



Digital technology and global mobility: Narrative review and directions for future research

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology (DT) is increasingly used in the modern workplace, including in global mobility management. DT is transforming – or has the potential to transform – nearly all aspects of assignment management and global mobility more broadly. In this paper we review research published between 2000 and 2022 that examines how DT is used by those undertaking and those managing global mobility. Our systematic narrative review suggests that research to date is fragmented, mostly anecdotal, and often lacks a clear theoretical base. Rather than view this as an insurmountable challenge, we believe that it presents an opportunity for developing a vibrant research agenda, and we offer suggestions that we hope will encourage more scholars to examine this topic in the future.

1. Introduction

There are many reasons why multinational organizations (MNCs) deploy a cadre of ‘organizational representatives’ (notably, employees typically referred to as “expatriates”) across borders for the sake of advancing the interest of the organization. First, expatriates are assigned to critical managerial positions or to ensure headquarters’ control over foreign subsidiaries. Second, they can facilitate coordination and can contribute to knowledge transfer across the MNC. From a more operational point, expatriate assignments have been used to fill vacant positions in locations where particular skills and expertise may be missing. Finally, assignments can be used to develop managers by exposing them to international experience. Being physically present in a foreign country allows for gaining in-person experiences, learning about the local culture and customer preferences, and gaining first-hand knowledge of local and regional markets and competitive landscape in their country of destination (Edström & Galbraith, 1977; Harzing, 2001). The biggest challenge in any MNCs is being able to balance the imperatives for global integration and local responsiveness (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989) and strategically deploying expatriates can help advance each of those goals without putting them in opposition to one another. By acting in accordance with corporate directives, expatriates can facilitate global integration, whilst also ensuring that subsidiary interests are not ignored

and that corporate plans are implemented in ways consistent with local circumstances. They can also enable maximizing global market opportunities and providing access to new geographies and new clientele.

But while international assignments are as old as MNCs themselves, since the turn of the 21st century global mobility has been changing quite dramatically. Notably, MNCs have been re-examining their approach to expatriation (e.g., in terms of location of postings, direction of mobility, nationality of assignees, or length of postings), have introduced new assignment types (short-term assignments, flexpatriation, etc.) and have re-evaluated the support extended to expatriates (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016). There are fewer traditional (i.e., long-term) assignments, some roles traditionally occupied by (traditional) expatriates are now filled by business travelers or short-term expatriates, there is more project work and more global virtual teams, neither of which requires physical relocation or frequent face-to-face meetings but relies instead on extensive virtual communication and cloud-based project management tools accessible from anywhere. While the study of global mobility in international management was previously synonymous with the study of corporate (long-term) expatriation, the field has now grown to include the study of the so-called “self-initiated expatriates” (those who undertake mobility on their own) and, most recently of “digital nomads” (highly mobile professionals, whose work is conducted in an online environment and is thus location-independent; Dreher &

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Triandafyllidou, 2023).

Most of these changes have been made possible by the unprecedented pace of development of new technology, in particular, digital technology. Although there is no agreed-upon definition of “digital technology,” the term is typically used to refer to electronic (computer-based) tools and applications that create, store, manage and transfer digital (i.e., expressed as a series of the digits 0 and 1) data, which include web-based communications, online portals, data management systems, electronic databases, etc. Digital technology (DT) has not only been used to solve operational and logistical issues on-site but has also made it possible to communicate and collaborate over long distances without the need to share the same physical workplace (Canhilal et al., 2020; Mutter & Thorn, 2019), which has fundamentally changed the way employees work.

Not surprisingly, extensive DT use is becoming common in global mobility management in MNCs (Sahakiantis & Dorner, 2021). DT can help alleviate the “remoteness” challenge that characterizes on-site international work (those physically relocating for work abroad are far from their homes, families, personal and professional networks). For individuals, they can facilitate “access” to the home office, increase connectedness, enable participation in virtual support communities, and help with day-to-day tasks such as booking travel without relying on travel agents, etc. In the case of digital nomads, their work arrangements will be impossible if they were unable to work in an online environment, which is of course only feasible through advances in DT. For organizations, the use of DT can mean enhanced recruitment capabilities, the use of more complex selection tools, more cost-efficient ways of training and supporting employees while they are abroad, creating and maintaining knowledge depositories, and the use of employee databases that provide information on any assignee at the touch of a button, etc. As technological sophistication increases, some MNCs are grappling with the fundamental question of whether today physical relocation of assignees is needed at all or whether physical mobility should be replaced by virtual work (Coughlan et al., 2019; Sahakiantis & Dorner, 2021). Indeed, such arguments have been made repeatedly over the last two decades and although they rest on different rationales, underlying them all is the assumption that completely “replacing” traditional mobility with alternate forms of international work, many relying primarily on virtual presence, can only be possible because of advances in DT development (e.g., Collings et al., 2007; Fenwick, 2004; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2013; Jooss et al., 2021; Suutari et al., 2013).

Although global mobility research is thriving, a few exceptions notwithstanding (e.g., O’Sullivan, 2013), the literature has not yet considered the role of DT in any systematic way (Johansson et al., 2023). Most studies that mention DT engage with the topic tangentially, for example by referring to DT briefly in the context of discussing another topic (e.g., Crocitto et al., 2005). This is a serious omission given that DT has the potential to transform radically nearly all aspects of global mobility (Johansson et al., 2023). It is thus imperative that researchers undertake a systematic study of how (to what ends and with what results) DT is used by organizations with globally mobile staff and by individuals undertaking work-related global mobility. To give scholars a head start, this paper offers a narrative review of the existing literature on the use of DT in the context of global mobility. We map the major themes and findings of the emergent field, framing our review around several related research questions (1) What are the *research paradigms* adopted by existing research? (2) What *methodological designs* have been used? (3) What are the dominant *theoretical perspectives* that have informed the study of DT and global mobility? (4) What *types of DTs* have been studied to date? and (6) What *uses of DT and/or outcomes of uses of DT* have been investigated at both the organizational and individual level? While the literature covers many disparate topics, we organize our review by examining uses of DT in typical stages of global mobility (i.e., selection, preparation and training, the assignment period, and repatriation). Based on the findings of our review, we also identify promising venues for future inquiry.

Our main contribution lies in offering an integrated view of what has been a fragmented field of study, which we view as necessary to propel the development of future research on DT use and global mobility. A concise summary of what has been done to date can be a useful launching pad for such research. Our review will be most relevant to those conducting research in international management (IM) and international human resource management (IHRM) but our work will also be of interest to scholars in diverse fields such as management information systems, human computer interaction, and economic geography. Time is ripe for integrating theories regarding DT use in organizations in global mobility research and for considering broader questions regarding the impact of technology for global work more generally. More rigorous research can also provide organizations and globally mobile individuals with data-and-results-driven recommendations on the best way to harness the opportunities associated with the exponential growth of DT.

2. Methods

2.1. Data collection

We began our systematic review by identifying relevant publications according to the following predefined selection criteria. First, we focused on peer-reviewed journal articles and research publications from edited volumes (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). However, since we only considered research publications, we decided to include articles from a broad set of journals, including a range of impact factors (e.g., from *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration*, IF=0.40, to *The Academy of Management Annals*, IF=19.24), in order to capture the full canvas of the emerging research field on DT use in global mobility. Second, we limited our review to publications in English between 2000 and 2022. This is because the turn of the century marks the beginning of discussions of a possible shift from traditional long-term international assignments to virtual forms of mobility (e.g., Bender & Fish, 2000; Latta, 1999). Third, we examined publications that focused specifically on, or discussed in non-rudimentary ways, the use of DT in the process of global mobility. We included research across mobility practices (e.g., selection, training, adjustment, and repatriation) and assignment types (e.g., international commuter assignments, frequent travelers, short-term, virtual assignments) to provide a more holistic perspective of the role of DT in global mobility (Avril & Magnini, 2007; Brewster et al., 2014). Studies with a broader conceptual focus on global mobility as an IHRM field were also integrated (Kostova et al., 2016). However, we excluded studies that merely point to DT in the context of the international assignee’s profession or industry sector without any focus on the use of DT in global mobility (e.g., IT expatriates as a sample to examine sociocultural communication challenges; Shah & Barker, 2017).

Our search involved two steps. First, publications were identified through a keyword search in the databases Web of Science, Scopus, Business Source Complete, and PsycInfo (via EBSCOhost). These databases provided us access to publications with the highest impact in the respective research fields (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). We initially used three main keywords – international assignment, expatriation, and digital* – and later elaborated the search terms by including derivatives and similar words (e.g., expatriat*, inpatriat*, global mobility, repatriat*, technolo*, virtual) with the coordinating conjunctions “OR” and “AND” (Fink, 2014). The first step identified a total of 1500 articles (Business Source Complete and PsycInfo: 623; Scopus: 471; and Web of Science: 406 articles). After that, two reviewers from the research team independently screened the titles, abstracts, keywords, and excluded duplicates, 144 publications remained that met the above-defined selection criteria (see Fig. 1). Second, we used the snowballing technique to identify additional research articles by searching the reference lists of the remaining publications (Greenhalgh et al., 2009). As a result, ten additional publications were included. Subsequent examination

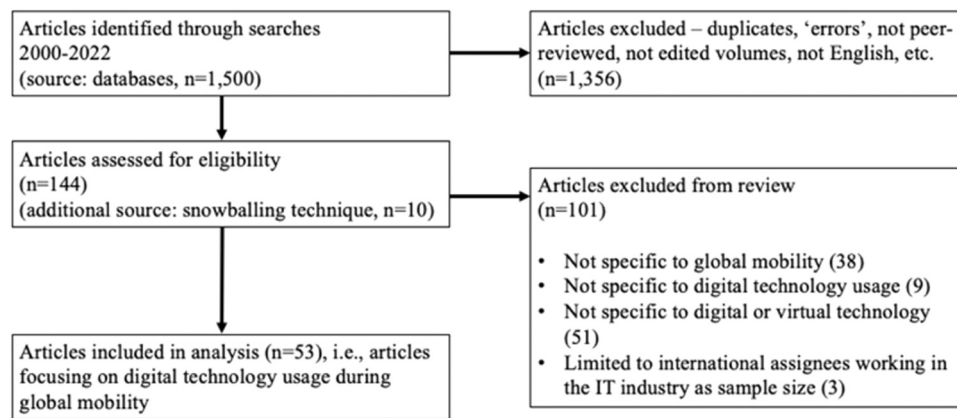


Fig. 1. Decision tree of literature search and review.

eliminated 101 papers as they did not relate specifically to either global mobility, DT, or DT use, or focused on a sample of assignees from the IT industries but did not examine issues related to DT or DT use. Based on this approach, we originally identified a total of 57 publications on DT use in the field of global mobility. Calculated for the 57 articles, inter-rater agreement exceeded 87% (calculated using Krippendorff's alpha, version 3.2 for SPSS; Hayes, 2013), with both reviewers confirming the relevance of 50 of the 57 articles. The reviewers disagreed on the remaining seven. The remaining seven were discussed further until an agreement was reached to include three and exclude four papers. In total, 53 publications were incorporated in this systematic literature review.

2.2. Data analysis

We first examined whether a discernible trend can be identified in terms of research interest in the use of DT in global mobility. We read all selected articles in detail. We began by recording the research paradigm adopted by each paper. Next, we coded the papers as conceptual or empirical, distinguishing between several types of conceptual and empirical papers. We then examined the theoretical foundations of the studies. Finally, we turned to the types of DT studies have examined, distilling along the way the main themes regarding how DT has been used – and/or can be used – in global mobility management.

3. Results

Fig. 2 shows the growth of publications on DT use in the global mobility literature between 2000 and 2022. When examining the time trend of publications included in our analysis, we see that interest in DT has increased over time, with roughly three times fewer papers published on this between 2000 and 2010 compared with the decade that followed (see Fig. 2).

3.1. Research paradigms¹

There are many ways in which the term *research paradigm* has been defined (Bonache & Festing, 2020). We were guided by Romani et al. (2018) who, when discussing research on international management, offered the following definition, “a scientific paradigm can be understood as distinctive views on reality, a distinctive set of cognitive interests, theoretical frameworks, research questions, and methods used by scientists in a dialogue about knowledge development” (p248).

¹ We thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to examine research from the perspective of research paradigms used in the studies included in this review.

Similarly, there is a multitude of classifications of *types* of research paradigms. As a thorough discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of our paper and following recent work by Bonache and Festing (2020) who identify *interpretivism* and *positivism* as the two most widely used paradigms in international HRM research, we opted for a simplified classification, coding the papers in our sample as *interpretivist* or *positivist*. Bonache and Festing (2020) also offer a set of dimensions describing each research paradigm (e.g., goals, basic ontological and epistemological assumptions, study characteristics, etc.) on which we relied to code each paper. Most generally speaking, *positivism* assumes that there is a single objective reality that can be captured by careful observation and seeks to introduce constructs (that can be objectively described and measured) and predict causal relationships between them. In contrast, *interpretivism* assumes that reality is socially constructed and that there are multiple perspectives on what such reality is. Unlike positivists whose goal is to “explain,” the goal of interpretivists is to “make sense” and “understand” and they have a heightened sensitivity to the role of context. While positivists tend to start from established theoretical foundations and seek to “test” theory, interpretivists seek to describe phenomena from multiple perspectives and focus on “generating” theory (Bonache and Festing, 2020).

In line with observations that positivism is the most widespread approach in the social sciences (Bonache and Festing, 2020), positivism was indeed dominant in our sample, with more than 80% of the papers ($n = 43$, or 81.1%) adopting a positivist paradigm. Only one of the papers adopting an interpretivist paradigm was published in a management journal (Ellmer & Reichel's 2021 publication in the *International Journal of Manpower*), with the remaining papers published in fields such as communication, information science, cultural studies, or migration. Interestingly, many of the positivist papers, offer descriptive observations on emerging phenomena rather than engage in formal theory testing. However, embracing the ontological and epistemological assumptions of positivism, they do so by framing their observations within the confines of existing theories (even if the relevance of such theories may sometimes be remote) and/or by putting forward propositions that can be formally tested by future research (see Appendix Table A.1).

3.2. Methodological approaches

About a third of the papers (32.1%) investigating the use of DT in global mobility were conceptual, approximately another third (33.9%) were qualitative, 28.3% were quantitative, and 3 studies (5.7%) adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. While between 2000 and 2010 conceptual (36%) and quantitative (45 %) studies were preferred to qualitative methods (9%), the number of qualitative studies (41%) grew more rapidly between 2010 and 2022 than that of quantitative (25%) and conceptual (25%) articles as there was increasing interest in exploring individuals' perspectives of DT in

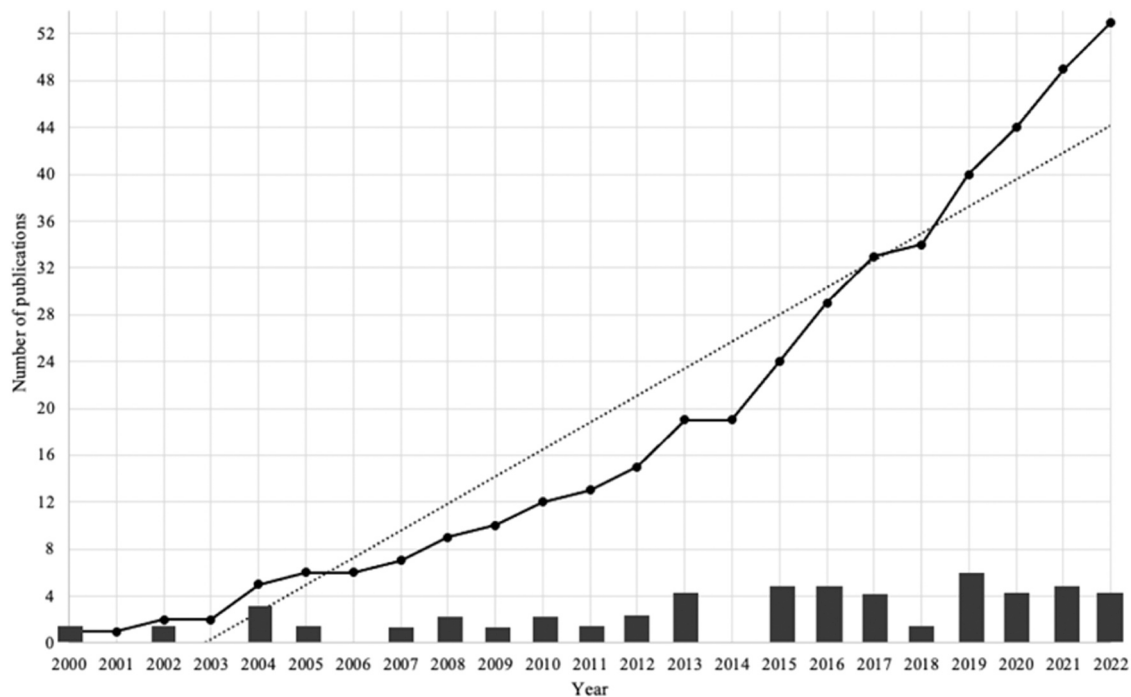


Fig. 2. Number of publications per year and growth trend in the literature.

global mobility. Mixed-method studies were underrepresented in the period we examined. Among qualitative papers, 55.6 % adopted an interpretivist research paradigm (indeed, as expected, all 10 interpretivist studies included in our sample were qualitative), and the remaining 44.5% were positivist, confirming the “strong tradition of *qualitative positivism*” in international management and IHRM research (Bonache & Festing, 2020, p105).

With regard to quantitative articles, most of the studies used self-reported surveys (71%) and regression analysis was the commonly adopted way of data analysis (64.29%). Most qualitative studies were based on interview data (e.g., Shaw & Luiz, 2018), with only one study using discourse analysis (Tang and Chao's 2010 investigation of expatriate blog posts and chat functions). Seven of the 18 qualitative articles focused on content analysis of written perspectives and comments on online blogs, videos, or social media posts on global mobility topics (e.g., Nardon et al., 2015).

3.3. Theoretical perspectives

We identified three groups of papers among the conceptual articles in our sample. Of the 17 conceptual papers 5 were literature reviews (e.g., Baruch et al.'s 2016 review on “career mobility in a global era”), 4 were explicitly focused on model development (e.g., Tripathi & Singh's 2021 model on the role of various stressors for the formation of stress, and the subsequent impact of stress on psychological wellbeing and performance), and the remainder ($n = 8$) described general themes related to global mobility and referring to DT in that context (e.g., Sahakiantz & Dorner's 2021 paper on the benefits of social media and online collaboration technology use in expatriate management). Among conceptual papers, less than half ($n = 8$) referred to specific theoretical perspectives, and the rest either referred to several theoretical perspectives (e.g., literature reviews) or adopted a phenomenon-based approach and did not refer to specific theoretical perspectives in meaningful ways. Over two thirds (72.2% of the empirical papers invoked a specific theoretical perspective (or multiple theoretical perspectives). The majority of the papers were at the individual level (only $n = 9$, or 16.5% were at the organizational level.).

As we were examining the theoretical foundations of our sample of papers, we heeded Shapira's (2011) warning that there has been misunderstanding and misuse of the term “theory” in management research. He cautioned that rather than using “theory” in a “very loose sense,” we will be better served by distinguished between *theories* (coherent explanations of a set of observed phenomena formulated in a way allowing that they can be refuted or falsified), *theoretical models* (tools of scientific inquiry consisting of specific predictions based on precisely specified assumptions) and *theoretical frameworks* (ways of organizing empirical observations, making sense of a field and understanding its boundaries, and major findings). Sandberg and Alvesson (2021) too, among others, have discussed the multitudes of meaning of “theory” and the many possible types of theory. They also note that given the dominance of an “explanation-prediction” approach to theory, scholars often try to “force-fit” their work in an “exploratory mould” so that they can claim their work contributes to a “theory”.

Our examination of the papers in our sample is very much aligned with these observations. There is indeed a lot of vagueness in what many authors refer to “theory” and use the term to cover theories, models, and frameworks, or occasionally even constructs. They often do not refer to foundational work that has introduced a particular theory, model, or a framework, but rather to subsequent papers that have used them as their own theoretical basis. Further, many of the papers that identified a theory as guiding their research question or model did not engage deeply with said underlying theory. Only very occasionally was there a focus on new theory development (e.g., O'Sullivan, 2013). Aiming to describe each paper as precisely as possible, our analysis noted the core theoretical perspective the papers highlight (where applicable). Given our goal to summarize and integrate, we deliberately use the word “perspective” as a broad term encompassing theories, theoretical models, and theoretical frameworks. Mirroring the research we are reviewing, we list the core theoretical perspective(s) of each paper as identified by the authors of the paper. For additional clarity, we note one or two key references the authors provide for the theoretical perspective that guided them (see Appendix Table A.1).

The papers in our sample drew on a very diverse set of theoretical perspectives. At the *individual level*, we identified three main groups: First,

theoretical perspectives on expatriate (and in one case, repatriate) adjustment have been most widely used (e.g., Coughlan et al., 2019; Cox, 2004; Mohd Yusuf et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2004; Nardon et al., 2015) to examine, for instance, questions such as the role of digitalized training or the role of DT allowing expatriates to maintain contact with family and friends (which was then linked to adjustment). Next are theoretical perspectives regarding training and/or learning. They have been applied to study the use of DT for training and mentoring purposes in expatriate environments (e.g., Crocitto et al., 2005; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008). For example, Crocitto et al. (2005) developed a “learning based framework” to examine how DT use in mentoring relationships can increase career outcomes and knowledge transfer. Third are theoretical perspectives on mentoring, social support, and social capital (e.g., Crowne, Goeke, & Shoemaker, 2015; Ogan and Ozakca, 2010), which have been used to examine issues such as how internet-based expat platforms can play in creating complementary opportunities of interaction leading to informational, emotional, and instrumental support for expatriates in the host country (e.g., Canhilal et al., 2020).

There were only a few papers at the organizational level that explicitly referred to a theoretical perspective. We were unable to identify a dominant theoretical perspective as papers relied on diverse theoretical foundations such as boundary spanning (e.g., Yang et al., 2022), institutional theory (e.g., Ellmer & Reichel, 2021), psychological contract (e.g., Ellmer et al., 2021), or the knowledge-based view (e.g., Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2011). Generally, the literature at the MNC-level lags behind research at the individual level. Even studies that discuss the role of organizations, do not focus on strategic issues. This was surprising as TD can have powerful impact on important strategic decisions in MNCs (such as production location decisions, and related choices about staffing and employee mobility).

3.4. Types of digital technology

We chose (1) the media richness and (2) the synchronicity of the DT type as dimensions to classify the wide range of DT studied in the literature on global mobility. We draw on Daft and Lengel (1986) who note that DT types differ in the degree of richness – that is the “ability of

information to change understanding within a time interval” (p. 560). Thus, DT that allows for immediate feedback and direct interpretation of cues and information, such as videoconferencing tools, can be seen as a richer technology while computer networks and databases, that are providing simple access to information, have a lower media richness. Second, the aspect of synchronicity refers to technology’s “ability to support individuals working together at the same time with a shared pattern of coordinated behavior” (Dennis et al., 2008; p. 576). In our example, videoconferencing tools would allow for the highest form of synchronicity of the DT reviewed in our review while computer networks and databases offer an asynchronous form of communication. Using these DT characteristics, we identified 8 groups of DT: computer networks and databases (Cho et al., 2013), e-mail and text chats (Shaw & Luiz, 2018), blogs and forums (Walz, 2020), social networking sites (Crowne & Goeke, 2012), microblogging and media sharing sites (Hyduk & Worrall, 2016), podcasts (Mai, 2017), virtual reality (VR) tools (Beutell et al., 2017), and videoconferencing (Park et al., 2019). Additionally, there are instances in which DT is used as an umbrella term, without reference to any specific technology (Collings et al., 2007). We group such instances in a separate (ninth) group. Fig. 3 shows the DT categorized by their media richness and synchronicity. Further, Fig. 4 indicates the frequency of the subgroups of DT covered by global mobility research.

3.5. Uses of DT

The literature we reviewed illustrated many potential uses of DT in the field of global mobility, for both organizations and individuals. Applying an organizational lens, we found several sub-themes that can be loosely grouped around the four traditional stages of the global mobility process (recruitment and selection, preparation and training, the assignment period, and repatriation) and one theme discussing the potential replacement of international assignments from a more general organizational perspective. Articles from an individual lens focused mostly on one of the four global mobility stages (i.e., the assignment period). Also, from the perspective of individuals, our review further identified a sub-theme on the dark side of DT use. Appendix Table A.2

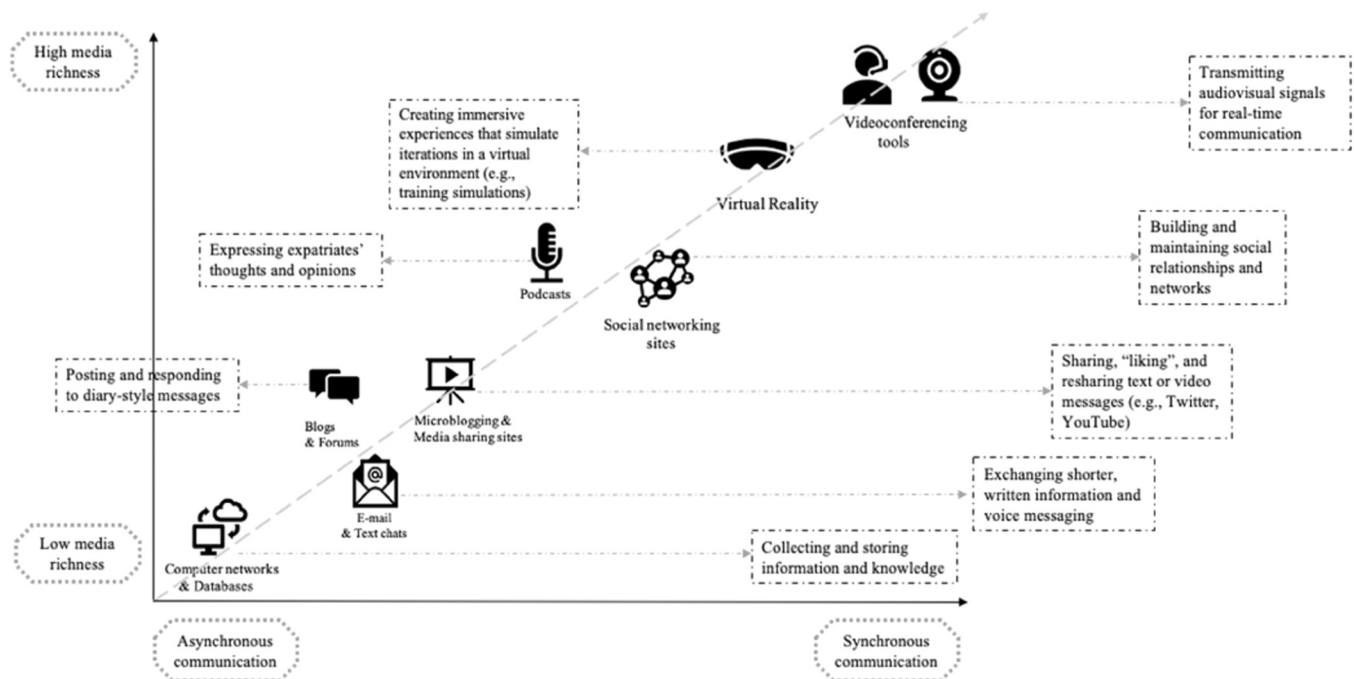


Fig. 3. Types of digital technology categorized by their media richness and synchronicity. Articles using a broader umbrella term (e.g., Information Technology) did not provide an opportunity for further specification and were left out in this illustration.

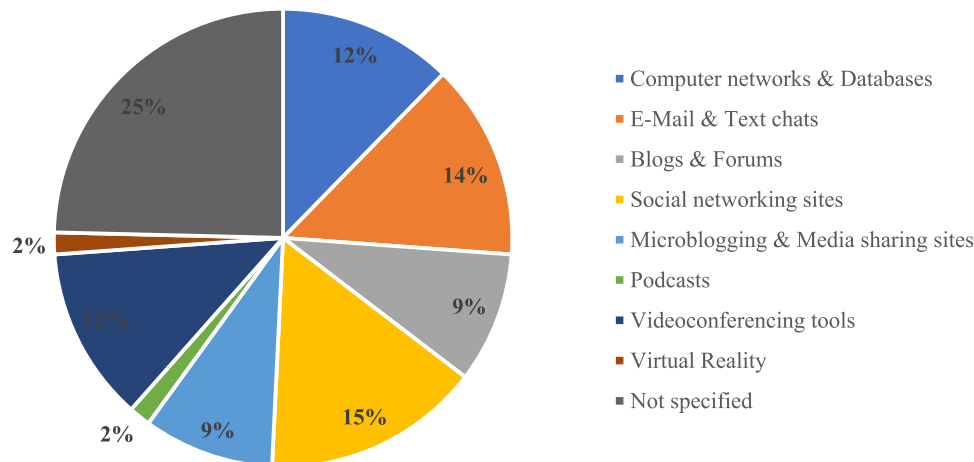


Fig. 4. Frequency of digital technologies covered by the literature.

gives an overview of the 53 publications, classified into assignment stages, organizational or individual level perspective, and referring to the sub-themes that we identified. In the following sections, we describe our results of more details.

3.5.1. Organizational lens: recruitment and selection

Research has pointed out that digital media can be used as a recruitment tool. A recent qualitative study of employer branding messages on Facebook examined the recruitment signals sent via company digital media postings (Ellmer et al., 2021). Such postings can highlight that a company would be suitable for those that desire an international career. It can also help in targeting a specific demographic and can emphasize the benefits of global mobility like opportunities for gaining international experience and personal development. The same study showed global mobility was not a significant theme emphasized in employer branding and was the exception rather than the rule, with MNCs from different countries deploying it somewhat differently (e.g., rarely emphasized in US MNCs and emphasized far more frequently in German MNCs; Ellmer et al., 2021).

Beyond recruitment, DT offers an efficient way of selecting employees for an assignment, as the digitalized integration of multiple assessment approaches in one medium can help HR departments in analyzing relevant characteristics such as the ability for cross-cultural adaption, international experience or family situations (Kanagavalli et al., 2019). In a series of qualitative and quantitative studies on virtual assignments Holtbrügge and Schillo (2008, 2011, 2013) note that DT can improve the selection process due to their capacity for quick and comprehensive assessments of qualified candidates for international assignments. They also propose that existing competency models for international assignments need to be refined to allow for the evaluation of digital-technology-related skills and abilities in selection processes in conjunction with communication and cross-cultural competencies. For example, as DT only provide limited expressions of individuals' feelings, facial expressions, and gestures, employees depend on communication skills that allow for the correct interpretation of digital communication despite the lack of face-to-face interaction (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2013). Indeed, digital communication in virtual assignments can often lead to misunderstandings caused by different cultures and, therefore, the ability to correctly interpret the conversation requires intercultural skills that particularly focus on digital communication. In other words, beyond identifying skills and abilities that have traditionally been associated with assignment success (e.g., cross-cultural competencies), it is important to also assess the qualifications and the knowledge of how to work with communication technology (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2011). Related to this point, quantitative research has documented that technically oriented managers adjust to their assignments more easily and

report higher expatriation and repatriation satisfaction, especially in the case of those in more technical roles (Lee et al., 2009; Morgan et al., 2004), which has been attributed to their increased ability to utilize DT both to ease their adjustment to new environments and to maintain connectivity with the home office (Morgan et al., 2004). Research has also identified the positive attitude toward change as an important antecedent to the productive use of DT, which in turn can influence task performance (Lee et al., 2009).

3.5.2. Organizational lens: preparation and training

Organizations can use DT to enhance or replace face-to-face training practices, shifting between in-person training before the assignment and online training delivery and support (e.g., Beutell et al., 2017; Cho et al., 2013; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008). DT enables access to various training materials, coming from a variety of sources (Sahakiantis & Dörner, 2021). Surprisingly, the literature has not addressed some obvious questions such as the extent to which training via DT is supported by organizations and what kind of training platforms are the most widely used. But in line with qualitative research on cross-cultural training, the authors recognized that different types of skills and knowledge are differently suited for digital delivery (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008). It has also been noted, just like in the case of selection, that training for assignments must also include training people for virtual communication and collaboration skills, as those become more and more prominent features in international work, especially in the case of virtual assignees (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008).

Qualitative research has pointed out that, given the increased availability and sophistication of DT, assignees may need to rely less on formalized training and can instead take the initiative to find the relevant knowledge and information they need to prepare themselves for their posting (Cho et al., 2013; Ellmer et al., 2021; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008). This does not mean that organizations have no role to play. To the contrary, organizational support can be critical. For example, organizations can create online portals and databases where former assignees share useful knowledge about their host countries. Over time such information can accumulate – which can facilitate the preparation of future assignees (Cho et al., 2013; Elkin et al., 2012; Shaw & Luiz, 2018). Indeed, organizations can become “banks” of global knowledge from country-savvy expatriates and repatriates (Crocitto et al., 2005, p. 531) that can help facilitate learning across the organization.

Digital training delivery can involve both interactive components (e.g., gathering everyone in a virtual classroom) or self-paced asynchronous study (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008). Organizations can provide access to digital learning platforms that allow assignees to undertake training on their own schedule and at their own pace (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008). For example, assignees can be given

access to foreign language and cross-cultural training that involves not only readings and videos but also interactive simulations, quizzes, case studies, or even customized webinars for a specific target country or city (Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021).

The literature has also discussed the benefits of *investing in more sophisticated training tools* that may not be easily available to individuals. Such tools can be invaluable in cases where assignees are preparing for postings in high-risk environments (for example, in countries with high incidences of terrorist attacks). In a conceptual paper, Beutell et al. (2017) have suggested that virtual reality (VR) technologies can be effectively deployed in the training and preparation stages to safely “expose” assignees and their family members to important aspects of day-to-day living in such host countries. They note that VR technology should not be used to replace traditional preparation approaches such as pre-departure country visits but to supplement and enhance assignees’ preparation, by safely exposing the assignee not only to the general milieu but also to riskier aspects of the country environment (for example, it can help the expatriate to visualize potential high-risk in-country scenarios and offer advice on how to handle them). Through such safe exposure to unfamiliar and potentially dangerous situations, VR training can help build resilience and activate proactive coping skills once the assignee is on-site. It can also help alleviate negative emotions such as fear, anger, frustration, or stress before and during the assignment. As a bonus, the availability of VR training and preparation may positively influence the decision of whether to take up an assignment in a high-risk country and can also help avoid early repatriation (Beutell et al., 2017).

3.5.3. Organizational lens: the assignment period

The most salient applications of DT during the assignment period have to do with keeping assignees connected with the home office, allowing them to stay active and visible in their networks, enhancing access to mentors, and, finally, providing critical instrumental support helpful for day-to-day living in the host country.

Keeping assignees connected with the home office. Both conceptual and empirical papers have noted that the use of DT can ensure uninterrupted communication between assignees and their home office. It can allow them easier access to organizational resources and organizational decision-makers. With the right tools, information can be exchanged instantaneously, across time zones and geographic distance (Cho et al., 2013; Morgan et al., 2004; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021). A qualitative study of knowledge transfer approaches highlighted that strategically deployed technology can play a critical role in capturing and transferring knowledge as it can ease the well-known negative impact of distance on knowledge sharing and accumulation (Shaw & Luiz, 2018). Beyond obvious benefits to the MNCs, from the assignees’ point of view, the use of more sophisticated DT tools (i.e., those described by higher “media richness”) is more likely to lead to communication satisfaction (Cox, 2004), which is key to assignment success.

Allowing assignees to stay active and visible in their networks. According to two quantitative studies, DT can also allow assignees to remain visible within their professional (both within and outside their organization; Morgan et al., 2004) and social (i.e., family and friends; Cox, 2004) networks throughout their absence. Maintaining these ties active helps minimize the negative impact of the “out of sight, out of mind” experience that is common for many assignees. As assignments end, assignees need not invest additional effort into re-establishing themselves professionally, which can greatly facilitate their re-entry (Coughlan et al., 2019; O’Sullivan, 2013), and this, in turn, aids the organization to absorb repatriate knowledge and expertise more easily and more rapidly.

Enhancing assignees’ access to mentors. It is well known that mentoring can play a critical role for expatriates (Harvey et al., 1999). Conceptual and qualitative papers have pointed out that mentoring programs are well suited to be run via online platforms, especially using more advanced DT such as videoconferencing (Cho et al., 2013; O’Sullivan,

2013; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021). E-mentoring allows organizations to connect digitally international assignees with mentors with appropriate competencies and qualifications. They can come from the assignee’s home office, but a technology-facilitated mentoring program can provide access to a much larger group of mentors ensuring that an assignee can be matched with those best suited to advise and support them, no matter where in the world the mentor and the mentee may reside (Crocitto et al., 2005). In a conceptual paper, Crocitto and colleagues (2005) note that mentoring expatriates can be somewhat demanding on individual mentors. It may thus be more efficient to maintain relationships with a constellation of mentors, each providing knowledge relevant to the specific stage of expatriation (see also Elkin et al., 2012). E-mentoring programs can offer much-needed flexibility that traditional mentoring programs do not afford.

Elkin et al. (2012) review the importance of investing in the right electronic tools for mentoring. An organization must have the right infrastructure, which carries development and maintenance costs. Not all electronic tools are created equal, especially when it comes to conveying visual cues and nuance. As such, the more communication “richness” a tool can provide, the lower the chance of misunderstanding, particularly when it comes to more sensitive advice. Having said that, Elkin et al. (2012) comment that text-based communication should not be dismissed, as it can provide the means for more honest and more precise feedback and the chance to reflect without the need to react to someone in real-time. They also raise the issue of privacy for both the mentor and the mentee, which can potentially be compromised in a digital environment. To that end, they emphasize that just like in any mentoring relationship, the success of e-mentoring is contingent upon a strong bond and a trusting, respectful, and committed relationship between mentor and mentee (Elkin et al., 2012).

Standing out from mainly conceptual work that is being published on this topic, in a rare empirical study, Carraher et al. (2008) examined the impact of both home and host-country mentors on expatriate effectiveness. They argued that the two types of mentors may be helpful to expatriates in different ways (e.g., home-country mentors may serve as a vital source of office information, including strategic issues and major personnel changes, may advocate for the expatriate, and help identify placement opportunities when they are set to return, while host-country mentors may provide most assistance during the on-site stage of the international assignment). Their study found that while both types of mentorship relationships were beneficial, there were relatively more benefits of having a host-country mentor. Having a home-country mentor had a significant positive effect on expatriate organizational knowledge, job performance, and promotability, but also had an unexpected negative relationship with expatriate’s organizational identification and job satisfaction. The authors then discussed that unfamiliarity and lack of comfort in using technology may act as a deterrent to e-mentoring relationships, as it may discourage mentors from initiating and maintaining contact with their expatriate mentees. It is worth noting that as we write this, this study is well over a decade old, and overall, (upgraded) technology is far more present in organizational life today, so it will be interesting to revisit the findings and investigate whether the results would still hold.

Providing critical instrumental support helpful for day-to-day living in the host country. In addition to helping assignees stay connected with mentors and colleagues, organizations can take advantage of advancements in DT that can help provide instrumental support to their assignees. A case in point here is digitally enabled healthcare. Two decades ago, Cheek and Chandra (2002) conceptually discussed the potential for “telemedicine” (medical visits supported by DT) to help overcome challenges assignees may encounter in getting appropriate care in host countries. Given the differences in health care systems, the language barriers that may arise as one describes one’s symptoms in the local language, the limited ability to access medical records, the varied availability of specific experts or specific treatments one may be prescribed, providing expatriates with access to telemedicine appears an

obvious solution that can address many of their healthcare needs. A virtual doctor's visit can take place regardless of the geographical and time-zone distance between assignees and healthcare providers and allows for high-quality healthcare support from a provider with whom expatriates feel comfortable.

Empirical research documenting the use of digitally enabled healthcare support is scarce. We found one study documenting the use of one healthcare counseling program, used by South Korean expatriates in three specific countries: Vietnam, Cambodia, and Uzbekistan (Park et al., 2019). The study provided evidence that the program managed to address most healthcare needs of the group it was serving, with only a few cases needing to be referred to local clinics (mostly for follow-up like laboratory tests) and less than 5% of cases needing local hospital referrals.

3.5.4. Organizational lens: repatriation

As indicated in the previous section, conceptual and empirical research has proposed that the use of DT (both during assignments and when they end) *can play a role in successful repatriation*. DT can allow ongoing communication with the home office, keeping one's visibility, engaging with mentors, and maintaining professional relationships at home, all of which can decrease the risk of assignees being excluded from organizational networks and processes upon return (Cho et al., 2013; Coughlan et al., 2019; Cox, 2004; O'Sullivan, 2013; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021). In line with such claims, an empirical study by Morgan and colleagues (2004) showed that more technically oriented managers reported fewer difficulties finding suitable repatriation positions and were more likely to receive promotion rates after repatriation. This allowed them an easier organizational re-entry and they reported higher repatriation satisfaction. Another study proposed that richer mediums of interpersonal communication would be characterized by higher communication satisfaction and would be associated with better repatriation adjustment, but results indicated that some types of technology-mediated communication were just as satisfying or more satisfying than some types of face-to-face communication (Cox, 2004).

Along the same lines, in a conceptual paper that provides the most comprehensive discussion of the role of DT (in particular, social media) in repatriation to date, O'Sullivan (2013) adopts a power lens and examines *how technology can empower various stakeholders in the repatriation process*. She suggests that technology can remove many of the obstacles that accompany repatriation and allow individuals to impact the process on their terms. She notes that social media can be instrumental for many aspects of repatriation – for example, it can raise awareness of the need to proactively manage one's repatriation, provide support to critical mentoring resources, help repatriates target suitable post-return jobs, and enable and strengthen their access to key managerial and HR decision makers. It can also be a potentially powerful channel for the expression of employee voice, allowing the repatriates' views to be heard. O'Sullivan (2013) also discusses how technology can empower the HR managers that are responsible for repatriation. She suggests that it can help them communicate more effectively with assignees, simultaneously lowering the HR managers' communication burdens and allowing them to be responsive. The paper specifically discusses the benefits of using formalized central online portals for communication – they can serve as rich information repositories on which repatriates can rely even if there is turnover in HR; it can also be a valuable educational resource for HR professionals moving into roles with international responsibilities for which they may lack experience and expertise.

3.5.5. Organizational lens: DT used to replace international assignments

As we noted earlier, scholars have suggested that DT can be used to “replace” or at least complement traditional international assignments (Jooss et al., 2021, 2022). This argument is most frequently made in papers that highlight the benefits of virtual mobility (Brotheridge et al., 2015; Coughlan et al., 2019; Fenwick, 2004; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2011) and describe virtual forms of organizing work that organizations

can employ as an alternative for international assignments (Baruch et al., 2016; Collings et al., 2007; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021; Selmer et al., 2022; Suutari et al., 2013). Indeed, researchers have argued that DT can ensure consistent and richer communication and support virtual collaboration and knowledge exchange and as such make it possible that several roles traditionally filled by international assignees can be fulfilled without physical relocation (Coughlan et al., 2019). There are now many tools allowing more seamless connection not just between co-workers (e.g., Brotheridge et al., 2015) but also between company employees and their clients (e.g., Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2011), especially in some lines of business (e.g., auditing) where the role of face-to-face contact is gradually diminishing. When one considers that beyond aiding communication and knowledge exchange (Berry, 2015; Kostova et al., 2016) or the delivery of simple services (Suutari et al., 2013), advanced technology can also be used to support far more sophisticated tasks such as remote maintenance of equipment (one study highlighted that robotics have now been used to perform surgery from afar) (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008), it is not difficult to imagine a future where the dominant form of global mobility is indeed virtual.

The most frequently mentioned benefits of virtual mobility are reduced costs, less disruption to the assignees' personal and family life, their working relationships and networks, and maintaining their home-base role (Coughlan et al., 2019; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021). Having said this, given some of the strategic reasons behind mobility (Edström & Galbraith, 1977; Harzing, 2001), the completion of certain goals (e.g., transfer of corporate culture, developing managerial cadre) is unlikely to be relegated entirely to virtual tools and settings, at least in the immediate future (Selmer et al., 2022). There are also instances in which the benefits of physical relocation make it preferable to virtual postings. Thus, in a recent study Yang et al. (2022) have shown that limited worktime overlap between MNE parent and subsidiary locations, language differences and differences between the levels of development of information and communication technology in home and host countries can decrease the effectiveness of parent–subsidiary real-time communication, which can then lead to increased deployment of (traditional) expatriates as intermediaries to overcome these barriers.

3.5.6. Individual lens: the assignment period

A subset of the articles we reviewed adopted the perspective of how individuals use – and/or can use – DT during periods of working abroad. A clear demarcation between organizational and individual lens is not easy, as a single study may discuss how DT can be used by both organizations and by individuals (for example, organizations can benefit from e-mentoring as it may increase the pool of available mentors, while individuals can benefit as the likelihood of getting matched to an appropriate mentor increases as the pool of mentors grows; Crocitto et al., 2005). Such parallels notwithstanding, some researchers focus more explicitly on how international assignees (and any accompanying family members) engage with DT: using it to get helpful information and “broadcast” information to others, to “express identity” and “create community”, stay connected and establish new connections, and receive emotional support and facilitates assignees' adjustment.

Getting helpful information and “broadcasting” information to others. Both before and during assignments, assignees can use various digital platforms and tools to get informed about their host country's environment from a wide variety of sources. There are of course official information sources that assignees can turn to (e.g., government websites or online newspapers; Ogan & Ozakca, 2010) but they can also peruse other, often informal, postings on Twitter (recently renamed X), Instagram, YouTube, podcasts, blogs, vlogs (private video logs about expatriate life; Oh & Oh, 2017), and so forth (Chang & Chang, 2019; Hu, Hu, et al., 2020; Hu, Liu, et al., 2020; Mai, 2017; Tang & Chao, 2010), either by other foreigners in the country or by locals, which can provide a more unfiltered view of lived-in experiences in the country. For example, conceptual and qualitative research shows that the Internet, social media channels, and personal blogs offer the possibility to

digitally access and exchange information and perceptions relating to foreign countries, cultures, or values as well as provide insights into their lives in the host country (Hyduk & Worrall, 2016; Mai, 2017; Nardon et al., 2015; Polson, 2015, 2016; Tang & Chao, 2010). Such information is not only useful to assignees themselves but also to any family members who may have relocated with them (Crowne & Goeke, 2012).

For example, Hyduk and Worrall (2016) empirically examined ‘tweets’ on topics related to immigration and expatriation to Canada and reported that exchanges via Twitter provide assignees with information about cultural values (e.g., a guide to living in the host country), national context (e.g., comparing tax authorities in Canada to those of the US) and practical information (e.g., best and worst places to live, location of meetings for new expatriates), all of which can help establish common ground for newcomers to the country. Thus, based on qualitative studies, expatriate YouTubers can act as transcultural experts in illustrating and discussing cultural practices, stereotypes, and artifacts of their host countries while critically comparing them with their home culture (Chang & Chang, 2019). Assignees, therefore, can function as insiders by sharing information and experience (i.e., ‘things no one told me about expat life’; Walz, 2020) about the host country that official sources do not provide.

In addition to being consumers of information on digital platforms, international assignees also create and “broadcast” digital content. As technology advances and new applications emerge, they can use a diverse set of tools to share their knowledge, experience, and opinions, ranging from relatively low-technology platforms to more sophisticated video-sharing platforms such as YouTube or TikTok (Chang & Chang, 2019; Mai, 2017; Oh & Oh, 2017; Tang & Chao, 2010). For instance, conceptual work has suggested that social media and blogging technologies can be helpful for assignees to create a space in which they can display their expertise and function as testimonials, providing an accurate picture of life as an international assignee in the host country (Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000). Thus, in an interesting qualitative study of amateur expatriate bloggers in mainland China, Mai (2017) identified a number of reasons that prompted expatriates to engage in blogging: some were simply recording what was happening in daily life, aiming their posts at family members or other expat friends. Others offered tips on how to “survive” in the new country. Some blogs were providing ideas on how to “consume” local culture (e.g., lifestyle blogs offering restaurant and hotel reviews, tips on day trips outside of metropolitan centers, etc.). Another reason shared by the bloggers is that some attempted to bridge what they saw as information gaps between how a country was being portrayed in Western/international media and the reality on the ground, especially in countries where things were changing quickly. What gets published about “other” countries is often decided in headquarters of news organizations, and as such editors may ignore important stories that loom large in a local context. Some bloggers also saw an opportunity to get involved in social issues and engage in political discussion, noting that given the language barrier and the relatively small audiences of their blogs, they were not as strictly censored by the local government (Mai, 2017).

And while such digital content is relatively abundant, not all of it is universally appreciated. Thus, in a qualitative study, Tang and Chao (2010) examine American expatriate blogs about living in China. The expatriates conveyed their “daily negotiations with Chinese life” and their interpretations of Chinese society, including stories regarding what the authors called “bizarre cultural practices,” viewing such practices as “an indispensable part of the whole package of the China spectacle” (Tang & Chao, 2010, p. 393). As indicated by the language used by Tang and Chao (2010), expatriate accounts are anything but uncontested. In another qualitative study, Oh and Oh (2017) analyzed a popular expatriate vlog by Canadian expatriates located in Korea. The authors draw attention to the fact that while framed as light-hearted and humorous, the vlog entries repeatedly mocked Korea and Korean culture (for example, recalling situations in which the vloggers experienced an

incorrect usage of the English language, referring to it as “Engrish”) and/or framed their experience in the country as “exotic” (for example, when they described instances of eating indigenous foods. Oh and Oh (2017) point out that though continuously demarcating themselves/-Westerners from Korea and Koreans, rather than offering an authentic view into Korean life and culture, the vloggers ultimately emphasize white superiority (Oh & Oh, 2017). Such research provides a stark reminder that digital content should be viewed with a certain dose of skepticism, or at the very least with caution, given that it represents individual (sometimes incorrect) interpretations of the local context, and reflects the biases of its creators.

“Expressing identity” and “creating community”. This brings forward another important point. Reflecting on her qualitative findings, Mai (2017) astutely observed that digital media created by expatriates goes beyond exchanging information and communication but provides “spaces for expressing identities and constructing communities” (p113). The idea that social media is used to construct identity during expatriation, has been pointed out by others as well (Chang & Chang, 2019; Walz, 2020). This is perhaps not surprising, given that expatriation is a major life transition that prompts assignees to reflect on their identity and some construct new identities as a result of their international experiences (Kraimer et al., 2012). Navigating new environments, negotiating daily life, taking up new work roles, and establishing new routines provide many opportunities to revisit one’s sense of self. Creating digital content is a way of self-expression that can help assignees reaffirm or expand existing identities and create and affirm new ones (Chang & Chang, 2019; Mai, 2017). On the flip side, DT may allow someone to stay connected to “home” and engage in activities that can help them affirm their existing identity. Thus Ogan and Ozakca, (2010) found that assignees use the Internet to consume different forms of media from their home country, such as newspapers, country-specific radio and TV channels, language-specific music stations, or to watch movies in their language (see also Crowne et al., 2015).

Staying connected and establishing new connections. DT can also help create and maintain a virtual community in the host and home country. As such, it can be used to organize social gatherings and may help expatriates reach out to fellow nationals in the host country and allow them to feel connected to those that represent “home” (Mai, 2017). For example, in a conceptual paper, Crowne et al. (2015) argue that international assignees using social networking sites such as LinkedIn, InterNations or Meetup can help identify professional contacts and create social and professional networks in the assigned host country. In qualitative work, Polson (2015, 2016) studies international assignees who are younger, single, often female, and usually undertake mobility without bringing any family and suggests that they are quite dependent on creating and maintaining connections to people in their host environments, which can be greatly facilitated with the help of DT (Polson, 2015).

Receiving emotional support and facilitating assignees’ adjustment. Assignees’ participation in social networking platforms such as InterNations is particularly helpful for receiving emotional support from different online sources, some of whom may have encountered similar issues and challenges (Canhilal et al., 2020; Crowne & Goeke, 2012; Tripathi & Singh, 2021). Assignees can use DT to share their emotions or vent about their frustrations and find understanding from fellow expatriates (Hyduk & Worrall, 2016; Nardon et al., 2015). Thus, in one example, a qualitative study illustrated that assignees’ use of blogging technologies (i.e., tweets, likes, hashtags, or chat functions on expatriate blogs and Twitter) not only to share their views and beliefs but also to engage in conversations about experiences of anxiety and uncertainty and seek comfort (Tang & Chao, 2010). In another example, Nardon et al. (2015) suggest that blogging allows the co-creation of online adjustment support resources. Blogging and commenting on blogs can not only enhance understanding of a new country but may also offer a sense of comfort that others too experience adjustment-related challenges.

Related to this, Mohd Yusuf et al. (2021) qualitatively explored how digital tools can help lessen culture shock and reduce loneliness. Their study focused on expatriate nurses unaccompanied by family members and they found that the nurses used DT to stay connected to their families and friends back home, which helped with maintaining their emotional stability and prolonged their stay in the host country. Other qualitative studies have suggested that using social networking sites (i.e., Facebook) allowed assignees to stay informed about their home communities and keep track of important events and anniversaries (Mai, 2017; Mathieu & Pavlíčková, 2017). It has also been documented that being able to connect via videoconferencing tools or social media promotes healthy family dynamics (Coughlan et al., 2019; Crowne et al., 2015) and ensures a continued emotional attachment with loved ones (Mutter & Thorn, 2019). Additionally, Mutter and Thorn (2019) reveal with their qualitative research that family members who stay at home, particularly the children, benefit from being able to communicate digitally with the international assignee as often as possible. The ability to connect on special events or anniversaries as well as during daily activities (e.g., a car ride to school, playing in the backyard) can also create an ongoing family relationship and give the impression that the parent abroad is still present (Crowne & Goeke, 2012).

3.5.7. Individual lens: the dark side of DT

Studies have shown that while there are many benefits to using DT, DT can also have a dark side. For example, Schinzel (2016) documents that issues such as unlimited and uncontrolled access to information, a lack of privacy or confidentiality, and access to unverified information can be associated with negative outcomes for assignees using networking technologies. Schinzel (2016) also emphasizes the limitations of using social media to understand cultural differences. Another study reveals that international assignees are often dependent on the use of the Internet, and particularly e-commerce, to supply their daily needs in their host country (Saeed, 2019), which can lead to excessive use of DT. Such excessive use further enhanced by the ease of access to information online may become an addiction to social media and unwillingness to engage with local contacts to obtain similar information locally. Similarly, two empirical studies by Hu and colleagues (Hu, Hu, et al., 2020; Hu, Liu, et al., 2020) suggest that excessive use of social media may impair expatriates from benefiting from their association with host country nationals and may lessen the development of cultural intelligence. Ultimately, relying primarily on information retrieved from DT can negatively influence assignees' ability to understand and handle cross-cultural matters (Hu, Liu, et al., 2020) and their adjustment in the host country (Hyduk & Worrall, 2016). Sahakians and Dörner (2021) also highlight that the use of social media and online collaboration tools may limit face-to-face contact which can lead to a lack of trust and increased potential or intercultural conflicts. Further, they draw attention to the potential for information overload, as well as to issues such as privacy concerns and cybercrime. Not surprisingly, they also suggest a link between DT use and concerns about psychological well-being.

4. Discussion

While the use of DT has continuously increased over the last two decades and was given a boost by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, literature on DT use in global mobility remains in its infancy. We very much agree with a recent observation by Johassen and colleagues (2023) that we “need a more unified understanding of the digital elements of expatriation” (p2). We respond to this call by summarizing research on the use of DT in global mobility to-date. We do so with the hope that our systemic review will also highlight that the topic of DT use in assignments can provide fertile ground for global mobility studies for years to come.

Our review illustrates that while a lot of interesting ideas about the role of DT in global mobility have surfaced, almost none of them has been explored in depth. Work remains largely descriptive and some

exceptions (e.g., O'Sullivan, 2013) notwithstanding, engagement with theory remains somewhat superficial. Our findings are in line with the findings of a recent review on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and HRM, an equally novel related research topic, in which the authors conclude that the majority of AI-HRM research is rather weak in terms of theory development (Pan & Froese, 2023). Although some of the papers (fewer than half) we reviewed refer to specific theories, they are rarely clear about how these theories apply to the specific topic they investigate, nor do they discuss how the theories must be amended or extended to reflect propositions specifically related to DT.

Granted, new DT tools emerge seemingly every week, and this poses an obvious challenge for researchers. In such circumstances, one might indeed expect a stronger reliance on a phenomenon-based approach. But while the phenomenon-based approach centers on capturing and describing emerging phenomena, it does not stop there. An important next step is to make meaningful connections between one's specific study and the larger reality by either highlighting the relevance of an existing theory or by developing a new theory, theoretical model or a framework (Doh, 2015). Many of the studies we reviewed limit themselves to describing what organizations (or respectively, individual assignees) *do* or to suggesting what they *can do* – but do not attempt to illuminate much beyond such descriptions. As noted by Thomas and colleagues (2011), for a study to make a contribution, it must go beyond the “boxes” and describe the “arrows”, i.e., while the specification of concepts, constructs or variables is central to describing a phenomenon and is needed to provide the building blocks of a theory (i.e., the “boxes”), it is critically important to then show how the constructs are related to or build on each other (i.e., how do “arrows” connect the boxes must also be clear). Regrettably, research on DT use in mobility has focused on the boxes at the cost of ignoring the arrows. Further, many empirical studies rely on small samples and/or report anecdotal findings. There are also papers that discuss the use of DT in a somewhat peripheral fashion, as one of many tools organizations have or should consider using. A case in point here are literature review papers that make it a point to emphasize that the use of DT is an important topic for mobility scholars but offer very little guidance beyond a general statement encouraging future research to follow up on this.

While this assessment may be a bit harsh, it should not be seen as criticism to any individual study. It is not unusual for early research on any topic to move somewhat slowly, in fits and starts. But the DT landscape is changing at a very fast pace, and we hope that this paper provides the impetus for scholars to venture there and explore it sooner rather than later, paying more attention to both theoretical and methodological rigor. We believe it is better to describe the research we reviewed as “glass half full”, in that it has sown the seeds for many exciting studies that will come to fruition in the years to come.

4.1. Implications for research

Given the speed of development of DT, coupled with the dynamic changes in the economic and political landscape and related implications for MNCs and global employees, it is a fool's errand to try to come up with a complete list of issues to be addressed future research. Instead, in the section that follows, based on our review, we identify a selection of important questions that deserve increased research attention. Rather than constituting a comprehensive research agenda, these questions are intended as a starting point for idea generation those interested in conducting research on the role of DT for global mobility. We follow this section with a discussion of more general methodological and theoretical implications that researchers should consider as they launch new studies on this exciting topic.

4.1.1. Suggested questions for future research

Future research must tackle questions at both the organizational and individual level, from both a strategic and an operational standpoint. First among them are the following: *whether, how, why, and under what*

conditions DT can eliminate the need for “traditional” mobility? And although at this point it may appear that clear answers may only come from peering into a crystal ball, there are some specific questions we can be examining today that can help us along the way. For example, on the more strategic side, we should be asking:

- Is there a difference between MNCs with different international strategies (i.e., multidomestic, global, transnational) or in different industries in how they use DT for mobility? If yes, what underlies these differences?
- Which traditional mobility functions are best conducted by virtual mobility and which still demand (prolonged) physical presence?
- How can DT be used to achieve an optimal combination of physical co-presence and virtual presence that would help ease the tension between the imperatives for global integration and local responsiveness that all MNCs face?
- How can the use of DT help enhance broader collaboration across organizational units?
- Can knowledge (especially tacit knowledge) be transferred effectively (or more effectively?) solely through use of DT tools or is it still necessary to at least supplement DT tools alongside personal interactions? Should such interactions be face-to-face or can they be mediated by technology? What type of DT tools will be most useful to capture the knowledge of globally mobile employees?
- Will the use of virtual mobility change in some way the nature of the relationship and the power dynamics between headquarters and subsidiaries and between subsidiaries?

Research should also consider the ROI of investing in sophisticated DT tools that can help select, prepare, manage, and repatriate assignees. A comparison between ROI on virtual assignments, long term expatriation, short term assignments, project work, and extended travel will be a great start (although we acknowledge that challenges in calculating ROI have been well documented; McNulty & De Cieri, 2011). An important thing to ask is what are the additional costs of deploying DT (e.g., for training global mobility managers to be digitally savvy so that they can optimize the use of new DT tools) or how receptive global HR managers are to increased use of DT tools in managing mobility and what the “cost” of such potential resistance may be.

From a more operational standpoint, research can examine what makes digital expatriation management tools effective - and how is “effectiveness” defined by global mobility managers? For example, does using DT tools in selection help broaden the employee base from which assignment candidates are considered and does it result in an expat cadre with a different demographic profile that previously, opening opportunities for candidates that would otherwise not come up on the radar? This is an important question to be addressed in the context of research that has discussed the possibility of built-in biases of some AI-based recruitment and selection tools (e.g., Kupfer et al., 2023). Does the use of DT tools allow for more frequent contact with assignees or does the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ concern still hold? Related to this, does continuous (virtual) engagement via DT with people over the course of their assignment result in better repatriation outcomes? To that end, it will also be interesting to compare the long-term career paths of traditional and virtual assignees (Johassen et al., 2023).

Some additional questions related to the use of DT tools for specific functions are:

- How can DT facilitate training for global mobility? Is instruction delivered through digital technology as effective as more traditional training and coaching? (A study of comparing the outcomes of various training designs will be an excellent start). What is the marginal cost of customization of training to specific individual-host location pairs and is such customization delivering significantly different results compared to less specifically customized training?

- Which types of social support (e.g., instrumental, informational) are provided by DT tools and which types still require a personal connection?
- How can DT tools be used to develop expatriate online communities and international networks within the MNC? Are such communities related to expatriate adjustment?
- How can/should organizations “manage” their expatriates when it comes to their own social media accounts given that in some countries their expatriate status may make them more visible? Is it good for business to have expatriates with strong social media presence in the local country?

As these and other questions are being investigated, scholars should also consider both privacy and security issues that arise from having to manage global mobility through DT tools. And of course, questions about the use of IA in managing global mobility will surely emerge, as they have in the broader field of HRM (Pan & Froese, 2023).

The main question from an individual standpoint, is *how DT tools can be used in a way that alleviates the “frictions” that accompany mobility* (Choudhury, 2021). Some specific inquiries may center around:

- What is the role of DT for different types of coping (e.g., problem focused, emotion focused)? What is the nature of the relationship (i.e., linear or curvilinear) between use of DT and coping?
- How does day-to-day use of DT facilitate (or) impede adjustment and understanding of the local environment? For example, is it used to help expatriates find what they need locally, give them access to locally relevant information or support that would otherwise will be hard to get (e.g., finding an online language tutors) or is used to allow them to lead an insular lifestyle? (e.g., by making it easier to connect with compatriots or by providing unlimited access to movies from one’s home country)?
- How does the use of DT tools affect social capital? Do expatriates form fewer relationships with locals or do tools like social media platforms allow them to reach out more broadly to the local community and establish more connections? Does DT prevent existing social capital from eroding?
- Is mentorship facilitated by DT tools more accessible (and more enduring) compared to more traditional mentorship (given the ease of communication between expatriates and mentors afforded by DT tools)?
- How can virtual expatriates (in the absence of in-person contact with foreign colleagues) leverage DT to enhance their cross-cultural competencies acquisition and learning about doing business internationally?

Beyond questions about the use of specific DT tools, research must investigate broader issues such as can DT empower expatriates? How? (O’Sullivan, 2013) Might there be gender effects (Polson, 2016)? What is the impact of DT use on other stakeholders (notably expatriate families, but also their host-country colleagues)? How do DT tools facilitate career self-management and the accumulation of career capital?

4.1.2. Theoretical and methodological considerations

As scholars set out to examine questions such as the ones we suggest above, they should bear in mind several theoretical and methodological considerations.

Strive for more precision regarding the type of DTs are being studied. First on the agenda is *more precision* regarding what DTs are being studied. Papers frequently refer to broad umbrella terms such as “social media”, “information and communication technologies”, or “digital technology” but do not specify what is meant by that or do not differentiate among specific tools that are being examined (e.g., Collings et al., 2007; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008, 2011) which poses a challenge when it comes to comparing and integrating their findings. Studies should be clear about the specific type of DT they are examining. Related to this, researchers

should put efforts toward clear and easy-to-apply categorizations of different types of DT. We offer one such categorization in this paper but given the relative paucity of DT that has been studied, we only consider two obvious dimensions and most commonly mentioned types of DT, and as such it is at best incomplete. Future research should take this effort forward and consider more relevant dimensions.

Study a wider gamut of types of DT. The research we reviewed focused on a relatively narrow set of DTs. For example, we found no studies of instantaneous text-based communication tools such as chat applications like *Slack*, *iMessage*, or *GoogleChat*. This is surprising given how accessible and easy to use such applications are (e.g., [Stray & Moe, 2020](#)), and the potential they have to quickly bridge geographical distances – as such one might suspect that they would be widely used by international assignees too, which suggests that future studies should specifically consider them. On the other end of the spectrum, researchers have also neglected sophisticated technologies like VR applications (see one exception in [Beutell et al., 2017](#)). Given the pace of technological development, the increasing role VR technology is likely to play, and the versatility of its applications, future research should pay particular attention to it (and other immersive technologies). A related example is the metaverse, which may allow dramatically new ways of conducting and organizing work across borders but comes with its own set of technological, legal, and ethical considerations ([He & Nagaraj, 2023](#)).

Consider existing relevant theories first. Although the field is ripe for new theoretical development, we caution here that there is no need to develop new theories, models, and frameworks, where existing theories can help, and that when a theoretical perspective is involved, authors should really engage with it rather than simply “name check” it. Some obvious theoretical perspectives at the individual level that we would have expected to see are those regarding adjustment, social support, identity, psychological stress, and coping. And while all five appear in the reviewed articles (see [Appendix Table A.1](#)), they were severely underutilized relative to what they can offer to understand many of the research questions posed by the studies. Scholars can examine research in related fields that, though addressing contemporary phenomena, nevertheless draws on applicable established theories—an example here is a study by [Gentina and Chen \(2019\)](#) who were interested in understanding when and why digital natives may prefer to resolve perceived loneliness by turning to the Internet versus through engaging in more face-to-face interactions. Although this is a “new” problem, the authors used “old” theory on stress and coping ([Lazarus & Folkman, 1984](#)) to build their hypotheses. We encourage global mobility scholars to consider such “classic” theories as they may provide the ideal theoretical starting point to examine and better understand how or why individuals use DT and what the outcomes of such use may be. We also caution scholars here to be more careful even with the overall use of the label “theory” – as we highlight in this review, there have been many discussions about what theory is ([Shapira, 2011](#)), what type of theory papers there are (e.g., [Sandberg and Alvesson, 2021](#)) and the different epistemological approaches to building theory (e.g., [Bonache and Festing, 2020](#); [Romani et al., 2018](#)).

Most of the studies that were explicit about their theoretical foundations were at the individual level analysis, whereas research informing the organizational lens was less forthcoming regarding this. There are many theories that can be helpful at the organizational level: for example, the broader HRM literature has applied theories, such as organizational learning theory ([Huber, 1991](#)) or evidence-based decision-making theory ([Baba & Hakemzadeh, 2012](#); [Bezzina et al., 2017](#)) to examine the use of DT by organizations. In the context of organizational learning theory, a study suggests that DT, and specifically big data, can facilitate decision-making, innovation competency, and organizational performance in HR practices ([Verma et al., 2021](#)). Applied to the global mobility context, organizational learning theory may guide scholars in investigating how and why DT and big data can function as potential drivers for mobility success (e.g., addressing retention rates for international assignees and opportunities to save costs or ways to enhance

the mobility program). Research on HR technology and HR analytics has also employed evidence-based decision-making theory to propose a model demonstrating the capability to use DT to deploy and store “scientific and organizational facts coupled with expert and stakeholder judgment to make managerial decisions” ([McCartney & Fu, 2022](#), p. 26). Transferred to the global mobility context, scholars would be able to examine to what extent DT-supported evidence-based management could help MNCs and their global managers to make better decisions or reduce risks associated with global mobility.

Consider theories outside HRM and management. Another fruitful idea here is to consult research in disciplines beyond HRM and management that have specifically examined how organizations make investment decisions regarding DT and the impact of technology on how work is being done (e.g., [Zammuto et al., 2007](#)). Notably, scholars in the field of Management Information Systems (MIS) have been studying the role of DT in organizations for quite some time and examining their work in publications such as the *Journal of Management Information Systems* or *MIS Quarterly* can be a good start. More specifically, studies that draw from theories such as disruptive innovation theory, can provide explanations for why organizations may succeed or fail to respond to digital disruptions (i.e., changing traditional business models) and ultimately allow for building digital platforms as a response to digital disruption ([Karimi & Walter, 2015](#)). This may also help in understanding the impact of the digital disruption in MNCs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As one suggestion of a versatile theory that can inform a wide range of studies, we draw the attention of IM and IHRM scholars to affordances theory ([Gibson, 1977](#); [Gibson et al., 2022](#); [Zammuto et al., 2007](#)). Affordances theory has been applied to examine the relationship between IT artefacts (such as DT tools that can be viewed as technical “objects”) and their users, at both the individual and the organizational level. The main premise of the theory is the stipulation that people see “objects” in their life in terms of the possibilities such objects “afford” them and that different actors may see different “affordances” of the same object. For example, DT tools can “afford” global HR managers the ability to visualize and easily monitor the entire expatriation process, deliver HR services in real time, or engage in virtual collaboration. Importantly, affordances theory states that affordances do not arise from the IT artefact itself but from the user/artifact relations. Scholars have also made a distinction between *affordances*, which create the potential for certain action) and the *realization* of such affordances, which involves someone taking a specific action (a tool that can enable virtual collaboration does not by itself ensure that people will indeed collaborate virtually) ([Volkoff & Strong, 2017](#); [Zammuto et al., 2007](#)). Technology should thus not be viewed independently of the actor and the social setting. Further, technology features interact with organizational features and with managerial intent to affect outcomes of interest ([Zammuto et al., 2007](#)). For example, the same DT tool (e.g., an applicant tracking system or a performance management system) can be used differently across organizations and can end up producing rather different results. Affordances can also interact – they can support other affordances or interfere with them ([Volkoff & Strong, 2017](#)). And while the focus of research has been on what affordances can enable, it is worth noting they can also constrain organizational actors ([Zammuto et al., 2007](#)), for example, the same tool that facilitates the creation of reports at the touch of a button may malfunction if all fields are not filled exactly as specified, which may be a challenge when compiling data from assignees in different subsidiaries, with locally-compliant reporting standards. Although the preceding examples refer to organizations, the theory applies to individuals too (e.g., expatriates can use a social networking tool as LinkedIn to make new contacts in their assignment country – or can spend countless hours just browsing postings from old colleagues regarding events that occur in their home office and regret that they were unable to be there.) In short, what matters most is not the DT tools themselves but why, how, when, by whom, and in what circumstances they are used. Given its versatility and established position

in MIS research, affordances theory can offer a useful framework that can allow IHRM and IM scholars to consider specific features of DT and how they combine with characteristics and actions of actors to better understand the use of DT in global mobility.

Another great example of a discipline outside organizational studies that may also offer useful perspectives on the study of the intersection of DT and global mobility is economic geography.² Economic geography is the study of spatial distribution of economic activities and the various influences (including that of technology) that shape them. We note here that our suggestion to consider economic geography as relevant to the study of DT and global mobility comes on the heels of a growing body of work that integrates economic geography and international business and a deepening dialogue between scholars across the two fields (Bathelt, Cantwell, & Mudambi, 2018; Cook, Johns, McDonald, Beaverstock, & Pandit, 2018; Phelps & Fuller, 2016).

More specifically, economic geographers have been interested in the role of technology in terms of whether it may impact the mobility of labor on a global scale. For example, related to research on expatriation, the work of John Salt and colleagues (Koser & Salt, 1997; Millar & Salt, 2008; Salt, 1988; Salt, 1997; Salt & Millar, 2006) discusses the role of “intra-company transfers” for migration flows, especially the migration of highly skilled workers, and the fact that location decisions by MNEs influence the spatial division of labor. He posits that the highly skilled are primarily “repositories of expertise” and their main contribution to the production process is knowledge. Knowledge, unlike manual labor, can be transferred without physical presence. Extending this argument, in his early publications Salt predicts that as technology advances, the disadvantage of not sharing the same physical space with co-workers will decline, and in time, technology-enabled opportunities for remote collaboration and increased air-travel may lead to decreased corporate mobility. Such predictions were made some 20–30 years ago and at the time Salt noted that “there is no research into the trade-offs between the application of new technology for transferring knowledge, business travel and migration” (Salt, 1997, p. 28). This statement is largely true today. If anything, technology may be enabling mobility of the highly skilled, many of whom can share their expertise and knowledge from anywhere and do not have to be tied down to a particular location to be engaged in productive activity. Whereas in the late 1980s, Salt noted that the way employers organize work influences people’s mobility and careers (Salt, 1988), more than three decades later technology may be providing a lever to individuals to enable their own mobility, regardless of the location of their employer. Being a “digital nomad” is still a relatively novel work arrangement and there is no meaningful way to estimate how many digital nomads actually are (Dreher & Triandafillidou, 2023) but the “work-from-anywhere” idea is gaining traction. Related to this, economic geographers have also discussed the idea that DT can facilitate the agglomeration of highly skilled workers who can work anywhere but flock to large metropolitan cities, including cities in the Global South, which afford them a certain cosmopolitan work-lifestyle. This can affect patterns of urban and regional growth (Scott, 2011) and may raise serious social issues at a local level (e.g., strain on the housing system, as lower paid local workers are pushed out of the housing market by better compensated digital nomads; Ferreira, 2022). Although such research is not directly related to IM and IHRM, it certainly has implications for MNCs (e.g., notably when it comes to location production decisions, and – related to HRM – the staffing of positions across various organizational units where the MNE operates).

Engage in (more) empirical research. Apart from the need for more theoretical development, future research should place a special emphasis on *conducting more empirical research*. With more empirical research and appropriate sample sizes, scholars can move beyond anecdotal accounts and will be able to engage in rigorous hypothesis testing or crafting better theories. Furthermore, research on DT use is

conducive to conducting experiments or to quasi-experimental designs (i.e., involving comparisons of the experiences of results of individuals and MNCs who engage in DT use with “control” groups of those that do not.) Laboratory studies can be used to examine issues such as the impact of using particular DT tools on virtual team dynamics and virtual collaboration.

Mind your empirical tools. Scholars must also develop reliable and valid measurements of DT usage. To date, researchers have either asked for the actual use of DT and virtual assignments (e.g., Coughlan et al., 2019; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2011) or have relied on measurement instruments from computer-mediated research fields (e.g., Brotheridge et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2009), published in journals such as *Computers in Human Behavior* (Hughes et al., 2012) or *MIS Quarterly* (Davis, 1989), to empirically examine the scope of its usage. However, to effectively study DT usage in global mobility, it may be necessary to borrow measurement instruments from the above-described computer-mediated research fields, and in case new constructs emerge from data (e.g., supervisors’ readiness and preparedness to provide instrumental support via DT), rigorous construct development will be needed.

Get creative when collecting data. Researchers could also consider innovative ways of data collection – for example, the use of DT tools creates rich metadata that can be explored to answer a number of interesting questions (Bailey et al., 2022) (although the analyses of such ‘digital exhaust’ also come with serious ethical considerations). It is also possible to analyze content-related datasets, such as social networking sites or expatriate blogs, to explore further opportunities for MNCs and individuals in using DT. Looking into other research fields, employing content analysis of social media posts may provide scholars with a better understanding of, for example, the extent and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals’ reaction to mobility and international assignments similar to what has been done by studies in other fields (e.g., examining pandemic-related outcomes such as panic buying (e.g., Arafat et al., 2020)).

4.2. Implications for practitioners

The findings of our literature review can be used as a starting point for HR managers and organizations in reconceptualizing their current global HR practices and global mobility strategies so that they can benefit from the use of DT to respond to the needs of their assignees (Dirani et al., 2020). Our review suggests that due to the rapidly emerging virtual work environment, HR managers have yet to reflect on and revise their existing HR policies to account for the implementation of DT in global mobility. Therefore, organizations need to develop HR policies (e.g., communication or work-from-home policies) that reflect the differences in working with various DTs (e.g., using videoconferencing for mentoring purposes vs. installing tools for telemedicine) and the complexity of its usage (e.g., implementing virtual reality vs. online databases) associated with the individual themes of our findings. Here virtual teamwork literature has emphasized that working in virtual teams has led to the development of new responsiveness, communication, and feedback policies in order to address a lack of trust and inclusion based on missing face-to-face interaction (Breuer et al., 2016; Purvanova, 2014). Similar work is needed in the global mobility context (Lazarova et al., 2023).

5. Conclusions

Our study provides a narrative review of DT use in global mobility research. We attempted to provide an integrated view of what has been studied so far, clarifying the role DT has played and can play across the typical stages of global mobility. Our review illustrates that researchers have put forward many exciting ideas about the role DT can play and its benefits in global mobility, but the field remains underdeveloped and fragmented. There is little doubt that the importance of DT in the modern workplace will continue to draw interest on behalf of global

² We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

mobility researchers in the future. While the focus of previous studies has been the organizational perspective of DT usage, there is also significant potential for research on how individuals engage and benefit from DT in global mobility. Besides the need for a clear categorization of individual DT tools, the call to study more sophisticated types of DT, and the necessity for more precision in future research, we also suggest focusing on theoretical development, conducting rigorous empirical work, and considering contributions from other disciplines. There are current calls for organizational scholars to incorporate the increasing role of technology in theorizing of key organizational processes and phenomena (Bailey et al., 2022) and we hope that our paper will contribute to this goal by stimulating new research on DT use in global mobility.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

None

Data Availability

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Appendix A

Table A1

Overview of the literature.

No	Year	Authors	Theoretical perspective	Research paradigm	Method	Level	Types of digital technology studied
1	2000	Mendenhall & Stahl	n/a	Positivism	Conceptual	n/a	Computer-assisted learning programs, Internet-based training tools
2	2002	Cheek & Chandra	n/a	Positivism	Conceptual	n/a	Telemedicine via electronic communication (i.e., Internet, Intranet, videoconferencing)
3	2004	Cox	Repatriation adjustment (Black et al., 1992) Media richness theory (Trevino et al., 1987)	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Information and communication technology (i.e., e-mail)
4	2004	Fenwick	n/a	Positivism	Mixed method	Ind	Teleconferencing
5	2004	Morgan et al.	Adjustment (Black et al., 1991)	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	State-of-the art information systems and technologies (not further specified)
6	2005	Crocitto et al.	Multiple learning cycles (Hall & Chandler, 2004) Mentoring (Higgins and Cram, 2001)	Positivism	Conceptual / Model development	Ind	Technology enabling remote mentoring (not further specified)
7	2007	Collings et al.	n/a	Positivism	Conceptual / Literature review	n/a	Electronic information and communication technologies (not further specified)
8	2008	Carraher et al.	Mentoring (Kram, 1985) Theory of international mentoring (Mezias and Scandura, 2005)	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Digital technologies (not further specified)
9	2008	Holtbrügge & Schillo	Typology of intercultural training (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983)	Positivism	Qualitative	Ind	Electronic media (i.e., e-mails, conference calls or video conferences)
10	2009	Lee	Technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989); Job stress theory (Lazarus et al., 1952)	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Company's Intranet system (including e-mail and data storage functions)
11	2010	Ogan & Ozacka	Social capital theory (Portes 1998; Putnam, 2000)	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Internet and other online-consumed media (i.e., radio, television, magazines, newspapers)
12	2010	Tang & Chao	n/a	Interpretivism	Qualitative	Ind	Blog posts and chat functions
13	2011	Holtbrügge & Schillo	Knowledge-based view (Tsang, 1999; Gupta and Govindarajan, 1991)	Positivism	Quantitative	Org	E-mails, web sites, Intranets, telephone calls or video conferences
14	2012	Crowne & Goeke	Adjustment (Black et al., 1991) Social Networks (Burque et al., 2008)	Positivism	Conceptual / Model development	Ind	Online social networking platforms
15	2012	Elkin et al.	Mentoring (Eshner et al., 2003)	Positivism	Conceptual	n/a	Computer mediated communication tools (not further specified)
16	2013	Cho et al.	n/a	Positivism	Qualitative	Ind	Online portals and expat databases
17	2013	Holtbrügge & Schillo	Transaction cost theory (Williamson, 1981)	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Electronic media and information technologies (i.e., e-mails, telephone and video conferences or chats)
18	2013	O'Sullivan	Framework on employee empowerment (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998)	Positivism	Conceptual	Ind	Social media (i.e., blogs and forums, wikis, media sharing sites, social networking sites, and videoconferencing)
19	2013	Suutari et al.	n/a	Positivism	Qualitative	Org	Virtual assignments, the use of videoconferencing, e-mail, and other communication medi
20	2015	Berry	Internalization theory (Buckley & Casson, 1976; Rugman, 1980)	Positivism	Quantitative	Org	Digital technologies (not further specified)
21	2015	Brotheridge et al.	Theory of affordances (Gibson, 1979)	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Computer-mediated communication (not further specified)
22	2015	Crowne et al.	Network theory/social capital (Podony & Page, 1998)	Positivism	Conceptual / Model development	Ind	Online social networking platforms

(continued on next page)

Table A1 (continued)

No	Year	Authors	Theoretical perspective	Research paradigm	Method	Level	Types of digital technology studied
23	2015	Nardon et al.	Adjustment (Black et al., 1991)	Positivism	Qualitative	Ind	Blogs
24	2015	Polson	Social support (Fahr et al., 2010)	Interpretivism	Qualitative	Ind	Online social networking platforms
25	2016	Baruch et al.	n/a	Positivism	Conceptual / Literature review	n/a	Communication technologies for virtual global work (not further specified)
26	2016	Hyduk & Worrall	Theory of information worlds (Burnett & Jaeger, 2008)	Interpretivism	Qualitative	Ind	Twitter posts and hashtags
27	2016	Kostova et al.	n/a	Positivism	Conceptual / Literature review	Org	Information and communication technology (not further specified)
28	2016	Polson	Power geometry (Massey, 1994)	Interpretivism	Qualitative	Ind	Location-based mapping technologies and online social networking sites
29	2016	Schinzler	Cultural values (Hofstede, 1980)	Positivism	Mixed methods	Ind	Social networking technologies (i.e., LinkedIn, Viadeo, XING, Facebook) and microblogging (i.e., Twitter)
30	2017	Beutell et al.	Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) Proactive coping (Aspinwal & Taylor, 1997) Conservation of resources (Hobfall et al., 2006)	Positivism	Conceptual	Ind	Virtual reality
31	2017	Mai	n/a	Interpretivism	Qualitative	Ind	Digital media (i.e., lifestyle magazines and podcasts); blogs
32	2017	Mathieu & Pavlíčková	n/a	Interpretivism	Qualitative	Ind	Facebook news feed
33	2017	Oh & Oh	n/a	Interpretivism	Qualitative	n/a	YouTube channels
34	2018	Shaw & Luiz	Knowledge transfer model (Nonaka, 1994)	Positivism	Qualitative	Org	E-mail, text chats, portal and content management systems
35	2019	Chang & Chang	Social linguistics (Gee, 1996)	Interpretivism	Qualitative	Ind	YouTube channels; YouTube videos
36	2019	Coughlan et al.	Adjustment (Crowne & Goeke, 2012) Cultural differences (Hofstede, 2009) Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986)	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Social media and computer-mediated communication (not further specified)
37	2019	Kanagavalli et al.	n/a	Positivism	Conceptual / Literature review	Org	Technologies for online recruitment (e.g., Online recruitment platforms, mobile recruitment applications)
38	2019	Mutter & Thorn	Job demands-resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007)	Positivism	Qualitative	Ind	Communication tools (i.e., e-mail, SMS, audio and video communication)
39	2019	Park et al.	n/a	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Video consultation and mobile apps
40	2019	Saeed	n/a	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Digital business applications
41	2020	Canhilal et al.	Social support (Albrecht & Adelman, 1984)	Positivism	Mixed methods	Ind	Expatriate online platform posts
42	2020	Hu et al.	Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978)	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Social media networks (i.e., Facebook and Twitter)
43	2020	Hu, Liu et al.	Person-Environment fit (Edwards 1996)	Positivism	Quantitative	Ind	Social media networks (i.e., Facebook and Twitter)
44	2020	Walz	Adjustment (Gong 2003) Tactics of intersubjectivity framework (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005); Sociolinguistics (Bucholtz, 2003)	Interpretivism	Qualitative	Ind	Expatriate blog posts
45	2021	Ellmer & Reichel	Institutional theory (Scott, 2014) Psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989)	Interpretivism	Qualitative	Org	Social media messages (i.e., Facebook)
46	2022	Jooss et al.	n/a	Positivism	Conceptual / Literature review	Org	Technology enabling global virtual work (not further specified)
47	2021	Mohd Yusuf et al.	Adjustment (Black and Gregersen, 1991)	Positivism	Qualitative	Ind	Social media communication tools
48	2021	Sahakians & Dorner	n/a	Positivism	Conceptual	n/a	Social media and online collaboration technology
49	2021	Tripathi & Singh	Stress emergence model (Bader & Berg, 2014)	Positivism	Conceptual / Model development	Ind	Virtual collaboration tools (not further specified)
50	2022	Caligiuri et al.	Adjustment (Black et al., 1991) Person-environment fit (Hippler et al., 2014) Expatriate Performance (Caligiuri 1997)	Positivism	Conceptual	Ind	Technology enabling remote and virtual cross-cultural work (not further specified)
51	2022	Jooss et al.	Event system theory (Morgeson et al., 2015)	Positivism	Qualitative	Ind	Technology enabling global virtual work (not further specified)
52	2022	Yang et al.	Boundary-spanning (Schotter et al. 2017)	Positivism	Quantitative	Org	Digital information and communication technologies enabling remote and real-time communication (not further specified)
53	2022	Selmer et al.	n/a	Positivism	Conceptual	n/a	Technology enabling electronic personal online interactions, virtual work and virtual global mobility (not further specified)

Notes. Number of publications in each research method: Reviews and conceptual work (n = 17; 32.08%), qualitative (n = 18; 33.96%), quantitative (n = 14; 26.42%) and mixed-method studies (n = 4; 7.55%). Components sum to 100.01% due to rounding.

Table A2

Overview of articles classified by stages, level and themes.

Assignment stages	Level	Themes for digital technology use	Reviewed articles
Recruitment and selection	Organizational lens	DT used as a recruitment tool	Ellmer et al., 2021
Preparation and training	Organizational lens	- DT as an efficient way of selection employees for an international assignment - DT to enhance or replace face-to-face training practices - Investing in more sophisticated training tools	Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2011; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2013; Kanagavalli et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2009; Morgan et al., 2004; Beutell et al., 2017; Cho et al., 2013; Crocitto et al., 2005; Ellmer et al., 2021; Ellmer & Reichel, 2021; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021; Shaw & Luiz, 2018; Beutell et al., 2017
The assignment period	Organizational lens	- Keeping assignees connected with the home office - Allowing assignees to stay active and visible in their networks - Enhancing assignees' access to mentors - Providing critical instrumental support helpful for day-to-day living in the host country	Cho et al., 2013; Cox, 2004; Morgan et al., 2004; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021; Shaw & Luiz, 2018; Coughlan et al., 2019; Cox, 2004; Morgan et al., 2004; O'Sullivan, 2013; Carraher et al., 2008; Cho et al., 2013; Crocitto et al., 2005; Elkin et al., 2012; O'Sullivan, 2013; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021; Cheek & Chandra, 2002; Park et al., 2019
	Individual lens	- To get helpful information and "broadcast" information to others "Expressing identity" and "creating community" - Staying connected and establishing new connections - Receiving emotional support and facilitating assignees' adjustment	Chang & Chang, 2019; Crowne & Goeke, 2012; Hu et al., 2020; Hu, Liu et al., 2020; Hyduk & Worrall, 2016; Mai, 2017; Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000; Nardon et al., 2015; Ogan et al., 2010; Oh & Oh, 2017; Polson, 2015, 2016; Tang & Chao, 2010; Walz, 2020; Chang & Chang, 2019; Crowne et al., 2015; Mai, 2017; Ogan and Ozakca, 2010; Walz, 2020; Crowne et al., 2015; Mai, 2017; Polson, 2015, 2016; Caligiuri et al., 2022; Canhilal et al., 2020; Coughlan et al., 2019; Crowne & Goeke, 2012; Crowne et al., 2015; Hyduk & Worrall, 2016; Mai, 2017; Mathieu & Pavličková, 2017; Mohd Yusuf et al., 2021; Mutter & Thorn, 2019; Nardon et al., 2015; Tang & Chao, 2010; Tripathi & Singh, 2021; Cho et al., 2013; Coughlan et al., 2019; Cox, 2004; Morgan et al., 2004; O'Sullivan, 2013; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021; O'Sullivan, 2013; Baruch et al., 2016; Berry, 2015; Brotheridge et al., 2015; Collings et al., 2007; Coughlan et al., 2019; Fenwick, 2004; Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008, 2011; Jooss et al., 2021, 2022; Kostova et al., 2016; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021; Selmer et al., 2022; Suutari et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2020; Hu, Liu et al., 2020; Hyduk & Worrall, 2016; Saeed, 2019; Sahakiant & Dörner, 2021; Schinzel, 2016; Yang et al., 2022
Repatriation	Organizational lens	- DT can play a role for successful repatriation - How DT can empower various stakeholders	O'Sullivan, 2013
To replace international assignments	Organizational lens	DT used to replace international assignments	O'Sullivan, 2013
The dark side of DT	Individual lens	Dark side of digital technologies	

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