in a territory, the home becomes a marker of their belonging to two worlds, the "home country" of origin and the "host country" of residence (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Peñaloza, 1994). The meanings of home are constructed around the migrant's relationship with the homeland, which is strong and enduring despite the lack of copresence. The home stores and displays possessions symbolizing the home country to demonstrate migrants' identity and restore a sense of home abroad (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Peñaloza, 1994).

The home in nomadism emerges as being flexible, portable, and distributed (Bardhi et al., 2012; Figueiredo & Uncles, 2015). The cosmopolitan ideology that underlines nomadism and expatriation opposes the ideal of travel to the notion of home (Thompson & Tambyah, 1999). While travel is desired as a source of freedom, adventure, and symbolic capital, the home is often denigrated as safe but boring and associated with femininity and attachment. Thus, nomads often adopt a utilitarian vision of the home and the possessions stored in it (Atanasova et al., 2022; Bardhi et al., 2012). This

view contrasts with traditional ideas of cherished possessions, sacred objects, and heirlooms providing a sense of self and identity. The home is created in each new locale by transporting a mobile set of possessions or recreating local identification through functional possessions (Bardhi et al., 2012; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999).

Despite these two opposite takes on the home that indirectly emerge from prior research, there is little research that directly examines homemaking in global mobility and its psychological consequences. The literature on global mobility tends to assume that the home is singular and place-based and underestimates its multidimensionality and multiplicity. For instance, studies of migrants' and expatriates' consumption (Peñaloza, 1994; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999) conceive the home as singular, tied to a particular place, often the nation-state. We challenge this assumption by examining the different meanings of home in conditions that challenge the singular and place-based home. To do so, we mobilize three perspectives on home.

### Three theoretical perspectives on home

We identify three perspectives on home across social sciences: home as a place, space, and set of practices. While these perspectives can be seen to underline consumer research on home, consumer researchers adopt predominantly the home as a place perspective. Further, an integration of these perspectives highlighting different meanings of home is missing.

First, consumer researchers have adopted predominantly the *home as a "place"* perspective. Here, home is associated with a physical structure—a house—and the material manifestations of dwelling (e.g., home ownership, possessions, furnishing) (Maclaran, 2012; Mallett, 2004). Home as a place often implies a singular place, enclosed, stable, and private (McCracken, 1989). This perspective foregrounds psychological ownership of the home and the furnishing and possessions that compose the home to produce a sense of familiarity, security, stability, control, and well-being (Belk, 1988; Grant & Handelman, 2023; Hill, 1991).

From a consumer psychology point of view, maintaining a singular home drives psychological ownership and anchors one's identity in time and space (Peck & Luangrath, 2023; Pierce & Peck, 2018). Consumers accumulate, display, and curate possessions in the home to symbolize and foster a sense of identity (Belk, 1988; Grant & Handelman, 2023; Mehta & Belk, 1991). This perspective also highlights the home as a homeland which provides a sense of national identity and patriotism and encourages the consumption of national brands (Li & Wyer Jr, 1994; Mehta & Belk, 1991). Moreover, home as a place provides consumers with a sense of groundedness, that is, a feeling of emotional rootedness emerges from connections to "familiar physical, social, and historic



environment and provides a sense of strength, safety, and stability” (Eichinger et al., 2022, p. 1). While this is the core perspective on home in consumer research, it has also been criticized for being unidimensional (Ahmed, 1999) and limiting the understanding of contemporary phenomena such as remote working where the public and private start intersecting in the home (Mimoun & Gruen, 2021).

Second, the *home as a “space”* perspective defines home as “simultaneously and indivisibly a spatial and a social unit of interaction” (Giddens, 1984, p. 82). The home is therefore constituted by the social interactions among the group of people who occupy the space and produce social institutions (e.g., family, household). Thus, the place's identity is provisional and in flux and is shaped by the particular social relations that occur in that space (Rabikowska, 2010). For instance, the home can be extended across space thanks to technologies that mediate long-distance family interactions (Epp et al., 2014).

From a consumer psychology point of view, this perspective argues that consumers develop a strong emotional attachment to home through various cues, which in turn can increase their commitment to home and the likelihood of making sacrifices to maintain the connection (Thomson et al., 2005). Central to this perspective are the “feelings” connected to the home including feelings toward one's family and childhood but also toward one's country, homeland, and place of origin (Jones, 1995). Home is thus central to one's identity and status and can provide a sense of emotional attachment, belonging, and rootedness in a global world because of the social and environmental cues that signify hominess (Newton, 2008; Wise, 2000).

Moreover, consumers' definition of what they regard as home is driven by aspirations for safety, authenticity, comfort, and love, which can be triggered by a single moment, smell, image, or sound (Wise, 2000). Prior research has, for example, shown how certain brands evoke the feeling of being at home thanks to their close association with childhood memories (Fournier, 1998). Therefore, we “feel at home” not necessarily in a particular place, but when we are with those whom we love (e.g., family, close friends, community) and when we are where we feel connected (e.g., where our loved ones are). While the home as a spatial and social unit is well-established, this perspective is criticized for being context-specific (Mallett, 2004).

Finally, the *home as “a set of practices”* perspective emphasizes the importance of organized, intentional, and thoughtful acts of doings in the formation and maintenance of the home. Understood this way, the focus is not necessarily on how people “think” or “feel” about home (i.e., perspective two), but instead on the diverse ways that people “do” and “are” at home (Ahmed, 1999; Mallett, 2004). The home is shaped less by the place and more by the homemaking practices that give meaning to the place (Ellingsen & Hidle, 2013). We define homemaking practices as reflexive practices in which one

purposefully engages to create a sense of home (e.g., strategic use of material possessions and rituals; selective and strategic consumer acculturation to create a sense of belonging).

While consumer researchers have touched on the role of practices in homemaking (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Dion et al., 2014), the home as a practice perspective is a novel one for our field. It focuses research on the roles and meanings of objects, routines, rituals, and everyday actions through which a space is transformed into a home (Rabikowska, 2010). In particular, domestic activities constitute the everyday, mundane doings that routinely take place in the domestic space of the home (Arsel & Bean, 2013). Domestic activities may include, for example, relaxing, cooking, gardening, decorating, cleaning, family socializing, or caring for pets (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Dion et al., 2014; Moisio et al., 2013). When domestic activities are strategically enacted in the process of homemaking as a cultural form, then they constitute homemaking practices. Homemaking practices are place appropriation practices that transform an empty space into a meaningful one (Miller, 1988; Moisio et al., 2013). Domestic activities and homemaking practices can overlap and are both crucial to the construction of the home.

From a consumer psychology point of view, this perspective suggests that the benefits of home can also be derived in conditions of continued change, such as during global mobility, thanks to homemaking practices and possessions. Indeed, from the home as a set of practices perspective, home does not imply being housed or settled in a single locale, but rather a place or a combination of places in which one has camped, sojourned, and settled during the course of one's lifetime (Rabikowska, 2010). For example, the ways refugees continuously engage in a process of homemaking across different environments through the strategic use of possessions, such as their favorite clothing, constitutes a sense of home for them (Schneider, 2023).

In our study, we combine the three perspectives on home to examine the multiplicity of meanings of home in global mobility.

## METHOD

To understand the meanings of home in global mobility, we follow a qualitative research design. We define global mobility as a certain type of international mobility where consumers live and travel across borders and relocate internationally frequently. Through this purposeful ongoing movement between two or more countries, consumers spend enough time in each location to identify an accommodation as a home. By purposeful, we mean that consumers' mobility is driven by key personal reasons (e.g., job requirements) that require a lengthy stay and a considerable degree of engagement with each location. Thus, globally mobile consumers must invest in several accommodations to accommodate their frequent stays in multiple

countries. This makes global mobility an ideal context to examine the impact of having multiple homes on consumers' perception of home, well-being, and identity.

Examples of globally mobile consumers can be found in long-distance family arrangements in which, for instance, one parent lives and works in Canada with the children while the other parent lives and works in China (Rhodes, 2002), long-distance company assignments in which, for instance, oil ring workers are sent abroad on an offshore platform for several months at time (Lau et al., 2012), expats who move internationally every few years following corporate assignments (Thompson & Tambyah, 1999), and transnational professionals who live in multiple countries simultaneously (Sharifonnasabi et al., 2024). Global mobility excludes traditional migrants (i.e., those who move to a country to settle in the long term, raise their family, and gain citizenship), short-term travelers (e.g., business travelers, tourists), and involuntary mobile individuals (e.g., refugees).

## Data collection

We followed a phenomenological approach (Thompson et al., 1990) to investigate the meanings of home for globally mobile individuals. This aims to understand a phenomenon as experienced by participants and draws commonalities among all those who experience the same phenomenon. This approach has been commonly used in studies of construct explication (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Moisis et al., 2013; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999). We combined phenomenological interviews and ethnographic observation to enhance the study's validity and trustworthiness and achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

We conducted 40 semi-structured phenomenological interviews, complemented by 10 home and/or office visits, with globally mobile consumers to capture their meaning(s) of home and homemaking practices as influenced by their current and previous international mobility. We used existing theories on home, homemaking, and consumption in mobility (Bardhi et al., 2012; Hill, 1991; McCracken, 1989; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Peñaloza, 1994) to design the interview guide. After grand tour questions (McCracken, 1988) covering their present and past mobility patterns, we asked informants about the role and meaning(s) of home(s) and homemaking practices in general and in the different countries in which they reside. We documented informants' consumption patterns to record the material aspects of homemaking, the knowledge required for maintaining home(s), and the meaning of home(s) for our informants. Interviews took place at the researchers' workplace, in public spaces (e.g., coffee shop), at the participant's home or office, or via video conferencing. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

We used purposeful sampling to gain variety in age, gender, occupation, type of mobility (e.g., nomadism,

expatriation, transnationalism), frequency of mobility, and extent of mobility (from border countries to different continents). We recruited informants through personal contacts, posts on relevant online groups, and snowballing. Our final sample of informants consists of 19 men and 21 women; 13 of the informants are single, 27 are married or in civil union relationships; and 13 have children. Informants range in age from 26 to 63 years. They work in real estate, engineering, IT, services, consultancy, finance, aviation, nursing, and academia. They have one nationality, except for three informants. Informants are fluent in two to four different languages. Their places of residence take a variety of forms, including owned, shared, and access-based. Appendix SI illustrates the profiles of our informants.

## Data analysis

Our data analysis involves three steps in which we move iteratively between data collection, analysis of themes, and theory following the Gioia method. This is a systematic approach to qualitative research to ensure rigor in the conduct and presentation of inductive research (Gioia et al., 2013). The method is particularly useful when developing or explicating research constructs, such as in our case to unpack the meanings of home in global mobility. It follows three specific steps in data analysis which we visualize in Figure 1 which describes how our analysis answers the first research question.

*Step 1.* Identifying key empirical concepts in the data structure. We first analyze individual transcripts by documenting each informant's home(s) across borders, domestic activities, materiality of the home, and other related consumption practices. This is in response to an initially puzzling observation that an individual might occupy multiple "homes," each performed differently and used to satisfy different needs and purposes. This step enables us to temporarily categorize each informant's home meaning and homemaking practices in different countries. We produce descriptive personal maps (see Appendix S2 for an example) highlighting different homes and their characteristics for each informant.

*Step 2.* Coding data to identify key patterns and themes (Gioia et al., 2013). We identify themes relating to home meanings and homemaking practices across different homes for each informant (see Figure 1 for a representation of the coding process). We pay particular attention to how consumers maintain and alter their domestic routines and activities as they engage in border-crossing mobility. We group these themes into first-order concepts and then move iteratively between the data and prior literature, particularly related to home, material objects, and well-being. We develop more abstract second-order concepts by refining, merging, and/or dropping first-order concepts until we become confident that they are descriptively dense and that any further

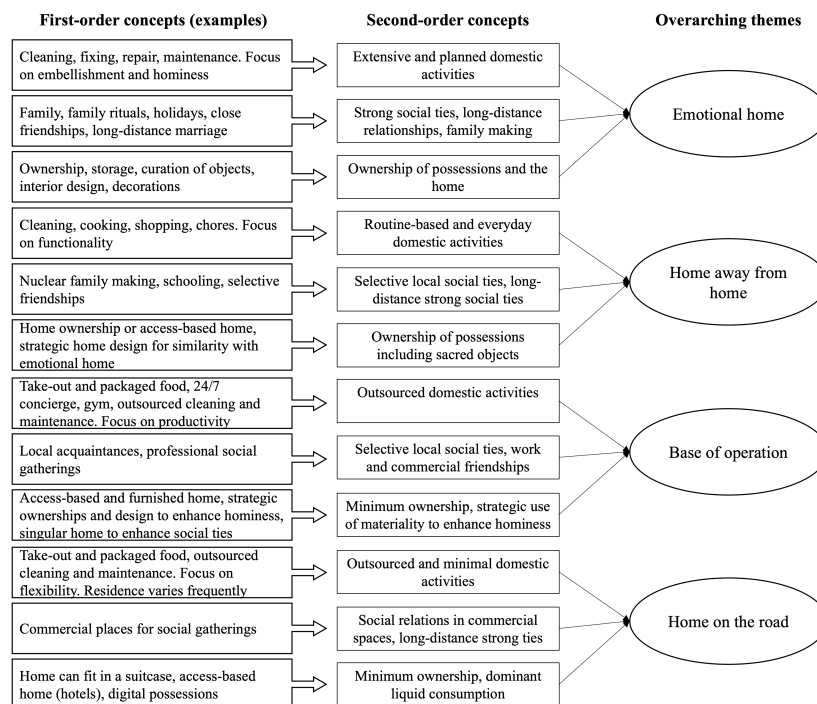


FIGURE 1 Illustrative summary of the data analysis overview.

improvement to our understanding will be minimal. This step leads to three areas of homemaking: domestic activities (e.g., cleaning, cooking, shopping, design, decoration, gardening), social ties (e.g., family making, rituals, holidays, friendship, parenting), and materiality (e.g., ownership, home aesthetic, maintenance, access, and liquid consumption).

**Step 3. Developing overarching themes.** Finally, by drawing comparisons between informants and in an iterative process between our data and the literature, we aggregate the second-order concepts into theoretical meanings around four types of home. At this stage of the analysis, the psychological consequences of maintaining a portfolio of homes across different countries (e.g., lack of groundedness, loneliness) emerged as an important theme. Thus, we code the data for the psychological consequences related to maintaining and living across multiple homes and the mechanisms that our informants deploy to cope with these consequences. We identify three types of psychological consequences: emotional, social, and cognitive. For each, we map out the marketplace solutions and home arrangements that informants use as a coping strategy.

## FINDINGS

### Portfolio of homes in global mobility

We observe that our informants develop and maintain multiple homes that possess different degrees of permanence, are maintained through different homemaking practices, and provide distinct psychological benefits. We

address our research question on the meanings of home developed by globally mobile consumers by identifying four types of home organized on a continuum based on their level of permanence, from stable to transient (see Figure 2). We examine each type of home and the consumption practices that co-constitute it. We note that homemaking practices may overlap across these homes; thus, we highlight those practices that are more salient for each type of home. While not all informants possess the four types of home, they all live across multiple types of home which as a whole provide them complementary psychological benefits. Our informants typically identify with 2 or 3 home types at the same time (see Appendix S2 for an illustrative case and Appendix S3 for additional quotes).

### Emotional home

The most stable type of home evidenced by our informants is the emotional home, a permanent home characterized by intimacy and domesticity aimed at building a sense of belongingness. The emotional home is underlined by the home as a place perspective (i.e., a lasting, often sacred physical building) as well as the home as a space perspective (i.e., filled with social and familial connections) for most informants. This home resembles the prototypical vision of a home as an idealized and sacred place sustained by intimate domestic activities (McCracken, 1989; Moisio et al., 2013). In terms of psychological benefits, the emotional home provides globally mobile consumers with a sense of belonging, ontological security, and groundedness (Peck & Luangrath, 2023).



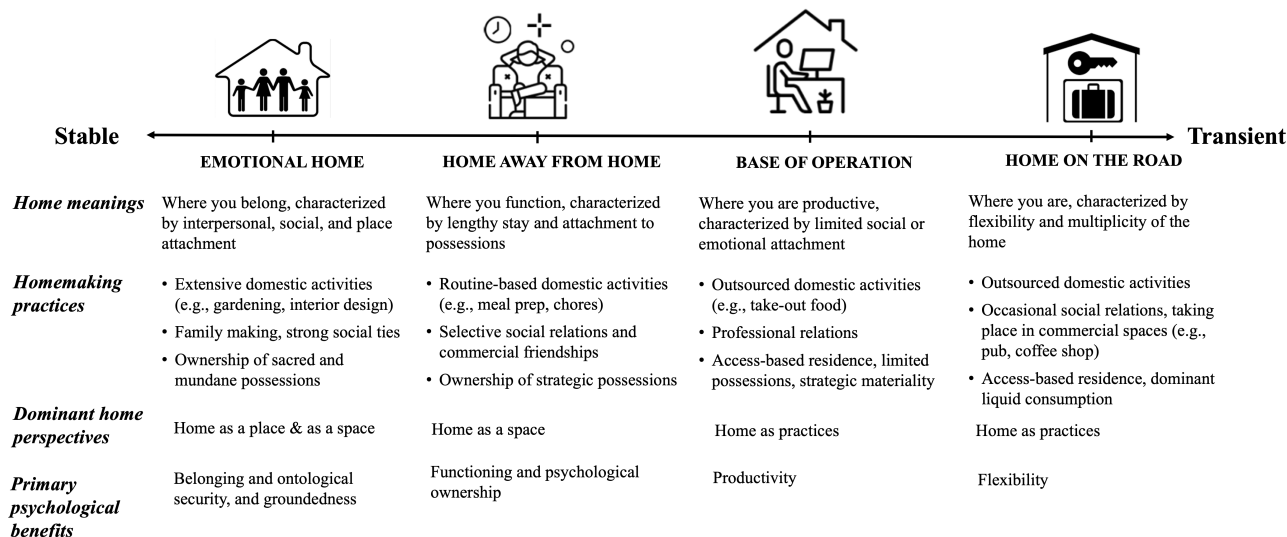


FIGURE 2 A typology of home in global consumer mobility.

The emotional home consists of a place (house or apartment) that is usually owned. This is also a place where a set of possessions, often the most sacred or those to which one is attached are stored and curated. The emotional home is also characterized by a strong sense of psychological ownership through emotional connections with key others (Peck & Luangrath, 2023). Regardless of the time our informants spend in their emotional home, they possess a strong emotional attachment to it. This attachment is rooted in a desire to experience a sense of belonging, being grounded in the world, and agency over one's environment (Eichinger et al., 2022; Pierce & Peck, 2018) that is crucial for mobile consumers who live a precarious life across borders (Sharifonnasabi et al., 2024).

Our informants testified to investing in maintaining long-term commitments to the emotional home economically, materially, and by fostering enduring social and familial relationships in the place. Indeed, the emotional home is the place where globally mobile consumers would ideally like to spend most of their leisure time and where they potentially plan to retire. In the following quote, Viju, a mechanical engineer who now spends his time between India and Japan after a sojourn in Oman, discusses his relationship with his emotional home:

Being in Bangalore makes me very happy. I have my own house, and one more, my parents' home. I feel comfortable in Bangalore. I feel relaxed. I feel satisfied when I reach my home in Bangalore. I feel that I reached some destination where I feel comfortable and relaxed. My wife and my son are there. We built the house 4 years ago. Everything is organized as we want. We made a lot of interior changes. Owning a house gives me a sense of accomplishment. Something that

I worked hard for...and now we look after it a lot, you know maintenance, regular clearing, painting. We do these ourselves. That's how we spent most weekends.

(Viju, 42, India/Japan)

Viju highlights the experience of being at home (e.g., happy, relaxed, oriented, comfortable) in the house he built with his family in Bangalore. This reveals the central importance of the place to generate a feeling of being in control over the space and objects (Peck & Luangrath, 2023). His attachment to the emotional home encourages practices of curation and maintenance. In his Bangalore home, taking care of the home constitutes an important part of his time. Similarly, to what is observed for self-made products (Norton et al., 2012), engaging in labor-intensive productive consumption serves to enhance the sense of the psychological ownership of the emotional home. Choosing to own his house in this location rather than renting provides him with a sense of emotional stability, continuity, and financial security (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Lamberton & Goldsmith, 2020).

His attachment to his emotional home further fosters social practices related to family-making and building strong social relationships to provide him with a sense of emotional belonging and groundedness. The emotional home is central to our informants' emotional and identity connections. For Viju, it represents his immediate family (e.g., wife and child, childhood memories) and a place that he has appropriated by making it his own (Miller, 1988). The emotional home, thus, helps globally mobile consumers form and maintain aspects of their identity, including the core self (who am I), perceived self (what others see), and the lived self (one's social identity through lived behaviors, cognitions, and emotions), while their frequent travels expose them to

different, and at times contradictory, social and cultural norms (Hillenbrand & Money, 2015). Viju, for example, maintains aspects of his Bangalore origin and identity, via ongoing travels to Bangalore to care for the home and invest in his social network.

Beyond home ownership and home maintenance practices, the storage of identity-relevant possessions also plays a key role in providing identity and emotional meanings (Belk, 1988) to the emotional home as revealed by Adam:

My most precious objects are in the home in Berlin. My piano, the art that I bought over the years, the Persian carpet that I bought in Afghanistan and that I inherited from my parents, my books. With the many moves that I have and with the sort of being on the move, everything is concentrated in Berlin because they might get damaged or lost if I take them with me or you know every second move is like throwing something away. We have some sculptures and a big dragon from China. These are things that will be there forever and remind me of these parts of my life.

(Adam, 60, UK/UAE/Germany)

Adam's Berlin house is his emotional home where he stores and curates his collection of singularized and sacred possessions. These possessions materialize his personal history and ensure a sense of continuity of the self over time (Curasi et al., 2004). While our informants tend to minimize possessions in global mobility, those they have kept have become even more cherished. In their emotional home, our informants accumulate and display these sacred possessions (e.g., furniture, trinkets, ornaments). Regardless of their frequent relocations, our informants collect possessions and hold strong and enduring ties to these encumbering objects in contrast with global nomads (Bardhi et al., 2012). These objects provide an anchor to define and maintain globally mobile consumers' personal identity, or sense of core self. Curating these autobiographical possessions (Kleine & Baker, 2004) is an essential domestic activity that enhances the stabilizing and securizing effect of the emotional home. Despite spending less than 2 months per year in his Berlin home, it retains its emotional strength and centrality in Adam's life. This reveals that the emotional home can be symbolic and sustained by the fraction of the year during which the consumer is present.

## Home away from home

The second type of home evidenced by our informants is the home away from home, a relatively stable home characterized by dwelling activities primarily aimed at

facilitating daily life. The home away from home emphasizes the home as a space perspective in which social interactions are crucial to the home's meaning. This home is organized to provide a structure around which to build consumption routines and includes enough symbolic possessions to provide comfort and familiarity in a new and foreign country. Indeed, the psychological benefits of this home for mobile consumers is a sense of psychological ownership (i.e., a feeling that a place can be yours despite lacking emotional attachment) (Peck & Luangrath, 2023; Pierce & Peck, 2018) while providing functional benefits (i.e., management of daily routines).

At first glance, the home away from home resembles the emotional home through the presence of selected symbolic possessions and routine-based domestic activities. Yet, it lacks the emotional attachment and identity value of the emotional home regardless of the time and investment spent in designing and maintaining this home. Indeed, while it tends to be a more enduring home, for example, due to the permanent nature of employment, the home away from home is designed to be functional rather than the foundation of one's identity. The home away from home can be a marketplace asset (Grant & Handelman, 2023). It remains a hybrid place involving "the co-presence of multiple aesthetic codes" (De Molli et al., 2020, p. 1509), in our context represented by balancing between home aspects that enhance productivity (i.e., needed to carry out daily activities efficiently) and those that enhance place attachment and psychological ownership (i.e., needed to maintain an everyday social life).

Here, Vivya contrasts her Indian emotional home with her US home away from home:

Because I do have my extended family back in India, I have two homes. One is where my parents and the extended family are and I have all of my childhood memories. The one in [the] USA is where basically we are doing all our day-to-day activities. We have our own personal rooms and where we have our own privacy. We decorated [the home] how we wanted [it] to be. It's actually similar to the home in India and we also make our plans, like what we're going to do on weekends, how we [are] going to spend our day...

(Vivya, 35, India/UK)

Vivya, who has been living in her US home for 10 years, sees it as a stable base for her and her nuclear family's everyday domestic activities. Even if it is their main place of residence, for most informants like Vivya, this type of home tends to be smaller and accessed rather than owned. Like other informants, she attempts to maintain a level of groundedness and control by mimicking some of the daily activities associated with her emotional home in India. For example, her prayer room

in the US home is a replica of her prayer room in India (both are located on the East side of the house, next to her bedroom, and decorated with the same idols and ornaments). We find that our informants use objects and spaces to create a connection to their past, social ties, or the physical space represented by the emotional home. The aesthetics of the home away from home are in an iconic relationship to the emotional home. This allows our informants to exert control over the space and create a sense of groundedness (Eichinger et al., 2022). Additionally, the routinized daily consumption and domestic activities, such as Vivya's daily planning, family outings, and prayers, sustain a feeling of continuity and control while being on the move.

Anka, a communication consultant, explains how she uses possessions to create a similar space in her London home as in her emotional home in Stockholm where her husband resides:

My home in London is actually quite similar to my home in Stockholm. It's actually scarily similar, even the apartment decoration is similar to be honest with you... I also take some of my dear objects everywhere I go. I do have some minerals that I take with me. I collect minerals, so I have some precious stones that I carry around, they go everywhere where I go. I own a stuffed animal that I actually got from my baptism, which has been following me from Germany to Sweden and now it's here [in London].

(Anka, 34, UK/Germany/ Sweden)

Like many of our informants, Anka sees her home away from home as an extension or a replication of her emotional home when she resides away. She selectively deploys symbolic possessions (e.g., collections, mementos) and domestic activities (e.g., interior design) to recreate this home and make it resemble her emotional home. Bringing her favorite possessions does not serve to replace her emotional home but rather to create a functional home away from home.

This quote also shows that our informants are more attached to their (readily movable) symbolic possessions than to the home away from home itself. Thus, the home away from home does not follow the place-based perspective. For example, both Vivya and Anka chose their home away from home to find better job opportunities and are ready to move if opportunities were to arise in a different location. This emphasizes the hybrid nature of the home away from home. Even though our informants spend the most time in their homes away from home, this type of home remains impermanent in the sense that they are aware that they can pick up at any time. In contrast to the appropriation literature (Miller, 1988), our informants do not develop a strong

place attachment to the home away from home despite investing extensively in it.

## Base of operation

The third type of home is the base of operation, a relatively transient home characterized by limited social or emotional attachment and a focus on optimizing professional productivity. This type of home fits best the home as a set of practices perspective and is manifested in different forms, including rental apartments, shared living arrangements, or corporate accommodations. In the base of operation, our informants' lives consist of intense work schedules and limited interpersonal relationships outside their professional domain. Domestic consumption activities, such as home cooking, grocery shopping, and gardening, as well as possession of material belongings, are less salient and often outsourced in this type of home. Rather the base of operation serves pragmatic and functional psychological benefits.

When globally mobile consumers reside at their base of operation, our informants prioritize consumption practices associated with convenience, efficiency, and ease of mobility. For example, home meals are usually substituted with takeout or dining out via heavy reliance on delivery platforms (e.g., Deliveroo, Uber). Investments in and accumulation of possessions, such as appliances and personal vehicles, are limited to facilitate the frequent moves characteristic of global mobility. Their daily rhythm and consumption choices are motivated primarily by the logic of productivity and access-based consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012).

Paola is a university lecturer with a full-time job in London and family in Italy and the US. Here is how she describes her rented flat in London where she spends most of the year:

Our place in London is nice but it's small and for London standard, it's nice, I say. It's one bedroom in London. Groomed to be modern. But it's rented. So, I've nothing there that is mine. I could empty it in about a day with a suitcase. I have some portraits, or artworks, but furniture was there.

(Paola, 34, UK/Italy/US)

Paola does not invest much in homemaking practices in London as revealed by her limited acquisition of personal possessions. By choosing a furnished rental, Paola makes sure that she will not have to invest time and effort in personalizing her home. Thus, she gains the flexibility to travel between her other home-places or even to relocate if a professional opportunity arises. The limited personalization of the base of operation is similar to what is found among military families living in base housing units, which are designed primarily for

efficiency and must be returned in the condition they were assigned (Girard, 2014).

Globally mobile consumers perceive the base of operation as temporary. Paola, for instance, has a clear picture in mind of how to pack all her material possessions if she were to leave the flat. Having clear packing routines in mind not only enhances one's flexibility (in this case, future mobility) but also tends to limit the development of consumption routines that could emotionally and cognitively anchor them to this home (Mimoun & Bardhi, 2022). Paola's homemaking practices in London reveal this home as a place with significant professional relevance but limited personal or emotional importance for her.

Similarly, we find that our informants do not project themselves into their current base of operation as their future home and source of identity. When Paola was asked to describe important places, objects, or people in her life, she reflected on key objects and people in her emotional homes in Italy and the US as signifiers of her identity (Eichinger et al., 2022). She reserves special routines (e.g., special-occasion shopping and celebration of key events such as birthdays and anniversaries), identity-bearing consumption and object ownership (e.g., her collection of books and artworks), and leisure activities for her emotional homes.

Similarly, Samuel is a market researcher with a full-time job in London and part-time jobs in Spain and Italy. His wife and child live in Spain where he spends around 5 months per year. He describes his home maintenance activities in London, where he spends half of the year:

To be honest, my office is cozier than my shared flat [in London]. At home, I just go to sleep. There is also the kitchen but I am too lazy to cook something just for me, you know, because the main point for me is I don't like to eat at home if I'm alone. I prefer to eat something in the office or on the way back. I stay long hours in my office and only go to my apartment to sleep. My office is homier in fact. I have a picture of my family, a picture of my wife. But at home, nothing. I organize my office in a way that I have access to food, to cleaning stuff, everything. I make sure that I have everything here.

(Samuel, 41, UK/Spain/Italy)

Samuel's shared rental apartment is located close to one of London's airports to facilitate the international commute to visit his family, reinforcing the temporariness and flexibility of the base of operation. When thinking of home in London, Samuel talks equally of his office where he spends most of his time, and of the flat where he rests and spends his time off. This highlights the blurring of boundaries between home and work (Mimoun & Gruen, 2021) for globally mobile consumers. By refraining from dedicating time to domestic activities in London (e.g., no cooking, intense work

schedule leaving no space for socialization), Samuel seems to avoid making his London flat a home. Our informants often spend most of their day at the office, which is also where they tend to extend the self via possessions (Tian & Belk, 2005), such as family photos for Samuel. His emphasis on his office being homier than his flat reveals that his practices are organized to facilitate creating a home base that facilitates his professional identity. Indeed, we find that our informants develop an instrumental relationship with their base of operation as they tend not to form important social relationships or attachments there.

## Home on the road

Finally, the most transient type of home evidenced by our informants is the home on the road, a transient and makeshift home characterized by flexibility and multiplicity. In contrast to the other three types, this is not a singular home and it is always accessed or shared. This type captures the home as a set of practices perspective. In this home, consumers rely extensively on liquid consumption and outsourced domestic activities. Social relationships remain occasional and take place in commercial spaces (e.g., pub, coffee shop). When our informants selectively invest in domestic activities and social relationships, such as with commercial friends (Price & Arnould, 1999) and brand relationships, they do so to claim the space and provide themselves with a temporary and situational sense of belonging. In terms of psychological benefit, the home on the road provides first and foremost flexibility.

Elena for example explains how she invests socially to appropriate her access-based accommodation in London:

In the UK, I live in a hotel... [I] always stay with them. It's a small, let's say, family-based hotel, and the atmosphere is very cozy, and I now feel myself as part of the family, and I do live pretty well with people who work there, so when I'm back in the evening I always spend time having a chat. I've been invited to weddings. People who got married that work in the hotel invite me to their weddings. I really established a close connection. I do feel at home. I don't mind it being a simple, soulless hotel room. I mean, the room always looks the same but it looks okay.... My main belongings are in the flat in Italy. I have some basic ones here that I leave in a fairly large bag and leave at the hotel. They keep it in storage for me... Nowadays, it probably takes me no more than five minutes to have my hand luggage done.

(Elena, 38, UK/Italy)



Over time, Elena has invested selectively in this home on the road by staying regularly at the same hotel. We find that commercial friendships (e.g., favorite hairstylist, hotel receptionist, or therapist) and brand relations (e.g., favorite pub, local shops) are crucial to building the home on the road. We find that our informants prioritize socially oriented dwelling practices (e.g., building ties with the hotel staff) over space-related practices (e.g., arranging the space, moving the furniture, incorporating sacred and cherished possessions) when constructing the home on the road. These practices provide a temporary and situational feeling of being at home that is enough to give them a sense of safety, comfort, and familiarity (Eroglu & Michel, 2018).

This is consistent with the view that people can feel at home in the world by grounding their experience less in a place and more in the activities that occur in this place (Mallett, 2004). Market-based activities, such as building commercial friendships with people and places, can provide the situational and transient feeling of being at home that globally mobile consumers need. At the same time, such access-based accommodations do often provide additional dwelling-oriented services, such as storage, which facilitates one's sense of being at home on the road. This is explained by Tylan, a consultant who spends 6 months in Germany and 6 months in Jordan. As an extreme case of global mobility, he has previously lived in 11 other countries. He reflects on his experience of creating a home on the road in the Gulf countries:

My relation with Gulf countries, although I stayed in some of them for a long time, but it stayed a bit in a temporary style. So, I think if I go for a couple of years somewhere and I always stay in a hotel or in a furnished apartment, then there's always a certain threshold that prevents me from fully indulging into that culture and that society... It was always the same hotel, similar itinerary of traveling. So of course, when you come for the first time there, it's very strange than when you go there for the tenth time and you know a lot of people and you know the souks and you know the malls and you know the hotels. It feels a lot more comfortable... They are not really homey per se. Most of them are more business-like, so you can really see that it's just basic, a table and some chairs and a coffee machine and you can feel that it's like an office atmosphere and not really homey. But, we don't have any preferences. It's always a temporary option, it's just for work.

(Tylan, 33, Germany/Jordan)

Despite spending long periods in several Gulf countries (e.g., up to 2 years in Oman), he always approaches

his homes there as transient by minimizing ownership and material investment. Tylan emphasizes the familiarity gained by repeated patronage of the same hotel and routinized daily consumption practices. Acquiring selective market knowledge (e.g., of the hotels and shopping areas) has helped him reproduce a sense of familiarity without having to deploy solid consumption that would make the home on the road more permanent. Sojourning in a home on the road involves always anticipating a future departure. This contrasts with the solid homemaking practices deployed in the emotional home and home away from home.

In sum, we identify four meanings of home along a continuum of stable to transient, which coexist and complement each other in global mobility. They are associated with distinct homemaking practices, such as consumption and relations to the market and service providers. For example, transient types of home are characterized by outsourced domestic activities and a preference for liquid consumption. We have also outlined the way that places, relations, or consumption practices enable a sense of home in global mobility for each of these four types. Further, each of these homes provides distinct psychological benefits to globally mobile consumers as they deal with frequent mobility, relocations, and transient and precarious inhabitation. Our informants compartmentalize homemaking practices across different homes and countries.

## Psychological consequences of the home portfolio and marketplace solutions

To understand how the multiplicity and fragmentation of home impact well-being, we highlight the emotional, social, and cognitive consequences of having a portfolio of homes and the marketplace resources that globally mobile consumers deploy to cope with them (see Table 1). We focus on the consequences that our informants most closely link to their experience of maintaining a home portfolio rather than on the hardships associated with global mobility in general. We separate three types of consequences for analytical purposes even if they are at times connected (e.g., loneliness (i.e., emotional) is linked to the social costs of missing family).

### Emotional burden of the portfolio of homes

#### *Psychological consequences*

Maintaining a portfolio of homes can be a source of emotional burden, by causing multiple, recurrent, and intense negative emotions including sadness, loneliness, and anxiety. These emotions, particularly when they accumulate over time, can threaten consumer



**TABLE 1** Portfolio of homes' consequences and coping strategies.

Challenges of having a portfolio of homes	Coping strategies	
	Marketplace solutions and consumption practices	Home arrangements
<b>Emotional</b> (e.g., loneliness, guilt, fear-of-missing-out)	Selective consumer acculturation efforts (e.g., shopping at local stores, avoiding change of residential place)	Maintain an emotional anchor and store symbolic objects to increase feelings of safety and continuity (emotional home)
<b>Social</b> (e.g., juggling between social groups across borders, lack of acceptance by locals, lack of copresence with significant others)	Developing commercial friendship (e.g., hairdresser, healthcare provider, commercial space such as pubs)	Maintain strong social ties to increase feelings of support and belonging (emotional home)
<b>Cognitive</b> (e.g., planning, relocation, settling down, housing, schooling, banking, institutional procedures)	Relying on specialized services (e.g., relocation packages) and company agents to facilitate relocation and minimize settling down costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining routines to increase feelings of familiarity, reducing change and precarity (home away from home)</li> <li>Minimizing ownership (base of operation, home on the road)</li> </ul>

well-being (Shrum et al., 2023). Some informants, like Min, explain how low local consumer literacy in different markets can be frightening, especially in an emergency (e.g., a medical scare). Others, like Katrina, explain that they often feel guilty that they cannot be there for their friends, family members, and even colleagues on various social occasions as they must share their time among their multiple homes. Additional burdensome emotions are particularly recurrent among those who live in a long-distance family arrangement. For instance, Samuel, who shares his time between Spain, the UK, and Italy, explains the sadness and loneliness resulting from being away from family and friends for a long time:

Here in the UK, I don't know what colleagues are doing, if they're married, if they're not married, how many kids. I don't know. They don't share and I find it odd. In my culture, we share information about our families. I am never invited into their homes either. The relationship can never become strong. Only a Romanian colleague has invited me a few times. It is so lonely to be away from my wife and my newborn son.

(Samuel, 41, UK/ Spain/Italy)

Samuel's loneliness is associated with his inability to fully settle in the UK despite having lived there for years as he still feels that he does not belong to British society and suffers from this isolation. While he purposefully does not anchor in London and maintains a work-oriented base of operation, this choice also produces recurrent negative emotions whenever the stress of missing his family and failing to connect with colleagues intensifies. We note that the stressors linked to handling a portfolio of homes generate a more diverse set of negative emotions than what is expected in negatively emotionally laden commercial encounters (Yi &

Baumgartner, 2004) and are therefore likely to require a greater range of coping strategies.

### Coping strategies

We observe that our informants strategically use marketplace resources to selectively acculturate in the host consumer culture (Bradford & Sherry Jr, 2014) as a way to cope. Developing localized commercial friendships (Price & Arnould, 1999) is an adaptive response to loneliness frequently deployed by our informants. Chris, for example, admits that he has never purchased from department stores in London and stayed loyal to smaller shops in his neighborhood, which has helped him establish a friendship with the owners and find a way to relate to British culture. Anka has tried to educate herself about the British consumer culture by actively reading the news and engaging in what she understands as “British” brands:

Before moving to the UK, I actually read this fantastic book called *Watching the English*. It's about Englishness... I'm not saying that I try to be British, I can never be. I am very German and Swedish by the fact that my husband is from Sweden and I lived there for a while. But I try to blend in at times. One of the first things I did was I went to a very well-known British chain of hairdressing salons Toni&Guy because whenever I was speaking with my friends, they could tell that I've been there. This weekend I had my friends over and we had coffee together and I served them cucumber sandwiches, just for the sake of being here and being part of it. I've actually started setting aside money before I came to the UK to make sure that at some stage I could go and buy myself a Burberry coat, just to embrace being here.

(Anka, 34, UK/Germany/Sweden)

Anka combines here a variety of coping strategies involving seeking social support (with her friends), positive reinterpretation (of her foreignness), and planful problem-solving (saving for the coat) (Yi & Baumgartner, 2004). Like Anka, our informants generally deploy a range of strategies in which problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) are complementary rather than oppositional (Yi & Baumgartner, 2004) across their homes even if the emotional home remains the central source of emotional support. Because negative emotions can be debilitating on a daily basis, our informants must find emotional resources even in the most transient homes.

## Social cost of the portfolio of homes

### *Psychological consequences*

Maintaining a portfolio of homes carries a social cost including having to trade off one's social investments across locales due to limited resources (i.e., time, money, emotional reservoir), missing close ones, and having difficulty developing a sense of belonging.

Our informants often feel that maintaining a rich social network across an array of homes and countries is challenging and costly. For example, Katrina manages multiple social networks both around her three homes (i.e., a flatshare in the UK where she works, a home with her husband and children in France where her husband works, and a home in Sweden where she was born and her parents live) and around places where she used to live (i.e., she previously spent several years in the UK and Canada for professional reasons):

The thing is moving away, you don't lose your friends but it's very difficult to establish friendships... You know they say you can have eight close friends. When you've lived in different places, you can have eight close friends in each place. It's just that you don't see them, so actually I think that you can have a richer friendship network if you stay long enough, because you are forced to build new linkages, and you'll maintain some old friends if they are deep enough. So that's a luxury, but it also means that you have more to manage, as well.

(Katrina, 40s, UK/France/Sweden)

While global mobility can help build a richer social network (Sharifonnasabi et al., 2024), staying active in these different social lives requires a lot of effort, time, and money to stay in touch with people spread across the world. Our participants explain how they constantly renegotiate their priorities and make trade-offs between developing their relationships in their current place of residence and preserving their relationships in their

other homes. For instance, each time they cross a border, they have to renounce being part of social events in the location they are leaving and they often feel that they are letting down their social connections there. These negotiations at times threaten and, in any case, shape our participants' social identity (White & Argo, 2009), limiting its breadth and forcing them to prioritize certain aspects.

Moreover, Katrina explains that the feeling that she belongs also becomes complicated. When reflecting on how she recently attended a party at the Swedish Embassy to celebrate Midsummer, she talks about her ambivalence between belonging and being rejected:

So, you have part of your heart that is where you come from. So, these people I can see that I am similar to them in a way. But I have problems identifying with them at the same time for different reasons... [Attending the celebration] reminds me "oh I'm not really there, I'm not really here!" I had problems renewing my passport a while ago, some stupid person who questioned my nationality because... [she said "you can't prove that you didn't get the American or Canadian nationality" and for a while it was illegal to get double nationality for Swedes... that made me very unsettled as well!

Her tone is still angry and uncomfortable when she discusses a recent incident when she had to prove her Swedish nationality to renew her passport. She is altered by her global mobility, an experience that is especially salient when she encounters other people from her country of origin. She struggles to feel that she belongs in her different homes because she perceives a distance from the other locals due to her regular absences and her reflexive distance from the local social and cultural norms. Others and institutions can add to this ambivalence by questioning her right to belong and even explicitly rejecting her as in the passport incident.

Our informants further explain how they struggle to accommodate new social and relational norms and feel that they cannot fit anywhere. We observe a tension between being settled and being on (or anticipating) the move which hinders the development of strong social ties in some of their countries of residence. For instance, Erica has moved from Lebanon to the UK to find a job in her area of bioethics. She has attempted to establish social connections by switching to shared accommodations and moving to busier areas of the city. Despite her efforts, Erica remains unhappy with her "lonely" life in the UK and admits that she is not hopeful to "ever feel settled" in London. At the time of the interview, Erica was preparing to move to another city in the UK, hoping for a fresh start and an easier at developing stable friendships in a smaller city.

Living far from my parents, friends, and hometown is very difficult. I felt so isolated [in London, UK], and I just decided that if I don't do this [traveling to Lebanon regularly] I can't actually take it anymore, this isolation. Imagine that I'm living in a city of eight million people and I feel so alone. It's amazing... Now I'm moving to Manchester. People have time there. You walk on the street and they actually talk to you. You can easily meet people. I know that I can't be on my own anymore. It's that bad.

(Erica, 37, UK/Lebanon)

Strong social connections are key for Erica to feel safe and secure in her home, something that living in London failed to offer. As a result of global mobility, our informants have to navigate multiple points of transition in and out of countries, relationships, and consumption lifestyles. Each of these points of transition is a source of recurrent and possibly chronic liminality (Mimoun & Bardhi, 2022). For Erica, her liminality can become a heavy burden, and she sometimes wishes to go back to a world where she could take things for granted. Finding her life normal and ordinary could be a reassuring counterpoint to the complexity and uncertainty that still surround her social life and negatively impact her subjective well-being.

### *Coping strategies*

We observe that, despite the challenges resulting from a lack of enduring social connections, globally mobile consumers strive to create social ties and community by taking advantage of marketplace resources. More specifically, they engage in forming and maintaining commercial friendships (Price & Arnould, 1999) across borders. These efforts can be seen as a form of emotion-focused coping (Han et al., 2016). Paola, for example, talks animatedly about her hairdresser that she has maintained over the past 12 years despite multiple relocations, some necessitating cross-continent travel to visit her:

If I want to go to the hairdresser, I wait, even for a month, that's fine, because I want to get it in Italy and I want to go to my favorite hairdresser. I like it because they know me, you know say hi, gossip kind of stuff, it's pleasant. It's an experience that I don't want to lose, it's nice, it's relaxing, it's friendship. I don't need to book in advance. I call, can I come? Yeah, come.

(Paola, 34, UK/Italy/US)

For Paola, maintaining a good relationship with her hairdresser means more than receiving good quality services. She considers her hairdresser a good friend, somebody whom she can share her life stories with, and more

importantly, a strong link to her hometown and emotional home in Italy. We observe the same pattern of cross-border strong commercial friendships that our informants strive to form and maintain with doctors and vendors of symbolic products (e.g., cosmetics, beauty) and commercial spaces (e.g., a pub, a coffee shop). In addition to social connection and a feeling of community, commercial friendships provide a sense of routine, order, and continuity that enhance globally mobile consumers' well-being and ontological security (Sharifonnasabi et al., 2024).

The emotional home is central to managing these challenging social consequences by providing consumers with strong and enduring social ties and storage for their symbolic possessions to build a sense of psychological ownership and emotional attachment (Thomson et al., 2005). This might explain why our informants invest so much to maintain their emotional home, despite its costs and often spending very little time there. This resonates with the concept of psychological distance which describes the degree to which one feels close or removed from a phenomenon (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Here, psychological distance is disconnected from physical distance as our informants display a sense of closeness to their emotional home even though they often spend very little time there.

## Cognitive burden of the portfolio of homes

### *Psychological consequences*

Having a portfolio of homes is expensive and heightens consumers' cognitive burden as one must manage their daily activities across multiple cross-border locales. Indeed, when people change their environment (e.g., relocate), they must engage in heightened cognitive processing to make sense of their new situation (Zwaan, 1996). Our informants explain how they must constantly engage in a multitude of tasks and decision-making around their international commutes (e.g., planning a relocation, traveling, settling down), home maintenance (e.g., scheduling and implementing repairs, cleaning, and shopping often from afar), and the planning and execution of household tasks (e.g., banking, taxes, and schooling).

Our informants reveal that it is often quite stressful to manage the multiple "lives" in which they are embedded, the ones which they pursue at a distance in the countries in which they are not currently staying, and the ones which they live in the day-to-day in the country in which they currently reside. They have to juggle multiple homes, multiple sets of possessions, multiple timelines, and multiple social networks. They cannot easily rely on consumption routines, which usually lessen the cognitive burden by relying on taken-for-granted practices (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998), because their routines are recurrently disrupted by international moves. Min, for example, spreads his life between three homes: one in London where he has a full-time job, one in Oxford, UK,

where his wife and children live, and one in China where the rest of his family lives, and he occasionally works on a contract basis. He explains how much planning and learning is involved to navigate these markets, despite only moving across locations that he knows well:

With every move, there comes many unknown factors, there is so much to learn, a new bank, finding a place to live, schools for the kids. A new start is difficult, there is always a period of time to settle down. Even for the countries that I know, like China, where is my hometown, every time I go back for work things have changed and I need to learn and plan for in advance.

(Min, 43, UK/China)

Like Min, our informants must manage their and their family's consumption activities around their regular moves. Whether the time between each journey is counted in days or months, the uncertainty brought by the perspective of a future move creates a cognitive burden that consumers must manage. From taxes to insurance to having access to key possessions, managing multiple homes means that one has to always consider their multiple accommodations when making consumption decisions. Chris, for instance, discusses how managing his expenses in multiple currencies requires constant attention to benefit from fluctuating exchange rates:

I came to the UK [from Germany] also because earning here in British pounds and paying in Euro my major rent or mortgage makes it a bit attractive at the moment, but after Brexit it is not necessarily the case, it is not as easy logistically. I have to think again.

(Chris, 42, UK/Germany)

Chris rents a flat in the UK where he works full time and owns a home in Germany where his wife and daughter reside. One of his key concerns is to stay on top of currency exchange rates to optimize his income. Political shifts such as Brexit bring additional complexity, disrupting known patterns of currency exchange rates and creating additional fees for money transfers. Other informants explain how they plan their travels to take advantage of sales schedules in different locations or maintain regular medical appointments. These elements add a layer of precariousness and routine disruption that likely impact globally mobile consumers' cognition, including a loss of control (Mimoun & Bardhi, 2022).

### *Coping strategies*

We observe that our informants strive to minimize the cognitive burden of managing the home portfolio by relying on marketplace resources, such as relocation companies and services offered by their employers, even if

they are financially less attractive. These efforts can be seen as problem-focused coping mechanisms that “activate thoughts about potential actions one can initiate in response to stress and result in a concrete and process-oriented mode of thinking emphasizing how to achieve one's objectives consistent with lower construal levels” (Han et al., 2016, p. 429). Min, for example, admits that he changed his way of settling in a new country. He used to engage in a cognitively demanding period of planning and searching that he refers to as a “coping time” but now adopts a more outsourced approach as he relies on his company suggestions and procedures:

I use my company to find a bank, whichever they use I use too. When I was younger, I used to spend a lot of time searching for good deals, good shortcuts. But now, I tend to find the quickest and easiest way instead of finding the cheapest way. Now I look for the most convenient and easiest way. I don't want to spend a lot of time thinking about it. Same for accommodation. I found an agent. I said I can pay money so I could have a peace of mind. It's not about affording things, it's about time and energy. I'm not saying that the salary is very good but it's about lifestyle. I probably earn the same amount of money as when I was younger, but I changed my thinking to make my life easier.

(Min, 43, UK/China)

Reciprocally, these challenging consequences also encourage specific home setups among our informants. For instance, to lessen the cognitive and financial costs of relocating, our informants minimize ownership in their base of operation and home on the road. Trying to replicate some home design elements and routinized practices from the emotional home in the home away from home also results in an increased feeling of familiarity and a reduced sense of instability.

In sum, a portfolio of homes generates complex cognitive, social, and emotional consequences. To manage these, our informants use a range of marketplace resources and consumption strategies to help them form social connections, even occasionally and across borders, establish a sense of order and continuity, lessen emotional blows, and relate to locals, even narrowly and strategically. All these efforts help improve their well-being and ontological security when their lifestyle demands precarious conditions stemming from frequent relocations and the lack of a singular home.

## DISCUSSION

Home constitutes an important consumption space associated with extensive consumption practices and



consumer psychology implications. There has been little consumer research on home beyond considering it as a context of the study (except Dion et al., 2014; Grant & Handelman, 2023). This study examines the meanings, dwelling consumption, and consumer psychology implications in a context—that is, global mobility—where home and homemaking are challenged. Our study questions the singular and place-based assumption of home in consumer research. Studying the different ways in which the concept of a stable, singular home is disrupted also sheds light on the important psychological characteristics of the home, and the fact that this is a multifaceted construct with implications for well-being, identity, and one's relationships with possessions. We contribute to consumer research in several ways.

### A multilayered conceptualization of home

We contribute to a multilayered conceptualization of home in consumer research by moving away from the assumption of home as a single and singularized place and demonstrating that home can be multiple and multipurpose. Home is not a singular place, and consumers can develop a portfolio of homes each bringing differentiated psychological benefits. We identify four types of home that enable consumers to shift between a more anchored and stable way of being toward a more transient one. At one extreme, the emotional home facilitates a sense of belongingness and psychological ownership and grounds the consumer in time and space. It is an anchor and point of stability. The emotional home is enabled by solid consumption practices, ownership, and possessions, as well as enduring intimate domestic activities in a place. At the other extreme, the home on the road is a transient type of home that facilitates flexibility and mobility while providing a temporary sense of groundedness. This type of home is fostered by liquid consumption and outsourced domestic activities.

The notion of a portfolio of homes bridges different conceptualizations of home in prior consumer behavior studies (Dion et al., 2014; Epp et al., 2014; McCracken, 1989) by highlighting that different, and at times contradictory, meanings of home can coexist and even become complementary. In transnational mobility, consumers are likely to have a broad portfolio of homes, but future research could explore what happens to the meanings of home for individuals who have a narrower portfolio, such as “snowbirds” who seasonally alternate between two homes or retirees who face less professional and family challenges and might find that maintaining two homes contributes to their identity renaissance (Schau et al., 2009). It might be interesting to explore whether, in such contexts, multiple meanings of homes may coexist in a single dwelling, which we do not find in our context.

Further, we contribute to prior literature by making explicit the three different perspectives on home (i.e., home as a place, home as a space, and home as a set of practices) that underline consumer research and by showing how they can be integrated to structure the meanings of home in mobility. We reveal how each type of home can be understood from one or a combination of these perspectives. For example, the emotional home constitutes a place with which one has established emotional attachment and a sense of psychological ownership; however, it can also be anchored in the home as a space meaning for others (i.e., it is the relationships rather than the place that constitutes the meaning of home). The more transient types of home are formed primarily via dwelling practices where consumers develop a set of homemaking practices that provide them with a sense of temporary belonging while also facilitating productivity and flexibility. By mobilizing the home-as-practice perspective which looks at home as a set of activities, possessions, and routines rather than a place, we identify meanings of home where home is portable and can be reproduced in different places rather than being anchored to a particular house or apartment.

Home is also not fixed, but rather can be reproduced during mobility, as shown in our study by the home away from home type as well as the more transient types of home. Domestic activities, dwelling practices, possessions, and relationships create homes in mobility which can offer some of the psychological benefits of home (e.g., belonging) as well as complimentary ones (e.g., flexibility). Dwelling practices include actual or virtual access to different consumer markets, formation of commercial friendships, and commitment to places (e.g., owning a property vs. accessing a shared living arrangement), which together create and sustain meanings associated with each home. In this way, home is also not separate from the market as we find that often home takes place in market-mediated spaces (e.g., accessed accommodations in hotels or Airbnbs). Furthermore, commercial friendships and consumption activities are integral in constituting a sense of home on the road. Future research is needed to explore further how commercial and access-based spaces provide a sense of home and the psychological consequences that result from blurring the lines between the notions of home and market.

### Psychological consequences of the portfolio of homes

We identify home as an important domain for consumer psychology because of its significant implications for consumer well-being. We argue that home provides a sense of groundedness and belonging in place.



Interestingly, we observe that all four types of home provide various degrees of groundedness in place which is essential for consumer well-being (Eichinger et al., 2022). The emotional home provides the strongest and most enduring sense of groundedness and belonging. The more transient types of home provide a temporary sense of groundedness through ritualized and routinized practices and commercial friendships. At the same time, we show that this network of interrelated homes while fragmented is complementary in terms of psychological well-being. Additionally, home facilitates a sense of psychological ownership, especially through the more stable types of home (Pierce & Peck, 2018). As we show in the case of the emotional home, consumers derive a sense of identity and a strong attachment toward the practices of extended self (Belk, 1988), such as building and appropriating the place by curating it with sacred possessions or those that signify their identity.

Our model identifies three psychological consequences resulting from the multiplication and fragmentation of home in global mobility, specifically cognitive, social, and emotional. With these findings, we extend the discussions hinting that, when people change their environment, they undergo an increased cognitive load to make sense of their new situation (Zwaan, 1996), which provokes a range of coping strategies to address the problems and regulate the emotional consequences of the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Yi & Baumgartner, 2004). Decisions that are routine or taken for granted for most consumers tend to be rather challenging when managed across a portfolio of home-places, often at a distance, and usually without much-needed local knowledge and expertise. The latter not only complicates decision-making but also makes one more detached and less anchored and grounded in each particular home locale. Such choices often involve more existential ones such as which country to choose to create an emotional home where to raise a family or retire. The social and emotional consequences are more enduring and intense for globally mobile consumers who often live and work away from their emotional homes or families. These are challenges that are not easily managed and are often perceived by our informants as a cost they endure for the lifestyle they choose. While our study identifies three types of consequences associated with having a portfolio of homes, further consumer psychology research could examine how each impacts consumer decision-making.

Our findings also showcase how consumers cope with the fragmentation of home across multiple places, with a focus on marketplace solutions and consumption practices. We observe that globally mobile consumers constitute an important segment for many services and brands because they lack local knowledge in many areas (e.g., taxation and banking), they face regulatory/institutional restrictions (e.g., needing a legal representation in a country depending on one's passport), they often outsource in the marketplace domestic choices,

decisions, and activities (especially in the more transient homes), or they must manage at distance most of their household and local consumption when away. Our data evidence that globally mobile consumers rely extensively on marketplace solutions to manage these challenging consequences, such as developing enduring and long-term commercial friendships with service providers (e.g., doctors, hairdressers) in their emotional homes to compensate for the lack of knowledge and trust in other countries' providers. This overreliance on market providers and brands in some of their more transient homes also suggests that more research is needed to understand the impact of such extensive outsourcing of homemaking (Epp & Velagaleti, 2014) on home and intimacy.

At the same time, our findings suggest that homemaking itself can be an adaptive mechanism in global mobility. We find that, by specializing their homes, consumers build a portfolio of homes that complement each other to gain the functional, emotional, and well-being benefits that a home usually provides. For example, we show that in contexts that demand flexibility and mobility, globally mobile consumers establish a transient type of home such as the base of operation or home on the road. These transient homes utilize liquid consumption modes and routinized consumption practices as ways to provide a sense of familiarity and ontological security while also facilitating global mobility. On the other side, to maintain a sense of groundedness and identity, globally mobile consumers invest in solid consumption practices to sustain an emotional home or duplicate it via mimicry consumption in a home away from home.

Consistent with our argument on the specialization of home as a coping mechanism, prior studies show that "psychological detachment from work during nonwork time is critical for replenishing resources and sustaining employees' well-being and performance capabilities" (Park et al., 2011, p. 458). Indeed, the specialization of space addresses the need for ontological security, being in control, and preserving routines in conditions of precariousness and liminality (Mimoun & Bardhi, 2022). By limiting practices to manageable bundles of activities in accordance with the specific meaning of each home, consumers can meet their need for an emotional and social anchor while ensuring the flexibility of their lifestyles. In sum, our model would propose a feedback loop where the multiplication and fragmentation of home across spaces bring psychological consequences, which in return are managed via homemaking practices. In a way, the homemaking style and meanings that emerge in our context are a result of the nature of global mobility and the consumers' management of these challenges.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors would like to thank Professor Anirban Mukhopadhyay for his insightful comments on the earlier version of the article, the editor, Associate Editor,

and three anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

**Data collection note** The first author conducted majority of in-depth interviews, home visits, and netnography data collection as part of her doctoral dissertation during 2015–2018. The second author conducted some in-depth interviews and home visits independently. More specifically, interviews and ethnographic home visits were conducted between 2017 and 2019 and netnography and personal diaries were collected between 2019 and 2022. Additional 10 interviews and observations were collected summer 2022. All authors engaged in data analysis on multiple occasions using field notes, photographs, interview transcripts, and archive of online data. The third author acted as a confidante throughout the process. Data were discussed and analyzed on multiple occasions by all three authors. The final manuscript was jointly authored by all three authors. The authors followed the GDPR guidelines of data protection and data storage carefully. All notes, transcriptions, images, and data are currently stored in password protected folders in the first author's university computer under the management of the first author and are only accessible to the research team. All informants' data are carefully anonymized. The netnographic data are currently stored in a project directory on the Open Science Framework and made available to the review team. **Data sharing note** The nature of the qualitative data collected for this study, in particular the interviews, consumer diaries, and home visits (the latter collected at respondents' homes), cannot be anonymized without losing most of their meaning. In addition, the data was collected before the new JCR data transparency policy was established, thus our IRB stated that only the researchers would have access to the full data. Sharing the data as is would breach the confidentiality promised to the respondents when they signed the consent forms. The netnographic data which are not submitted to the above-mentioned restrictions are stored as per JCR policy on an open-source repository accessible at the following link: [https://osf.io/ztjwx/?view\\_only=22956efd405344d18081084ed32c24d8](https://osf.io/ztjwx/?view_only=22956efd405344d18081084ed32c24d8).

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

**How to cite this article:** Sharifonnasabi, Z., Mimoun, L., & Bardhi, F. (2024). Home and psychological well-being in global consumer mobility. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 00, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpsy.1440>