



**THE USE OF NEW MEDIA IN GHANAIAN TRANSNATIONAL
SIBLINGS' COMMUNICATION**

BY

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MADC 23021

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS
AND COMMUNICATION UniMAC IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MA IN DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNICATION.**

DECEMBER 2024

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my original research and that, no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged using complete references.

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This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of a Dissertation laid down by the University of Media, Arts, and Communication, UniMAC.

DR. ROSEMARY OBENG-HINNEH, PhD

.....  17th December, 2024

Supervisor

Signature

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of new media in maintaining sibling relationships within transnational families, with a specific focus on communication dynamics, emotional intimacy, and the challenges posed by physical separation. As globalization continues to drive migration, families are increasingly dispersed across borders, necessitating the use of digital communication platforms to sustain connections. This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore these dynamics, employing semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants aged 18 to 55 from Ghanaian transnational families. The findings underscore the indispensable role of digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Instagram in fostering sibling relationships across geographical divides. These tools enable siblings to engage in frequent communication, share life updates, and provide emotional support. Through features like video calls, instant messaging, and multimedia sharing, siblings can maintain a sense of involvement in each other's lives despite being separated by vast distances. Participants highlighted how these platforms allowed them to celebrate milestones, offer comfort during difficult times, and nurture a sense of togetherness, creating a digital space for connection. However, the study also reveals significant limitations of digital communication. While these tools facilitate accessibility and regular interaction, they cannot fully replicate the depth and richness of in-person exchanges. The absence of physical presence and non-verbal cues such as body language, touch, and tone of voice can diminish the emotional intimacy of sibling interactions. Some participants expressed frustration with the inability of digital platforms to convey complex emotions effectively, leading to occasional feelings of disconnection and misunderstanding. The research further identifies several challenges associated with digital communication among siblings in transnational families. Time zone differences emerged as a frequent obstacle, making it difficult to align schedules for real-time interactions. Technological barriers, including unreliable internet connectivity and limited access to advanced devices in some regions, were also reported. Additionally, the reliance on text-based communication occasionally led to misinterpretations, highlighting the need for careful articulation and understanding in such exchanges. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that while new media plays a critical role in sustaining sibling relationships in transnational families, it cannot entirely substitute for the emotional and relational depth of face-to-face interactions. Recommendations include improving digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy, and exploring immersive technologies like virtual reality to enhance the quality of long-distance family communication. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of the dynamics of transnational sibling relationships, emphasizing the interplay between technology, culture, and emotional bonds in an increasingly interconnected world.

KEYWORDS: Transnational families, sibling relationships, New Media, Digital Communication, Emotional Intimacy, Video Calls, Time Zone Differences, Connectivity Challenges, Digital Literacy, Communication Dynamics. Virtual Gatherings, Miscommunication, Media Multiplexity, Social Support, Technological Adaptation, Non-Verbal Cues, Family Bonding.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my lovely husband Mr. Kwadwo Asiedu Oyirifi and my beloved parents Mr. and Mrs Owusu and siblings, whose love and sacrifices have been a constant source of inspiration. To my siblings, who are the heart of this study, thank you for teaching me the value of familial bonds. This work is also dedicated to all transnational families striving to maintain their relationships across borders, proving that distance can never diminish love.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

In the past few decades, the advent of new media has significantly transformed how people communicate across borders. New media refers to digital forms of communication, such as social media, messaging apps, and other internet-based platforms that allow instantaneous communication regardless of geographical distance (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). With the globalization of economies and increased migration, many families are spread across different countries, and siblings are often separated by great distances. In these transnational families, new media has become a vital tool for maintaining relationships and fostering a sense of closeness (Madianou & Miller, 2012). The transformation has witnessed unprecedented levels of globalization, resulting in increased migration for education, employment, and better living standards. This migration has led to the formation of transnational families, where members live in different countries, often continents apart (Smith & King, 2018). In this context, maintaining familial bonds becomes both challenging and crucial, with new media serving as a critical bridge. New media involves digital communication technologies that enable real-time communication across vast distances. These technologies include social networking sites, video calls, and instant messaging applications, which have evolved rapidly due to advances in internet accessibility and mobile technology (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The definition of new media is continuously expanding as new technologies emerge and integrate into daily communication.

In transnational families, sibling relationships also undergo a transformation influenced by digital communication. Siblings often use a variety of online platforms to share daily life updates, provide emotional support, and maintain a sense of familial continuity despite physical separation (Gomez & Turner, 2021). These digital interactions can help reinforce bonds and foster a shared family identity across different national contexts. However, the reliance on technology can sometimes lead to a superficial connection, where meaningful emotional exchanges are replaced by brief, routine updates (Lee, 2022). The ability of new media to support emotional closeness among siblings is significant. It provides a platform for continuous emotional support and conflict resolution, essential elements of any close relationship. Through regular and various forms of digital communication, siblings can develop a sense of co-presence, feeling emotionally connected despite physical absence (Jiang & Bazarova, 2021).

The frequency and quality of communication among siblings vary widely and can be influenced by factors such as age differences, gender, and individual personalities. Older siblings might take on more responsibility for maintaining contact and supporting younger ones, which can either strengthen or strain the sibling bond depending on the emotional dynamics of the relationship (Smith & Patel, 2021). Moreover, conflicts that arise can be harder to resolve digitally, as the lack of physical presence and non-verbal cues can hinder effective conflict resolution (Johansson & Hess, 2020). The impact of new media on sibling relationships also varies across different cultural contexts. Cultural values influence communication styles, the frequency of interaction, and the platforms chosen for communication. Considering collectivist cultures, family cohesion and frequent interactions might be more prevalent, guiding the use and impact of new media among siblings (Liu & Gallois, 2021).

Furthermore, Communication among spouses in transnational families is a complex, broad phenomenon that reflects the challenges and opportunities posed by geographical separation. Spousal relationships across borders often rely heavily on digital communication technologies

to maintain emotional intimacy and manage household responsibilities from afar. The adaption of daily video calls and instant messaging becomes crucial in sharing parental duties and offering mutual support, thus preserving marital bonds (Chen & Choi, 2019). However, physical distance can also intensify misunderstandings and feelings of loneliness, as digital interactions sometimes fail to fully replicate the distinctions of face-to-face communication (Parker & Wang, 2021). Additionally, time zone differences and varying work schedules can further complicate communication, potentially leading to decreased interaction frequency and increased relationship strain (Brooks & Davidson, 2020).

Research indicates that trust and relationship satisfaction in transnational spousal relationships can be significantly impacted by the quality and quantity of digital communication (Liu & Brown, 2021). Effective communication, characterized by openness and regular engagement, helps in managing the inherent uncertainties of long-distance relationships. On the other way around, superficial interactions might contribute to feelings of insecurity and detachment (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2022). Furthermore, cultural differences and language barriers, especially in marriages between partners from different countries, can influence communication styles and preferences, impacting overall relationship dynamics (Kashyap & Tahir, 2023).

Also, Parent-child communication in transnational families presents its unique challenges and dynamics. Parents often use digital media to remain involved in their children's lives, participating in educational decisions, daily care, and moral support through frequent online interactions (Tran & Nguyen, 2023). This form of "digital parenting" can be particularly beneficial in maintaining authority and emotional closeness, but it also requires careful management to avoid over-intrusion or neglect (Morgan & Kellerman, 2021). Younger children might struggle with the concept of distance and absence, which can make digital communication with parents feel inadequate or confusing (Fitzgerald & Graham, 2022). As

children grow older, their needs and expectations from communication evolve, potentially leading to decreased frequency of contact, which parents might interpret as emotional distancing (Xu & Harvey, 2024). On the other hand, teenagers and young adults may leverage digital media to create a balanced dynamic of closeness and independence from their parents, navigating between seeking support and asserting their autonomy (Ortega & Lorenzo, 2022). Each of these relationships within a transnational family's spousal, sibling, and parent-child demonstrates a varied interplay of affection, duty, and individual agency, all mediated through the lens of new media communication. Understanding these dynamics offers insights into the strengths and vulnerabilities of family bonds as they adapt to the realities of global mobility and digital connectivity.

1.2. Statement Of the Problem

While existing research (Osei et al., 2023) has focused on the dynamics of parent-child interactions and spousal relationships within transnational families, the specific communication tones among siblings have not been sufficiently explored (Park & Waldinger, 2016). Transnational families maintain relationships across borders through various communication strategies and care practices. Park and Waldinger (2017) found that the presence of family members in the birth country increases cross-border communication frequency, with siblings playing a significant role. Sampaio and Carvalho (2022) highlighted the impact of legal status on care provision, noting that undocumented siblings often provide emotional support from afar. They also observed gendered expectations in care responsibilities. Bulut (2024) emphasized the importance of innovative communication practices and cultural ties in preserving familial bonds. Dang et al. (2019) revealed the complex, multimodal nature of transnational family communication, involving language, silence, touch, and spatial

orientation. These studies collectively demonstrate the resilience and adaptability of transnational families in maintaining relationships despite geographical separations, while also stressing the challenges they face in navigating legal, cultural, and technological landscapes.

While global migration trends continue to rise, it often results in siblings living in different countries, each adapting to distinct cultural environments (Smith & King, 2018). The role of new media in maintaining these sibling relationships is particularly critical. Digital platforms, including social media, instant messaging, and video calls, have become the primary means of communication across borders. These technologies not only facilitate logistical coordination and sharing of family news but also play a crucial role in emotional bonding and support among siblings (Chen & Choi, 2019). However, despite their widespread use, the effectiveness and emotional quality of these interactions remain underexamined in academic research. Siblings hold unique positions in each other's lives, often sharing long histories and formative experiences. This shared background can create strong emotional bonds that require regular nurturing to maintain, especially in the face of physical separation (Parker & Wang, 2021). The challenge arises in understanding how these bonds are affected when siblings communicate exclusively through digital means. Questions about the depth of emotional connection and the ability to provide mutual support through digital communication are particularly pressing. The communication among siblings in transnational families is a complex issue that includes emotional, cultural, and technological dimensions. As global migration continues to shape family structures, there is a pressing need to delve deeper into how siblings maintain their relationships across distances. This understanding is crucial not only for academic purposes but also for the formulation of social policies and support systems that cater to the needs of transnational families (Xu & Harvey, 2024).

This study aimed to explore the role of new media in the communication patterns of siblings in Ghanaian transnational families.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How do siblings in transnational families use new media to maintain their relationships?
2. What is the effect of new media on the emotional intimacy of sibling relationships across borders?
3. What challenges do siblings face when using new media for communication in transnational contexts?

1.5 Research Objectives

The general objective of the study was to explore how new media technologies facilitate communication dynamics among siblings who live in different countries. Specific objectives were:

1. To investigate how siblings in Ghanaian transnational families use new media to maintain their relationships.
2. To explore the effect of new media on the emotional intimacy of sibling relationships across borders.
3. To identify the challenges siblings face when using new media for communication in transnational contexts.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in its exploration of the under-researched area of new media's influence on sibling relationships in transnational families. This investigation is critical for multiple reasons. First, it will enrich the academic discourse surrounding family communication and the integration of digital media, offering new perspectives and insights. Second, the study will be valuable for families and individuals engaged in long-distance

relationships, as it will present both the advantages and challenges associated with utilizing new media for communication. Finally, the research outcomes will have practical implications for policymakers and organizations dedicated to supporting transnational families, as the findings provide essential data that can be used to craft resources and interventions aimed at fostering robust family bonds across geographical divides.

1.7 Delimitation

This study focuses on the role of communication within transnational families, with a specific emphasis on sibling relationships influenced by new media and transnational communication technologies. It is delimited to siblings in transnational families who actively use digital communication tools, such as social media, messaging platforms, and video conferencing. The research excludes other family dynamics, such as parent-child or extended family relationships, to maintain a focused scope on sibling interactions. Geographically, the study targets transnational families with members residing in Ghana whose siblings are in other countries across the world. It does not delve into communication technologies that are not widely accessible or commonly used by families, ensuring relevance to modern communication practices.

1.8 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of new media in sibling relationships within transnational families, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the reliance on qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, inherently involves subjectivity.

Participants may present idealized or selective accounts of their communication practices, potentially influencing the findings.

Finally, logistical constraints, such as time and resource limitations, restricted the sample size and diversity of participants. A smaller sample size may limit the ability to make broader generalizations, while certain subgroups of siblings within transnational families might be underrepresented, leaving out potentially important perspectives.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

Exploring the communication dynamics within transnational families requires a clear definition of key terms and concepts employed in the study. This clarity ensures accurate understanding and lays the groundwork for examining the effects of digital communication on the relationships between siblings living apart. The following are definitions of pivotal terms commonly referenced in this study.

New Media: Digital forms of communication, such as social media, messaging apps, and other internet-based platforms.

Transnational Families: Families whose members live across national borders, maintaining familial ties, cultural practices, and financial or emotional support across distances typically due to migration for employment, education, or other personal reasons.

Emotional Intimacy: The closeness and emotional bond shared between individuals, characterized by open communication and mutual support.

Digital Communication: The use of digital technologies such as email, social media, messaging apps, and video calling platforms to communicate. It is characterized by the instantaneous transmission of information across long distances.

Digital Literacy: The ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.

Migration: The movement of people from one place to another, often across political or cultural boundaries, to settle temporarily or permanently in a new location.

Communication Dynamics: The patterns and processes involved in personal or social communication, which include the exchange of information, the frequency, mode, and quality of communications, and the effects these have on relationships.

Cultural Identity: The identity or feeling of belonging to a group based on various cultural categories including nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality, or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture.

Digital Divide: The gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information and communications technology, and those that don't or have restricted access. This can include the imbalances in physical access to technology as well as the imbalances in resources and skills needed to effectively participate as a digital citizen.

1.9.1 The Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction, including the background, statement of the problem, purpose, research objectives, research questions, significance, delimitation, limitations, and definitions of terms. Chapter two reviews the relevant literature on new media and family communication. Chapter three outlines the research methodology, including the research design, sampling, data collection, and analysis methods. Chapter four presents the findings and discusses them to the research questions. Finally, chapter five concludes the study, providing a summary of findings, implications, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0. Introduction

Transnational families are families whose members are spread across different nation-states while maintaining close relationships are a defining feature of today's globalized world. The increasing prevalence of transnational families brings forth unique challenges, especially in sustaining relationships across distances and managing varying cultural models. Despite the physical separation, communication technologies play a pivotal role in fostering and maintaining these familial bonds. Among the various relationships within transnational families, sibling dynamics are particularly impacted using new media. As Benítez (2012) posits, the quality of sibling relationships is enhanced by regular communication through digital platforms, which fosters emotional intimacy. Through this review, we explore the role of new media in maintaining relationships, the emotional and relational impacts of communication, and how families cope with the challenges of long-distance communication.

2.1 Communication among Parent-Child Relationships in Transnational Families

The parent-child relationship in transnational families has been the subject of extensive research, particularly concerning how digital media bridges the emotional and physical distance between them. Osei et al. (2023) provide valuable insights into how secondary school students in Ghana use WhatsApp to communicate with their parents living abroad. Despite the geographical separation, these digital interactions offer a sense of presence and involvement in their daily lives. However, the study highlights a key limitation since secondary school students

in Ghana are not permitted to use mobile phones in schools, the findings may not fully capture the complexities of transnational communication. Furthermore, Osei's research, which used in-depth interviews with 38 participants, identified a significant gap in understanding the emotional bonds between parents and children that extend beyond digital communication.

Madianou and Miller (2011, 2012, 2020) further examined the role of new media in maintaining parent-child relationships in their study of Filipino migrant families. Their research, using ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews, found that real-time communication through platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp is essential for preserving the emotional well-being of children left behind. The study shows that frequent and meaningful communication helps alleviate feelings of abandonment among children, especially during critical developmental periods. Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) contribute to this discussion by demonstrating that communication technologies enable parents to remain active participants in their children's lives, even from afar. Their case studies from Europe and Africa reveal that parents use communication technologies to monitor their children's academic progress, health, and well-being. However, the extent of parental involvement depends heavily on the parents' digital literacy, which, in some cases, creates a barrier to effective communication.

2.2 The Role of Digital Media in Sibling Relationships in Transnational Families

While most research on transnational families has centered around parent-child relationships, sibling relationships are equally important but underexplored. Benítez (2012) suggests that sibling relationships in transnational families can be strengthened through regular digital communication, as siblings engage in shared activities such as gaming or watching movies together online. These activities foster a sense of closeness, which is vital for maintaining sibling bonds across distances.

Baldassare's (2008) research adds another dimension to sibling dynamics by highlighting how elder siblings often assume a parental role in the absence of their parents. Through platforms like WhatsApp and Skype, siblings can communicate in real-time, providing each other with emotional support and companionship. Baldassare's study, which focused on Italian families in Australia, found that siblings who maintained regular communication had stronger emotional bonds, even though they were physically separated.

Interestingly, the study by Madianou and Miller (2019) notes that younger siblings often rely more on their elder siblings than their parents for real-time advice and emotional support. This suggests that sibling relationships are crucial in transnational families, particularly when there is a generational or technological gap between parents and children. The digital space provides siblings with opportunities to share their experiences, offer guidance, and maintain a level of intimacy that would otherwise be impossible across long distances.

2.3 Emotional Impact of Communication Technologies on Transnational Families

Communication technologies have become an emotional lifeline for members of transnational families, enabling them to maintain their relationships despite physical separation. Madianou and Miller's (2011) ethnographic research among Filipino families revealed that platforms like WhatsApp and Skype help bridge the emotional gap created by migration. These platforms allow for real-time interaction, which is essential for mitigating feelings of loneliness and isolation, particularly among children and elderly family members.

In a similar study, Carling and Pettersen (2021) explored how Somali families dispersed across Norway, the U.S., and Somalia manage financial remittances through regular communication. While their focus was on financial management, the study also underscored the emotional impact of regular communication in maintaining family cohesion. The study found that

frequent conversations about financial matters provided emotional reassurance for family members in the home country, reinforcing their sense of connection and support. Madianou and Miller (2020) further expanded on this by exploring how communication technologies enhance emotional support among migrant families. Their research highlighted that the emotional well-being of children and elderly family members was significantly improved by frequent digital communication. Video calls were found to reduce feelings of isolation and provide a sense of presence that helped maintain emotional bonds despite physical separation.

2.4 Communication Strategies in Transnational Families

Transnational families use a variety of communication strategies to maintain their relationships and manage the challenges posed by physical separation. Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) noted that parents in transnational families often schedule regular calls or video chats to maintain a sense of routine and continuity in their children's lives. These scheduled interactions provide emotional stability for children and allow parents to remain involved in their daily activities, such as schoolwork and extracurricular activities.

Carling and Pettersen (2021) found that Somali families utilized digital platforms not only for emotional support but also for practical communication, such as managing remittances. This regular, task-oriented communication helps maintain familial responsibilities and ensures that the needs of family members in the home country are met. Additionally, financial remittances are often accompanied by conversations about family matters, further strengthening the emotional connection between transnational family members.

Merla (2019) suggest that family members use new media not just for one-on-one communication but also for group interactions. Group chats on platforms like WhatsApp enable

multiple family members to communicate simultaneously, fostering a sense of community and collective engagement. These interactions allow siblings and other family members to share experiences, coordinate family events, and maintain a sense of belonging.

2.5 Communication and Cultural Transmission in Transnational Families

Another important aspect of communication in transnational families is the transmission of cultural values and practices. Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) found that parents often use digital communication to instill cultural values in their children, particularly when they are growing up in a different cultural context. By sharing stories, traditions, and cultural practices through video calls or social media, parents can ensure that their children remain connected to their cultural heritage.

Similarly, Madianou and Miller (2020) emphasize that the use of new media in transnational families allows for the continuation of cultural traditions, such as celebrating holidays or important family milestones. Through video calls, families can participate in shared cultural activities despite being physically separated. This fosters a sense of cultural continuity and helps children maintain a strong connection to their heritage.

2.6 Gender Dynamics in Transnational Sibling Communication

Gender plays a significant role in communication patterns within transnational families. Parreñas (2001) conducted a study of Filipina domestic workers in the United States and their families in the Philippines, focusing on the gendered nature of communication especially among male and female siblings. Women and female siblings often act as primary caregivers and are more likely to engage in frequent communication to maintain family cohesion. This is

particularly evident in transnational families where the younger woman (female sibling) has migrated, and the male (brother) remains at home with the children. Baldassar and Merla (2019) also explored the role of gender in transnational family communication, focusing on Italian and Belgian families dispersed across Europe and Australia. Their findings indicate that women are more likely to take on the responsibility of maintaining communication with family members, ensuring that emotional bonds and family cohesion are preserved. This gendered division of labor in communication reflects traditional caregiving roles, even in transnational contexts.

2.7 Generational Gaps in Technology Usage among Transnational Families

Generational differences in technology usage can significantly affect communication patterns within transnational families. Skrbiš (2008) explored how older family members, particularly parents and grandparents, often struggle with new communication technologies, while younger members, such as siblings, adapt more easily. This creates a digital divide that can hinder effective communication and create tension within families. Osei et al. (2023) noted a similar generational gap in their study of Ghanaian families, where older siblings often help their younger siblings navigate new media platforms. This intergenerational support is crucial in maintaining communication, as younger siblings often rely on their older counterparts to bridge the technological divide. The generational gap in technology usage can also affect the emotional well-being of family members, as older relatives may feel disconnected from younger family members due to their lack of digital literacy.

2.8 The Role of social media in Transnational Family Communication

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have emerged as powerful tools for maintaining relationships in transnational families. Madianou and Miller (2019) highlight how social media provides a space for family members to share their daily experiences, celebrate milestones, and stay updated on each other's lives. This constant flow of information helps foster a sense of community and belonging, even when family members are geographically dispersed.

Also, Carling and Pettersen (2021) found that social media platforms also play a crucial role in managing practical aspects of family life, such as coordinating financial remittances and providing updates on family events. Social media allows for real-time communication, which is essential for managing the complex dynamics of transnational family life. While new media fosters closeness among siblings, it can also worsen sibling rivalry in some cases. Skrbiš (2008) noted that younger siblings may feel neglected if older siblings assume a parental role or dominate communication channels. This can lead to feelings of resentment and jealousy, particularly if older siblings are perceived to be more proficient in navigating new media.

At the same time, sibling cooperation is enhanced through digital platforms, as siblings can collaborate on tasks such as organizing family events or providing support for one another. Baldassar (2008) found that sibling cooperation is often strengthened through shared digital experiences, such as playing online games or participating in video calls together. These activities help foster a sense of camaraderie and mutual support, which is crucial for maintaining strong sibling relationships in transnational families.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

The Polymedia Theory

Polymedia Theory was developed by Madianou and Miller (2012) to explain how individuals navigate and use various communication technologies in contexts where multiple media are accessible. It moves beyond the technical features of media to focus on how users strategically choose between different platforms based on their social and emotional needs. The theory posits that when people have access to a wide array of communication tools, the choice of media becomes an important part of how relationships are managed. Rather than simply focusing on technical aspects such as cost or availability, polymedia theory emphasizes the relational and emotional implications of media choice in communication (Madianou & Miller, 2012).

A key tenet of polymedia theory is the idea of media ecology, which suggests that different forms of media coexist and interact within a person's communication environment. This means that individuals often use various media platforms in complementary ways, depending on the nature of their relationships and the context of their communication. For example, siblings in transnational families may use WhatsApp for quick messages, social media for sharing updates, and video calls for more intimate conversations. The theory highlights that these choices are not arbitrary but are made based on the emotional and social context of the interaction (Madianou & Miller, 2013). By focusing on the relational dimensions of media use, polymedia theory allows researchers to examine how people manage their relationships through different communication channels.

Polymedia theory also places agency at the center of media use, emphasizing that individuals make conscious choices about which media to use based on the nature of the relationship and the message being communicated. In transnational families, siblings separated by geographical

distances rely heavily on new media to maintain their relationships, and their choice of media is often influenced by emotional factors (Madianou & Miller, 2012). For instance, they might opt for video calls to convey important news or share emotional moments, while text messaging or social media may be reserved for routine interactions. The theory thus provides a useful framework for understanding how siblings in transnational families use different media to strengthen or maintain emotional bonds despite the physical distance. In the context of the study on the role of communication in transnational families, polymedia theory is particularly relevant because it helps explain how siblings navigate the complexities of long-distance relationships through media. The theory's focus on the emotional and relational dimensions of media use aligns with the study's examination of how new media platforms impact sibling relationships. Polymedia theory suggests that siblings do not merely use technology to communicate but do so in ways that manage and even enhance their emotional connections. For example, a sibling may choose to engage in a video call during important family events to feel more present or use messaging apps to engage in shared activities, such as playing online games, to maintain a sense of closeness (Benítez, 2012).

Applying polymedia theory, the study can also explore how the emotional needs of siblings influence their media choices and how those choices affect the quality of their relationships. This theory offers a comprehensive lens through which the emotional and social impacts of transnational communication can be studied. It also highlights the need to consider how siblings in transnational families navigate the various challenges posed by geographical separation, such as time zone differences and cultural shifts, by strategically using different media to manage their interactions. Therefore, polymedia theory provides an ideal framework for understanding the nuanced ways in which communication technologies shape sibling relationships in transnational families.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework and research methodology used to explore the role of new media in the communication patterns of siblings in transnational families. The chapter discusses the research approaches, design, study setting, target population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, data handling, analysis methods, and ethical considerations. It concludes with a summary of the chapter.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy underpinning this study is Interpretivism. Interpretivism, with its emphasis on understanding the meanings that individuals assign to their social realities, is particularly suited to exploring how siblings use new media to maintain their relationships across vast distances (Bryman, 2016). Focusing on individual experiences and perceptions, Interpretivism allows for an in-depth exploration of how digital communication tools are embedded within the daily lives of these families, giving the variability and richness of their interactions.

The flexibility of Interpretivism is crucial in examining the dynamics of sibling communication in different cultural and geographical contexts. It supports the use of qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of communication logs, which are ideal for capturing the detailed narratives and complex emotions involved in maintaining sibling relationships via new media (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For example, the interpretation

of text messages, the emotional nuances conveyed through video calls, and the role of social media in creating shared spaces of interaction are all subjective experiences that can be effectively explored through an interpretive lens. Also, Interpretivism's commitment to understanding phenomena within specific social contexts allows the study to account for the diverse ways in which transnational siblings use and are affected by new media, depending on their cultural backgrounds and personal circumstances (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This philosophical approach recognizes that the meanings of digital interactions are not static but are constructed and reconstructed over time. As such, it provides a robust framework for developing a deeper understanding of the ongoing changes in sibling relationships facilitated by new media, offering valuable insights that can inform both theoretical perspectives and practical interventions aimed at supporting transnational families.

3.2 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, ideal for delving into the social phenomena of sibling relationships in transnational families. The qualitative methodology is particularly effective for capturing the balanced experiences, diverse perspectives, and emotional depths of individuals spread across different geographical locations. With a focus on the subjective experiences of siblings who rely on new media for communication, this approach will allow the researcher to uncover rich, detailed narratives that quantitative methods might overlook (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These methods enable researchers to gather firsthand insights into the frequency, content, and emotional tone of interactions between siblings. Furthermore, this approach helps in identifying the underlying meanings and significance that participants attach to their digital interactions. Through such detailed inquiry, the study seeks to understand not just the surface patterns of communication, but also the emotional and psychological impacts

of these interactions. The choice of a qualitative approach also facilitates an exploration of the complexities introduced by varying cultural backgrounds, societal norms, and personal expectations within transnational families. Each sibling relationship can be influenced by different cultural understandings of family roles and communication practices, which are essential factors to consider in transnational contexts. Qualitative methods are uniquely suited to explore how these cultural differences manifest in everyday communication and affect relationship dynamics.

Additionally, the qualitative approach allows for adaptability and reflexivity in research design. As the study progresses, initial findings can lead to adjustments in the research questions or methods, providing flexibility that is particularly beneficial in dynamic and complex settings like those of transnational families. This adaptiveness ensures that the research remains relevant and responsive to the realities of participants' lives, thereby enhancing the validity and depth of the findings.

3.3 Research Design

The study employs a case study research design, which is particularly suited for exploring the complex and individualized experiences of siblings in transnational families who frequently use new media to maintain their connections. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of specific instances where digital communication plays a crucial role in nurturing sibling relationships across different geographic and cultural divides (Arora et al., 2023). A case study design is beneficial for understanding the unique contexts within which these interactions occur, offering a detailed examination of particular situations rather than generalizing across broader populations (Simons, 2014; Grant et al., 2020). Focusing on specific cases, the

research delve into the complex ways in which siblings use various digital platforms to share life updates, provide emotional support, and navigate the challenges posed by distance and differing time zones. Techniques such as detailed interviews, analysis of communication logs, and observation of interactions on social media platforms enable the researcher to gather comprehensive data on how digital tools are employed in maintaining these familial bonds (Abel et al., 2020). This method emphasizes not only the functional uses of new media but also the rich emotional layers and renegotiations of family roles and identities that occur within these interactions (Abel et al., 2020).

Moreover, the case study approach provides a framework for capturing the diverse experiences of sibling groups from different transnational settings, allowing for a detailed comparison and contrast. This can illuminate both common patterns and unique variations in how siblings sustain their relationships through digital means. Such detailed case analyses contributed to a better understanding of how digital communication technologies can be optimized to support family cohesion in transnational contexts (Houen et al., 2020).

3.4 Study Setting

The study was conducted among internet users in Accra. Accra is chosen specifically because internet availability and access is higher in Accra than other parts of the country with a focus on transnational siblings who are active on social media platforms. Participants were recruited from transnational families who are in Accra and have siblings outside Ghana. This setting allows the researcher to access a diverse pool of participants from different geographical locations, providing a broad perspective on the use of new media in sibling relationships across borders

3.5 Target Population

The research population is defined by Mneimneh et al., (2021) as all feasible components, individuals, or observations connected to a certain phenomenon of interest to the researcher. The target population for this study consists of adult siblings who are residents of Accra and are part of transnational families and who use new media regularly to communicate with each other across borders. The study focuses on siblings aged 18 and above, as they are likely to have established communication patterns and the ability to articulate their experiences effectively.

3.6 Sample and Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique is used to select participants for the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that allows the researcher to select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, the criteria include being an adult sibling in a transnational family residing in Accra and using new media regularly for communication. Given the qualitative nature of the study, a sample size of 15 siblings was used to achieve in-depth understanding and allow for comprehensive analysis. This sampling technique ensured that the selected participants have direct experience with the phenomenon under study and can provide rich, detailed insights into their use of new media for maintaining sibling relationships.

3.7 Data Collection methods and Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method for this study. This method allows for flexibility in exploring participants' experiences while ensuring that the core research questions are addressed. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed

to obtain detailed responses about the use of new media in sibling communication, the impact on emotional intimacy, and any challenges encountered. The semi-structured format allows participants to share their stories in their own words, providing depth and context to the data.

3.8 Information and Data Handling

Gathering, arranging, storing, and displaying data in a way that facilitates efficient use and retrieval is known as information handling (Everitt, 2001). The collection, organisation, analysis, and interpretation of data constitute the fundamental tasks of data handling in research. It is vital to guarantee that the data gathered is dependable, accurate, and consistent. The data collected from the interviews was digitally recorded, with participants' consent, to ensure accuracy and completeness. The recordings were then be transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.9 Analysis and Presentation

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected from the interviews. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involves several steps: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This approach allows the researcher to systematically explore the data, identify key themes related to the research questions, and provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of new media in sibling relationships within transnational families.

3.9.1 Ethical Issues

The research ethics observed in this study were line with the principles of beneficence, respect for human dignity, and justice, according to Polit (2019). Several ethical considerations were addressed in this study to ensure the rights and well-being of participants are protected. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews using the consent forms that explained the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process, with all information being securely stored and only accessible to the researcher. The data was stored securely on a password-protected computer, and access is restricted to the researcher and supervisor. To maintain anonymity, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts, and pseudonyms will be used in all written reports.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the Theoretical Framework and research methodology for the study on the role of new media in transnational communication among siblings. It has detailed the qualitative research approach, phenomenological design, study setting, target population, sampling technique, data collection instruments, data handling, analysis methods, and ethical considerations. These methodological choices are intended to provide a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study with 15 participants, aged 18 to 55, representing a range of professions and familial contexts analysed through thematic analysis, to address the research questions and objectives. The primary aim of this research was to explore the role of new media in maintaining sibling relationships within transnational families, focusing on how these tools facilitate communication, foster emotional intimacy, and overcome challenges. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews with participants from Ghanaian transnational families. A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants who actively use new media for communication with their siblings across borders. This approach ensured a diverse representation of age, gender, and geographic locations, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of communication dynamics.

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes from the interview data, aligning with the qualitative nature of the study. The findings are organized around the research questions and supported by participants' responses, theoretical insights, and existing literature. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis and discussion of how siblings leverage new media to maintain their relationships, the emotional impact of these tools, and the challenges they encounter.

4.1 How Siblings in Transnational Families Use New Media

This section explores how siblings in transnational families utilize new media to maintain their relationships. Themes such as communication frequency, the use of diverse platforms, and the role of rituals emerged as significant factors in sustaining familial bonds across borders. These themes illustrate the strategic and intentional ways siblings navigate digital communication to bridge physical distance and remain emotionally connected. Leveraging various platforms and adapting their communication styles to meet their needs, siblings demonstrate resilience and creativity in maintaining relationships despite the challenges of geographic separation.

4.1.2 Platforms Used

Participants demonstrated a varied approach to platform selection, choosing tools based on their unique communication needs. For quick updates and casual interactions, text-based platforms like WhatsApp were widely preferred due to their accessibility and ease of use. Meanwhile, platforms such as Zoom and Skype were reserved for extended conversations or virtual gatherings, offering richer interactions. Instagram and Facebook also played a role in sharing photos and videos, fostering a sense of shared experiences. *For example, Akosua, a 35-year-old nurse living in Ghana with a Sibling in Canada, explained, “WhatsApp is great for everyday chats, but when we need to have a serious conversation, we switch to Zoom because it feels more personal.” Similarly, Nana, a 20-year-old university student in Ghana, shared, “I send pictures of my day on Instagram to my sister in the US. It’s a way for her to see what’s going on in my life, even if we don’t talk every day.”*

The strategic use of diverse platforms aligns with the concept of media multiplexity, as discussed by Baym (2015), which highlights that stronger relationships tend to utilize multiple communication channels. Text-based platforms enable frequent and lightweight communication, while video-based tools offer the depth needed for emotionally significant interactions. By diversifying their platform usage, participants ensured that their communication remained dynamic and responsive to varying needs.

4.1.3 Frequency of Communication

While platform choice was key, the frequency of communication also played a critical role in maintaining sibling relationships. Many participants reported daily or weekly interactions through platforms like WhatsApp, often sharing small updates, jokes, or check-ins to remain involved in each other's lives. Video calls on platforms like Zoom were typically scheduled weekly or around significant events to allow for deeper conversations. Kwame (not real name), a 29-year-old software developer in Ghana, and his brother Kojo, who lives in the UK. The time difference between the Ghana and UK, which is typically one hour but sometimes aligns during certain periods of the year to have deeper conversations, plays a subtle but impactful role in how they structure their communication.

explained, Kwame *"Since I finish work around 6 PM Ghana time, it's already evening in the UK, and my brother is usually wrapping up his day. We can only have short conversations during the week, so we save our longer chats for the weekend when we're both free."* Kwame added, *"The time difference isn't huge, but it still limits when we can talk properly. Sometimes, if he's busy late into the night, I leave him a voice note and wait for his response the next day."*

The regularity of these interactions reflects the importance of frequent contact in fostering emotional closeness. Ellison et al. (2021) emphasize that platforms like WhatsApp facilitate both synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (delayed) communication, making it easier for users to maintain regular contact regardless of time zone differences. This consistency helped participants bridge emotional gaps and sustain their relationships across borders.

4.1.4 Use of Diverse Platforms

Participants demonstrated a varied approach to platform selection, choosing specific tools based on the purpose and context of their communication. For quick updates and casual interactions, text-based platforms like WhatsApp were preferred. Meanwhile, Zoom or Skype were used for more extended conversations or virtual gatherings, such as family meetings or celebrations. Akosua, a 35-year-old nurse living in Ghana, and her brother Yaw, who resides in Canada. The time difference between Ghana and Canada, which ranges from 4 to 6 hours depending on the season, significantly impacts how and when they communicate.

Akosua shared, “Because of the time difference, I often leave WhatsApp messages for Yaw during the day while I’m on break at work. By the time he wakes up and reads them, it’s already late in Ghana. We use Zoom for longer conversations, but it’s tricky to find a time that works for both of us unless it’s on the weekend.”

The strategic use of diverse platforms aligns with the concept of media multiplexity discussed in Baym (2015), which emphasizes that stronger relationships tend to utilize multiple communication channels. Platforms like Instagram, with their visual focus, allow siblings to share snapshots of their lives, fostering a sense of shared experiences. Meanwhile, video calls enable richer interactions by incorporating verbal and non-verbal cues, enhancing emotional

closeness. Siblings effectively leveraged these platforms to adapt to their varying schedules, cultural expectations, and emotional needs, ensuring that their communication remained meaningful and contextually appropriate. The strategic use of diverse platforms underscores the importance of flexibility and intentionality in sustaining relationships across transnational settings, reflecting the evolving nature of digital communication in family dynamics. This versatility not only enhances the frequency of interactions but also reinforces the emotional depth and significance of sibling bonds.

4.1.5 Role of Rituals in Communication

Rituals emerged as another significant factor in maintaining sibling relationships, providing structure and continuity in their interactions. These rituals often included scheduled weekly calls, virtual celebrations of milestones, or routine messages on special occasions. Participants found that such practices reinforced a sense of normalcy and connection, even in the face of physical separation. Adwoa, a 30-year-old teacher living in Ghana, and her brother Kojo, who resides in Germany. The time difference between Ghana and Germany, typically one hour, is less pronounced compared to other transnational families, but it still requires coordination for synchronous interactions, particularly during busy schedules.

Adwoa explained, “Our Sunday Zoom calls have become a family tradition, but we always plan them for the evening, around 7 PM my time, because that’s when Kojo is done with his day. Even with just a one-hour difference, it can be tricky because sometimes I have late commitments, or he’s delayed at work.” These rituals are consistent with findings by Madianou and Miller (2012), who emphasize the role of digital communication in preserving family traditions and reinforcing relational bonds in transnational contexts. Ritualized interactions

offer siblings a shared space to connect, reflect, and sustain their emotional ties, ensuring that their relationships remain a priority despite the challenges of distance and differing schedules.

4.2 The Effect of New Media on the Emotional Intimacy of Sibling Relationships Across Borders

The use of new media has significantly influenced the emotional intimacy of sibling relationships in transnational families. Enabling frequent and meaningful communication, digital tools have become a lifeline for maintaining emotional bonds despite geographic separation. Siblings use these platforms not only to stay in touch but also to provide emotional support, celebrate milestones, and reinforce their connections. This section examines the role of new media in fostering emotional intimacy through three key themes: visual and verbal presence, emotional support, and reinforcement of bonds.

4.2.1 Visual and Verbal Presence

Video calls have emerged as a critical tool for fostering emotional intimacy among siblings in transnational families. Participants highlighted the unique ability of video-based communication to replicate elements of face-to-face interactions, allowing siblings to see and hear each other in real-time. This created a sense of presence and connection that text-based platforms could not replicate. Adjoa, a 25-year-old teacher living in Ghana, shared, *“Seeing my sister’s smile during a video call makes me feel like she’s right here with me, even though we’re miles apart.”* Visual cues, such as facial expressions and gestures, play a pivotal role in conveying emotions and maintaining closeness. Also, Kwame, a 29-year-old software

developer in Ghana, explained, “When we talk over video, I can tell how my brother is feeling just by looking at his face. It’s not something you can always pick up in a text.” These insights align with the findings by Jiang and Bazarova (2021), who emphasize that visual elements in digital communication foster emotional closeness by providing a richer context for understanding.

Verbal cues, such as tone of voice and laughter, further enhance the sense of connection during video calls. Participants described how hearing their sibling’s voice brought comfort and familiarity, reinforcing the closeness they shared despite being physically apart. As Akosua, a 35-year-old nurse in Canada, remarked, *“Hearing my brother laugh during our video calls instantly lifts my mood. It feels like we’re back home, talking like we used to.”* This combination of visual and verbal elements makes video calls an indispensable medium for maintaining sibling relationships across borders. Video calls provide a multidimensional interaction that replicates key aspects of face-to-face communication, enabling siblings to express themselves more authentically and meaningfully. Allowing siblings to share not only their words but also their expressions and voices, video calls sustain the depth and quality of their relationships, making them a critical tool for emotional intimacy in transnational families.

4.2.2 Emotional Support and Reinforcement of Bonds

New media platforms play a crucial role in providing emotional support and reinforcing sibling bonds in transnational families. These tools enable siblings to maintain a sense of emotional presence, share life milestones, and provide comfort during challenging times. Participants consistently highlighted how digital communication tools like WhatsApp and Zoom helped them stay emotionally connected, despite physical separation. For many participants, new

media offered a reliable way to provide and receive emotional reassurance during difficult periods. Kwame, a 29-year-old software developer in Ghana, shared, *“When I was sick, my brother called me every day to check on me. Even though he couldn’t be there in person, his calls made me feel cared for.”* Similarly, Akosua, a 35-year-old nurse in Ghana, explained, *“When I was going through a rough time, my sister’s daily WhatsApp messages reminded me that she was always there for me, even from afar.”* These examples underscore how digital communication helps siblings maintain their supportive roles, offering comfort and stability during times of need. Beyond providing emotional support, new media also reinforces sibling bonds by enabling them to participate in each other’s milestones and achievements. Virtual celebrations facilitated through platforms like Zoom and WhatsApp, allow siblings to share significant moments, such as birthdays, graduations, and job promotions, despite the geographic divide. As Nana, a 22-year-old university student in Ghana, reflected, *“Even though my brother couldn’t attend my graduation in person, he joined the ceremony over Zoom. It made the day feel complete.”* Similarly, Abena, a 23-year-old student in Ghana, shared, *“When I got promoted, my sister sent a congratulatory video to our family group chat. It meant a lot to me.”* While these platforms provide opportunities to remain involved in each other’s lives, participants acknowledged that digital communication cannot fully replicate the experience of physical presence. Kojo, a 28-year-old engineer in Ghana, noted, *“We try to celebrate everything virtually, but it’s not the same as being there together.”* Nevertheless, the ability to share emotions and milestones through digital tools ensures that siblings remain emotionally present and connected, reinforcing their bonds in meaningful ways.

4.3 Challenges Siblings Face When Using New Media for Communication in Transnational Contexts

4.3.1 Technical Issues

One of the most frequently cited challenges was poor internet connectivity, which disrupted communication and caused frustration. Participants reported experiencing interrupted calls, lagging video chats, and dropped connections, especially during adverse weather conditions. For instance, Kwame, a 29-year-old software developer, shared, *“When it rains, the network is so bad that we can’t even complete a proper conversation.”* Similarly, Akosua, a 35-year-old nurse explained, *“There were times when the network was so unstable that I had to switch to sending texts instead of making a call.”* Participants noted that these technical issues not only made conversations less fluid but also affected the emotional depth of their interactions. When siblings relied on video calls to convey emotional situations, disruptions in connectivity often led to frustration and disengagement. Adjoa, a 25-year-old teacher, added, *“Sometimes, we are in the middle of a heartfelt conversation, and the call drops. It ruins the moment.”* This aligns with Madianou and Miller’s (2012) concept of polymedia, which suggests that users’ access and choice of media are shaped by contextual factors, such as infrastructure and affordability. These technical challenges are increased in underserved areas where internet access is less reliable. Participants living in such areas expressed difficulty coordinating regular communication with their siblings abroad. Yaw, a 28-year-old teacher, commented, *“In my area, the internet breaks are so frequent that we’ve had to limit our calls to just weekends when the network is slightly better.”* Improved internet infrastructure and affordable, reliable access to digital platforms are essential to address these issues. Participants suggested that service providers should prioritize network stability and introduce features that help maintain communication during unstable connections, such as low-bandwidth options for video calls.

4.3.2 Miscommunication and Misunderstandings

Another common challenge was the risk of miscommunication, particularly when using text-based platforms. The absence of verbal tone and non-verbal cues often led to misunderstandings among siblings. Ama, a 20-year-old student in Ghana, shared, *“Sometimes, what I mean in a message is not how my sibling interprets it. This has caused small arguments before.”* Similarly, Kojo, a 28-year-old engineer, explained, *“It’s hard to convey emotions through text, and this can make serious conversations feel impersonal.”* This challenge aligns with Goffman’s (1959) theory of impression management, which highlights how non-verbal cues play a critical role in shaping interpersonal understanding. Without these cues, text-based communication can result in unintended interpretations.

Participants highlighted that misunderstandings were more likely to occur during emotionally charged or sensitive discussions. Adwoa, a 30-year-old teacher, noted, *“When discussing a family issue, my message was misunderstood, and it escalated the situation until we cleared things up later in the call”*. To resolve such issues, participants often turned to voice notes or video calls, which allowed them to express their emotions more clearly. Nana, a 22-year-old university student, said, *“When I feel like my message wasn’t understood, I follow up with a call to explain myself.”* Baym’s (2015) work on media multiplexity further supports this, suggesting that the use of multiple platforms, such as transitioning from text to voice or video calls, can help mitigate miscommunication. Participants emphasized that using richer communication methods enhanced emotional clarity and reduced conflicts, demonstrating their adaptability in navigating this challenge. Despite these workarounds, siblings emphasized the importance of being patient and clarifying intentions during text-based exchanges to avoid unnecessary conflict. The challenge of miscommunication highlights the need for platforms to incorporate features that enable clearer emotional expression, such as tone indicators or richer

text formatting options. These tools could help bridge the gap between digital and face-to-face communication, reducing the risk of misunderstandings.

4.3.3 Time Zone Differences and Scheduling Conflicts

Time zone differences posed a significant barrier to regular and meaningful communication. Siblings living in different countries often struggled to find mutually convenient times for calls due to their varying schedules. Kwame, in Ghana, and his sister in UK had to coordinate calls around their work and personal commitments. Kwame explained, *“By the time I’m free after work, it’s already late afternoon in the UK, and my sister is busy finishing up her day. Sometimes, we have to postpone our calls because she’s too occupied with work but when the time is equal, we enjoy nice conversation he added”* Participants shared that these scheduling conflicts often resulted in fewer real-time interactions, with asynchronous methods such as voice notes or messages becoming more common. Akosua remarked, *“We leave voice notes for each other because it’s hard to align our schedules. It’s not the same as talking live, but it works.”*

While siblings adapted by prioritizing weekends or special occasions for live conversations, the lack of spontaneity in their interactions sometimes made the relationships feel less dynamic. Ama 22 years shared, *“We plan our calls so much that it feels formal, not like how we used to talk when we lived together.”* To address this, participants suggested introducing features such as integrated scheduling tools within communication platforms to simplify coordinating across time zones. These tools could help siblings maintain their connections without the stress of constantly adjusting their schedules.

4.3.4 Emotional and Social Challenges

The absence of physical presence in digital communication often limits the emotional depth of sibling interactions in transnational families. While new media provides a vital connection, participants expressed that it could not fully replicate the warmth and immediacy of face-to-face conversations. Adjoa, a 55-year-old mother, noted, *“You can’t hug someone over a video call. Sometimes, I just want to be there physically, especially during important moments.”* This sentiment highlights the inherent limitations of digital platforms in fostering physical closeness, which plays a significant role in emotional intimacy. One of the major challenges participants faced was discussing sensitive topics through digital platforms. Yaw, a 40-year-old teacher, explained, *“When we talk about family problems or personal issues, it’s hard to express everything through a screen. There’s a barrier that makes it less personal.”* This reflects the struggles many siblings face when trying to convey complex emotions or provide comfort through a medium that lacks physical cues like touch, body language, or shared physical spaces. For some, these missing elements made emotional support feel less impactful and less genuine. These findings align with media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), which suggests that the effectiveness of communication channels depends on their ability to convey rich information. While video calls are richer than text-based communication, they still fall short of replicating the tactile and embodied experiences of in-person interactions. The ability to provide a comforting hug or share physical proximity during emotionally significant moments cannot be replicated digitally. This limitation reinforces the idea that digital communication tools, while effective for maintaining contact, have inherent constraints in addressing the deeper emotional needs of siblings in transnational contexts. Another significant challenge was the emotional exhaustion that sometimes-accompanied digital communication. Siblings reported that the need to maintain regular contact, despite the limitations of digital tools, could

feel overwhelming. Yaw shared, *“There’s this constant pressure to keep checking in and being present digitally, but it’s not the same as being there. Sometimes it just feels draining.”* This reflects the broader challenge of managing emotional labour in long-distance relationships, where digital tools demand a different kind of emotional investment compared to face-to-face interactions. To address these challenges, some participants expressed a desire for more immersive technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), which could create a greater sense of presence and interactivity. These tools, discussed by Baym (2015) in the context of digital communication, have the potential to bridge some of the gaps left by traditional video or text-based platforms.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter analysed and presented the findings of the study, focusing on how siblings in transnational families use new media to maintain their relationships. Using thematic analysis, the chapter explored three core aspects: how siblings leverage new media platforms, the effect of these tools on emotional intimacy, and the challenges faced in digital communication. The findings revealed that siblings use a variety of platforms, such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Instagram, to sustain their bonds. These platforms were chosen strategically based on the purpose and context of communication, ranging from quick updates to in-depth conversations. Regular communication and ritualized practices, such as weekly calls or virtual celebrations, emerged as essential strategies for maintaining emotional closeness despite physical distance. The study also highlighted the impact of new media on emotional intimacy. Siblings emphasized the importance of video calls, which replicate aspects of face-to-face interactions by enabling visual and verbal presence. However, while new media facilitated emotional support and the reinforcement of bonds, it could not fully replicate the depth of physical presence, particularly during significant life events or challenging times. The chapter further identified key challenges siblings face when using new media, including technical issues, miscommunication, time zone differences, and the limitations of digital tools in addressing emotional and cultural expectations. These barriers, though significant, were navigated through adaptive strategies such as asynchronous communication, platform diversification, and scheduling flexibility.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study, summarizing its findings, presenting conclusions, and offering recommendations for future research and practice. The study explored how siblings in transnational families use new media to maintain their relationships, focusing on its role in fostering emotional intimacy and the challenges associated with digital communication. The research employed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews to collect data from a purposive sample of 15 participants aged between 20 and 55. These participants were selected to reflect diverse geographic locations, professions, and sibling dynamics. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes from the data, providing a detailed understanding of how siblings navigate communication across borders. The findings are presented according to the research objectives, ensuring a clear link between the study's goals and the insights gained.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study are structured around the key research objectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of how siblings in transnational families utilize new media to sustain their relationships. Participants revealed that digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and social media play an integral role in maintaining consistent communication despite geographical separation. These tools enable siblings to share updates about their daily lives, celebrate milestones, and offer emotional support, thereby fostering a sense of togetherness.

The data highlighted the adaptability of siblings in leveraging multiple forms of communication text messages, video calls, and group chats to stay connected, illustrating the versatility of new media in bridging physical distance. In terms of emotional intimacy, the study found that new media significantly influences the depth and quality of sibling relationships. While regular digital interactions often enhance emotional closeness by creating a sense of co-presence, participants noted that such communication could sometimes lack the depth of face-to-face interactions. Certain non-verbal cues, such as body language and tone of voice, are diminished in text-based communication, which may occasionally lead to misunderstandings. However, siblings frequently emphasized that the convenience and immediacy of digital tools allowed them to provide timely emotional support, mitigating the negative effects of physical distance and strengthening their bonds.

The study also uncovered several challenges associated with the use of new media in transnational sibling relationships. Time zone differences, technological limitations, and occasional miscommunication were identified as recurring obstacles. Participants expressed frustration with the inability to align schedules for real-time interactions and highlighted the uneven quality of internet access in different regions as a barrier. Additionally, the reliance on digital platforms was seen by some as contributing to a superficial connection, with siblings feeling that they were sometimes only "digitally present" in each other's lives. These findings underscore the complexities of maintaining sibling relationships in transnational contexts and emphasize the need for intentionality in digital communication to sustain meaningful emotional connections.

5.2 How Siblings Use New Media to Maintain Relationships

Participants revealed that new media platforms, including WhatsApp, Zoom, and Instagram, played a vital role in facilitating communication and maintaining sibling relationships across borders. Regular communication, often daily or weekly, emerged as a key strategy. Text messages, video calls, and shared multimedia were commonly used to create a sense of presence and togetherness. Siblings adopted diverse communication practices to sustain their bonds. Many used multiple platforms strategically: WhatsApp for quick updates, Zoom for in-depth conversations, and Instagram for sharing visual moments of their lives. Ritualized communication, such as weekly family calls and virtual celebrations of milestones, provided structure and continuity. Sharing everyday experiences, such as photos, voice notes, and updates, helped siblings maintain emotional proximity, fostering a sense of involvement in each other's lives despite physical separation.

5.3 The Effect of New Media on Emotional Intimacy

New media significantly enhanced emotional intimacy among siblings by enabling visual and verbal presence. Video calls were highlighted as particularly effective in replicating face-to-face interactions, allowing siblings to see and hear each other, which fostered a stronger sense of connection. These tools were instrumental in providing emotional support during crises, such as health challenges or personal difficulties, as siblings used them to stay present and offer reassurance. Participants also emphasized the role of new media in sharing milestones and achievements, such as graduations or promotions, through virtual celebrations or multimedia messages. These practices reinforced emotional bonds and created shared moments of joy. However, limitations were also noted. The inability of digital communication to fully convey

deeper emotions or resolve conflicts was frequently cited, underscoring the limitations of new media in addressing complex relational dynamics.

5.4 Challenges in Using New Media for Communication

Participants identified several challenges in using new media for communication. Technical issues, such as poor internet connectivity and frequent disruptions, were common barriers that hindered seamless interactions. These challenges were particularly pronounced in rural or underserved areas, where reliable access to digital platforms was limited. Time zone differences posed another significant challenge, complicating the scheduling of real-time conversations. Siblings often had to rely on asynchronous methods, such as voice notes or text messages, to bridge these temporal gaps. Miscommunication was also a frequent issue, particularly in text-based interactions, where the lack of non-verbal cues often led to misunderstandings.

Additionally, participants reported emotional fatigue from the constant effort to maintain regular contact, compounded by cultural pressures to uphold familial obligations. These challenges highlight the dual role of new media as both an enabler and a constraint in sustaining sibling relationships across borders.

5.5 Conclusion

The study concludes that new media serves as an indispensable tool in maintaining sibling relationships within transnational families. Digital platforms such as social media, video calls, and instant messaging applications provide siblings with flexible and accessible means of communication, enabling them to bridge physical distances effectively. These tools allow siblings to share significant moments, provide emotional support, and maintain a sense of involvement in each other's lives despite geographical separation. By leveraging these technologies, siblings can overcome many of the barriers posed by distance, creating a sense of co-presence that helps sustain their familial bonds. However, while new media facilitates consistent communication, the findings reveal its limitations in replicating the depth and authenticity of in-person interactions. Participants noted that while digital communication allows them to remain connected, it often lacks the emotional richness and immediacy of face-to-face exchanges. Non-verbal cues such as body language, physical touch, and varied vocal intonations, which play a significant role in building emotional intimacy, are diminished or absent in digital interactions. This limitation occasionally leaves siblings feeling disconnected or misunderstood, particularly during emotionally charged or complex conversations. Consequently, while new media bridges physical gaps, it cannot entirely replace the emotional depth of physical presence.

The study also highlights the various challenges that siblings encounter in using new media for communication. Technological issues, such as poor internet connectivity and time zone differences, frequently disrupt interactions, creating frustration and, at times, emotional distance. Participants also reported instances of miscommunication, often attributed to the absence of contextual cues in text-based communication. Additionally, cultural expectations and differing communication styles sometimes led to misunderstandings, further complicating

sibling relationships. These challenges underscore the importance of intentional and adaptive communication strategies to mitigate the drawbacks of digital interactions in transnational contexts.

In summary, the findings point out the complex interplay between technology and emotional bonds in sustaining sibling relationships across borders. While new media provides crucial support for maintaining these relationships, it is not a perfect substitute for in-person interactions. The study suggests that advancements in digital communication technologies, such as virtual reality and immersive platforms, could offer more effective ways to simulate physical presence and enhance emotional connection.

5.6 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed, with specific responsibilities assigned to relevant stakeholders to enhance sibling communication in transnational families

1. Enhance Digital Communication Tools

Technology companies and developers of communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Instagram should focus on integrating features that replicate physical presence. For example, incorporating virtual reality (VR) spaces where users can interact in shared virtual environments or improving video and audio quality to make conversations feel more natural can address the emotional needs of users. Developers should also include features such as tone indicators for text communication and immersive shared activities to foster emotional closeness

2. Promote Digital Literacy

Educational institutions, NGOs, and local governments should collaborate to design digital literacy programs targeting underserved populations, particularly in rural areas or low-resource settings. These initiatives should teach individuals how to use new media platforms effectively, including practical training on navigating features like video calls, asynchronous communication, and troubleshooting connectivity issues. For instance, community centres could host free workshops or provide online tutorials tailored to the needs of transnational families.

3. Improve Infrastructure and Accessibility

Governments, telecommunications companies, and internet service providers (ISPs) should prioritize investments in reliable internet infrastructure, particularly in rural or underserved areas where connectivity issues are prevalent. Policies that incentivize ISPs to expand their services to these regions, such as subsidies or tax breaks for rural network expansions, could address technical barriers. Additionally, international development organizations, such as the World Bank or UNDP, should fund initiatives to improve digital access in developing countries, ensuring that families across borders have equal opportunities to stay connected.

4. Future Research Directions

Academic institutions and research funding bodies, such as national research councils or international organizations like UNESCO, should sponsor studies that examine the long-term effects of new media on sibling relationships. Comparative studies exploring communication practices across different cultural contexts could provide insights into universal and unique dynamics in transnational families. Additionally, researchers should investigate the potential of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR), in transforming digital communication. Government research grants and private-sector partnerships with technology companies could accelerate innovations that enhance relational bonds in transnational families.

5.7 Suggestions for Future Research

To enhance the understanding of how new media influences sibling relationships in transnational families, future research should consider exploring several areas that extend beyond the scope of this study. One important avenue is examining the longitudinal impacts of digital communication on sibling relationships. Future studies could investigate how sibling interactions change over time, particularly as life circumstances such as marriage, career changes, or aging their communication patterns. Additionally, the rapid evolution of digital technologies warrants an exploration of how siblings adapt to new tools and platforms over extended periods. A longitudinal approach would provide valuable insights into how sibling bonds evolve in response to long-term separations and technological advancements, offering a dynamic perspective on transnational family communication. Another significant area for exploration is cultural comparisons. While this study focused on Ghanaian transnational families, future research could examine how sibling communication varies across different

cultural contexts. By including participants from diverse cultural backgrounds, researchers can identify both universal and culturally specific practices in digital communication. This approach would deepen our understanding of the relationship between cultural norms and new media usage, highlighting the unique ways families navigate transnational communication challenges based on their cultural frameworks.

Research should also delve into the impact of emerging technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI), on fostering sibling relationships. These advanced tools have the potential to revolutionize digital communication by creating immersive and emotionally engaging experiences that closely mimic face-to-face interactions. For instance, VR could allow siblings to share virtual spaces for celebrations or casual interactions, while AI-driven tools might enhance emotional understanding and reduce miscommunication. Examining these technologies could provide valuable insights into their practical applications and limitations in transnational family contexts.

Additionally, future studies should aim to expand participant demographics to include siblings from rural or underserved areas. These groups often face unique challenges, such as limited internet access or inadequate digital literacy, which can significantly impact their ability to maintain transnational relationships. Understanding how these constraints shape communication dynamics would highlight the inequalities in digital connectivity and offer targeted solutions to address them.

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE STUDY: THE USE OF NEW MEDIA IN GHANAIAN TRANSNATIONAL SIBLINGS' COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERVIEW

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

The purpose of this interview and the overall study is to explore how siblings in transnational families use new media technologies, such as social media, messaging apps, and video calls, to maintain their relationships despite living in different countries. The study aims to understand the impact of these digital tools on emotional closeness between siblings and to identify any challenges they face in communicating through these platforms. Your insights will help us better understand the role of new media in maintaining sibling bonds across geographic distances, which can contribute to developing strategies and resources to support transnational families. I want to assure you that everything you share during this interview will remain confidential. Your name and any identifying information will not be used in the study, and your responses will be anonymized to protect your privacy. Additionally, you have the right to withdraw from the interview or the study at any time, for any reason, without any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be removed from the study and will not be used in any way.

I would like to inform you that, with your permission, this interview will be recorded. The recording will help ensure that I capture your responses accurately and that no important details are missed. The recording will only be used for the purpose of this study and will remain

confidential. If you are comfortable with this, may I have your consent to record the interview?

Ask for verbal or written consent to begin the interview.

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

A. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

A1. Age

A2. Gender

A3. Occupation

B. Can you share some information about your sibling(s)?

B1. Number of siblings

B2. Ages and genders of your siblings

B3. Countries where your siblings currently reside

B4. How long have you and your siblings lived apart?

SECTION 2: USE OF NEW MEDIA TO MAINTAIN SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

(RESEARCH QUESTION 1)

C1. How often do you communicate with your sibling(s) using new media?

C2. What types of new media platforms do you use to stay in touch with your sibling(s)?

C3. Can you describe your typical interactions with your sibling(s) through these platforms?

C4. What do you usually talk about?

C5. How do these conversations make you feel?

C6. Do you prefer certain platforms over others? If so, why?

C7. How do you and your sibling(s) coordinate communication across time zones or busy schedules?

C8. How has the use of new media impacted the frequency and nature of your communication with your sibling(s)?

SECTION 3: EFFECT OF NEW MEDIA ON EMOTIONAL INTIMACY (RESEARCH QUESTION 2)

D1. Do you feel that new media has helped you maintain emotional closeness with your sibling(s)? Why or why not?

D2. Can you share a specific instance where digital communication made you feel emotionally closer to your sibling(s)?

D3. How do you express emotions (e.g., joy, sadness, support) through new media platforms when communicating with your sibling(s)?

D4. Are there any limitations in expressing yourself emotionally through new media compared to face-to-face interactions?

D5. In your opinion, has the distance between you and your sibling(s) affected your emotional bond? If so, how has new media helped or hindered that bond?

D6. How do you handle sensitive or emotional conversations with your sibling(s) using new media?

SECTION 4: CHALLENGES IN USING NEW MEDIA FOR COMMUNICATION

(RESEARCH QUESTION 3)

E1. What challenges do you face when communicating with your sibling(s) through new media platforms?

Technical issues (e.g., internet connectivity, device compatibility)

Time zone differences

Miscommunication or misunderstandings

E2. Can you provide an example of a time when communication with your sibling(s) through new media was difficult or unsatisfactory?

E3. How do you resolve conflicts or misunderstandings that arise through digital communication?

E4. Are there any cultural or social challenges you encounter when using new media to communicate with your sibling(s)?

E5. Do you think certain topics or conversations are harder to have through new media compared to face-to-face communication? If so, which ones and why?

E6. How do you think new media could be improved to better support your relationship with your sibling(s)?

SECTION 5: CLOSING QUESTIONS

Overall, how would you describe the impact of new media on your relationship with your sibling(s)?

Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't discussed yet about your communication with your sibling(s) using new media?

Do you have any advice for other siblings in transnational families on maintaining close relationships through new media?

CONCLUSION

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your experiences with me. Your insights are incredibly valuable and will contribute greatly to the study. I truly appreciate your openness and willingness to participate.

I want to remind you that everything you've shared today will remain confidential. Your name and any identifying details will not be included in the study. The information you've provided will only be used for research purposes to better understand how siblings in transnational families communicate through new media. Your responses will be anonymized, and any findings will be presented in a way that ensures your privacy is protected.