

IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON AFRICAN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: ANALYSING THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Over the past decades, technological advancements have significantly simplified various aspects of human life. However, the contemporary and unprecedented acceleration in technological development, particularly with the rise of digital communication tools, has dramatically transformed the global landscape. This transformation has led to a shift from a once-divergent world to a more interconnected global village, thereby making communication more accessible and effortless. Nevertheless, every technological innovation inevitably introduces new cultural dynamics into society. Digital communication has engendered a new global culture. While the benefits of this cultural shift are evident, its adverse effects are equally profound. One of the most significant negative impacts is observed within the family unit, where the lack of physical (face-to-face) interaction strains familial bonds. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in African family relationships, where physical interaction and communalism are integral to familial bonding and socialization. This paper, therefore, seeks to address these central questions: how has technology impacted on African families over the years? And how has digital communication influenced African families and their relationships? Employing a method of critical analysis, this study explores the effects of technology and digital communication on African family relationships over the years. The findings reveal that digital communication tools have had enormous impacts on family socialization, bonding, and relationships. Ultimately, the paper advocates for a balanced approach to the use of digital communication tools to preserve the close-knit relationships that have traditionally characterized African families.

Keywords: Technology, Digital Communication, Family, African family

Introduction

The family serves as the fundamental cornerstone upon which every society is built. In all cultures, and particularly in Africa, familial relationships and interactions are central to the social fabric. Mgbemena and Muonwe (2021) emphasize this significance, asserting that the human family is the most crucial unit of human existence, shaping our experiences and encompassing all that is good within them. The family has been variously described as the primary unit of society, the nucleus of community life, the individual's foremost social support system, and the essential unit of human socialization—a microcosm of society itself (Mgbemena & Muonwe, 2021).

As the basic social unit, the family consists of individuals connected by ties of marriage, blood or adoption, collectively forming a single household. Moreover, it is recognized as the most private and pervasive social institution within society. It is private because many social activities revolve around it, and pervasive because it is the first institution in which individuals are involved from the earliest stages of their lives (Menssah & Amissah, 2016).

In Africa, the family remains the cornerstone of social organization. The African concept of family extends far beyond the nuclear unit of a man, wife, and children, encompassing a broad network of relatives, including in-laws and even deceased ancestors (Akam, 2023). This broader,

communal orientation distinguishes African family structures from the more individualistic family model typical in Western societies. Consequently, family relationships, interactions, and socialization in Africa are fundamentally different from those in the West.

Africa, a continent historically shaped by external influences such as slavery and colonialism, has seen its sociocultural and political institutions significantly disrupted (Akam, 2023). Among the most affected were African family structures and relationships, which were altered by the introduction of monogamous ideals through missionary activities accompanying colonialism—a stark contrast to traditional African practices. However, these historical disruptions pale in comparison to the impact of modern technology and digital communication tools on African family dynamics. Digital communication has introduced a new social order in which families interact, which, while perhaps benign in the individualistic West, has profound implications for Africa's communalistic cultures (Akam, 2023).

Since most societal changes originate within the family, where individuals first become members before integrating into the broader community (Akam, 2023), it is reasonable to argue that technology and digital communication have profoundly influenced the family as an institution over the years. The introduction and adoption of these technologies by African families have had a particularly strong impact on familial structures (Akam, 2023). The rapid advancement and widespread integration of communication technology into daily life have fundamentally altered how families interact and maintain relationships (Kyalo, 2024).

From the era of the telephone, radio, and television to the current proliferation of digital communication tools—such as smartphones and social media platforms—the family unit has undergone significant transformations. While these technologies offer substantial benefits, such as facilitating long-distance communication and enabling new forms of shared experiences (Kyalo, 2024), they also introduce challenges. Hertlein (2012) observes that the ubiquitous nature of these technologies presents unique difficulties, a point echoed by Kyalo (2024), who notes that digital communication technologies can disrupt family dynamics, particularly in relationships.

The pervasive use of smartphones and social media has led to increased screen time and a decline in meaningful face-to-face interactions within the family unit, resulting in feelings of disconnection and potential misunderstandings (Kyalo, 2024). A study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2018, as cited in Kyalo, 2024) underscores this issue, revealing that 95% of teenagers have access to smartphones, with 45% being online almost constantly. This data highlights the extensive reach of digital communication among younger family members, further illustrating the profound impact of these technologies on family life.

Technology and digital communication have significantly impacted the African family unit, which, beyond its primary function of procreation and the continuity of family lineage, also serves as a support system for the physical, mental, emotional, and social needs of its members (Akam). Recognizing this, the present paper undertakes a detailed analysis of the effects of technology and digital communication on the African family over time. As Thompson and Goodman (2019) emphasize, addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the specific cultural and socioeconomic contexts in which families operate.

This study begins by examining the Igbo-African family model, providing a foundation for understanding the concept of family within traditional Igbo society. By contrasting the past with the present, the study aims to illuminate the changes brought about by technological

advancements. So, it also offers a historical overview of how technology and digital communication tools influenced the dynamics of family relationships and contributed to a new social order. Ultimately, the study advocates for a balanced approach to the use of digital communication tools, aiming to preserve the close-knit relationships that have traditionally characterized African families.

Towards an Understanding of The Igbo-African Notion of Family

The family is a fundamental institution in the lives of the Igbo people, serving as the foundation from which all relationships within Igbo culture emerge. Every child born into an Igbo family begins their understanding of human relationships within the familial unit. In traditional Igbo society, an individual's identity, social acceptance, or rejection is deeply tied to their family background (Mgbemena & Muonwe, 2021).

The concept of family in Igbo society differs significantly from the Western notion. While the nuclear family—comprised of parents and their children—may have existed in some form before European contact, its prominence grew markedly during and after the colonial period, becoming the dominant family structure in post-colonial Africa due to the imposition of Euro-Christian values. However, in the African context, particularly among the Igbo, the nuclear family is an insufficient representation of the broader family concept, which extends beyond the immediate household to include a wider network of relatives (Akam, 2023).

Therefore, in Igbo African society, the concept of family encompasses not only the husband, wife (or wives), and children but also extends to include a broader network of relatives, such as in-laws, uncles, cousins, nephews, and even maids and servants (Ogbalu, 2006, as cited in Onwuatuegwu, 2020). These individuals are bound together by strong family ties, a sense of collectivism, and communalism. In contrast, Western culture typically defines the family in more narrow terms, focusing primarily on the nuclear unit of husband, wife, and children (Akam, 2023). While Western families tend to favour a monogamous and nuclear structure, Igbo-African societies embrace an extended family model that may be either monogamous or polygamous, depending on individual choice (Eze, 2012, as cited in Onwuatuegwu, 2020).

The Igbo word for family, "Ezinulo," encapsulates these broader familial ties. "EzinỤlọ" is a compound noun derived from "Ezi," meaning outside, and "Ụlọ," meaning house (Akam, 2023). This term reflects the idea of family as a blend of both the external and the home, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the family unit. Akam (2023) provides a thoughtful analysis of this concept, exploring the dynamics of power and communication that are inherent within it.

While the husband could be assumed to be the ezi, the wife is the Ụlọ. To be an Ezi is to move out and provide for the family. Being an Ụlọ is to be a caretaker of a home. This explains some of the names given to Igbo wives such as Oriekwu (enjoyer of wealth), and Odoziekwu (caretaker of wealth) among others. While being a husband or a wife speaks of a spouse's mutual responsibility to each other, being a father or a mother depicts their wider responsibility to the entire household including to their children and relatives. As the father provides, the mother preserves, manages, and shares what is provided. Provision confers on the father a central role of a director and instructor. Communication revolves around the father just as obeisance flows to him. In this chain, fathers, mothers and children in their seniority play not just authority roles but also important roles in the communication pattern of the tribal family as who, what, when, where, why and how of communication obey unconventional family dogma that respects seniority and ties knowledge with age (43)

Considering this understanding, Aneto (2020) astutely observes that the Igbo concept of "Ezinaulo" is both dynamic and integrative, encompassing both external and internal elements. It is a flexible, inclusive concept, broad in scope yet also capable of focusing on narrower relationships. This term signifies that the Igbo do not limit the notion of family to those residing within the household, but also extend it to those beyond it. Households, as microcosms of society, grow to encompass villages and expand into broader communities (Akam). Consequently, the Igbo people draw strength from their families, relying on them for support and sustenance in every situation (Mgbemena & Muonwe, 2021).

This understanding highlights the African concept of family as fundamentally communalistic, characterized by mutual dependence. However, the advent of technology and digital communication has gradually influenced the African family over the years, disrupting its traditional modes of operation. The following section of this paper provides a brief historical overview of the evolution of African families since the introduction of these technologies.

An Overview of Digital Communication Technology.

Communication technology encompasses a broad spectrum of tools, systems, and platforms designed to facilitate information exchange across distances. This includes physical devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, as well as software and applications like email, social media, instant messaging, and video conferencing tools. Over the past few decades, these technologies have advanced rapidly, fundamentally transforming the landscape of both personal and professional communication. The widespread adoption of the internet, mobile networks, and digital platforms has revolutionized how individuals connect, share information, and sustain relationships. These technological developments have had profound implications for family dynamics, reshaping how family members interact, support one another, and maintain relationships despite physical separations (Walther, 2012).

In this context, digital communication has significantly altered the social order within families. Akam (2023) remarks on technology as a catalyst for social change, noting that its advent has precipitated a profound influx of consequences into societal structures, driving cultural transformations. Technological progress can be understood as a series of cultural epochs, with each invention providing not only a tool for addressing specific problems but also introducing a new cultural paradigm to which society must adapt.

Technology encompasses both hardware and software, each playing a crucial role in extending human capabilities. As hardware, technology—whether in media, communication, or industrial contexts—functions as a tool that extends sensory and functional abilities. As software, technology represents a complex and evolving system that shapes societal and cognitive patterns in both intended and unintended ways. Once introduced, a technological device becomes an integral part of society, inevitably influencing and updating the preferences and behaviours of its members (Akam, 2023). With a thorough understanding of the African concept of family and technology and digital communication, the focus now shifts to examining the specific impacts of digital communication on African family relationships.

Historical Overview of the Evolvement of Technology in African Igbo Family

In his work, *African Family in the Ecology of Media: From Face-to-Face to Facebook*, Akam (2023) provides a comprehensive historical overview of the various stages in which technology emerged within African-Igbo households. He delineates the gradual and subtle intrusions that began to transform African family dynamics and how these changes have fully manifested in African homes through digital communication tools. This foundational analysis informs our

exploration of the evolution of technology within the African-Igbo family context.

Prior to the advent of technology in African homes, oral tradition served as the primary means of communication. In a predominantly oral society, listening was an essential skill necessary for record-keeping and information transmission. Communication was predominantly conducted through face-to-face interactions. In the absence of written records, significant family ceremonies and events were memorized and linked with important social festivals or cosmological occurrences occurring around the same period. Family genealogy, history, and notable events were preserved through continuous storytelling, a potent method for ensuring the retention of information (Akam, 2023).

Furthermore, there was stringent control and scrutiny over information sources and their dissemination. A clear distinction existed between the 'what' of knowledge and the 'how' of acquiring it. While general knowledge, such as the ripening of mangoes, was widely accessible, specialized knowledge, such as that concerning medicinal herbs, was restricted to specific individuals, roles, or age groups within a family or those chosen by deities. Transgressing the boundaries of specialized knowledge was considered taboo, and such knowledge often perished with the family or select individuals (Akam, 2023).

This dynamic extends to the family unit. Traditionally, it was customary for children to gather and listen to their parents, making parents the primary role models within the family. Consequently, parents exerted significant control over the knowledge accessible to their children. Due to the strong emphasis on learning by imitation, parents often restricted their children's interactions with peers from families deemed to be socially deviant. In the patriarchal Igbo society, the male head of the family not only served as the primary provider but also acted as the instructor and central source of information. Communication within the family largely centered around the father, who commanded respect and whose advice, opinions, and directives were sought by both wives and children (Akam, 2023).

Elders also held authoritative positions in traditional Igbo society, as knowledge was closely associated with age. Thus, parents and elders were the principal sources of information within the tribal family. Learning occurred through imitation, listening, and participation, with oral communication being paramount in the absence of other media. In this context, the ears were considered the most important organ for receiving knowledge, and the voice was essential for instructing, educating, and expressing ideas (Akam, 2023).

In the absence of extended means of communication, the voice was synonymous with physical presence. However, significant changes occurred with the advent of colonialism, which introduced evangelization and Western education to Africa. These developments had a profound impact on the African family structure. Colonialism brought literacy, shifting the primary means of knowledge acquisition from auditory to visual. With literacy, the eyes, rather than the ears, became the principal organ for engaging with knowledge. This transition occurred because knowledge began to be recorded and retrieved through written materials, rather than through memorization by ear.

The introduction of literacy transformed knowledge dynamics within tribal families. Unlike orality, where knowledge and the knower are intertwined, literacy establishes a separation between the reader and the content. Writing and reading created a new paradigm for knowledge dissemination and retention, marking a significant shift from traditional oral practices (Akam, 2023). With the advent of writing, knowledge transitioned from being a communal asset to an individual one, shifting from the head to the book. Oral tradition primarily focused on preserving

communal wisdom often associated with deities. In contrast, literacy redefined knowledge as a personal achievement, transforming it into an individual possession that conferred power and prestige. Akam (2023), in his examination of the effects of this new social order on the African family, writes:

For the African family where wisdom has resided in age and seniority, the social change brought by literacy redefined authority structure elevating the educated with its attendant economic privileges above the non-educated. This tension could be seen today in families where those who are uneducated tend to busy themselves with cultural practices against the educated who want to use their economic privileges to influence the tradition to their favour (46)

In this context, the process of learning from elders diminished as literate generations increasingly sought knowledge from written sources, occasionally teaching their elders in turn. Both literate and illiterate parents began to rely on their educated children for information. The rise of individualism led family members to seek private spaces for reading and writing, which undermined the communal aspect of knowledge and control.

The proliferation of various books introduced challenges in managing the information accessible to children, a stark contrast to the controlled environment of oral tradition. While literate parents attempted to safeguard their family's values and morals by censoring reading materials, illiterate parents had limited options for doing so. Literacy weakened traditional authority structures within tribal families, introducing new vocabularies and values. Authority shifted from the head of the family to the realm of literacy and the economic opportunities afforded by education. Following the advent of literacy, electronic mass media emerged, introduced by technologies such as the telegraph, radio, camera, and television. The success of electronic media stemmed from its ability to integrate both oral and written forms of communication, combining auditory and visual elements to impact audiences from a distance. By leveraging the printing press, electronic media facilitated the mass circulation of content and extended its reach to a broader audience.

This new form of media introduced a novel influence into tribal families, effectively displacing traditional roles previously occupied by family members. This shift has been a significant source of disruption within African families during the era of interactive media. While radio primarily engaged the auditory senses, television addressed both visual and auditory faculties, combining them to dominate sensory engagement. Electronic media thus redirected focus from parents and elders to technological devices, eroding traditional communalism. Audiences were increasingly subjected to content curated by program producers, which further marginalized the role of familial authority in favour of media-driven news and entertainment.

In a typical Igbo household, electronic media such as a television and/or transistor radio, along with a landline phone, are commonly positioned in a corner of the sitting room, accompanied by a central table displaying family photo albums. The placement of these devices reflects their significance in the family's daily life. Family members frequently gather to listen to the news, watch movies, or use photo albums to recount significant events to visitors.

This arrangement highlights the role of these gadgets in bringing the family together, as radio and television schedules increasingly disrupted traditional family routines. These media functions extend beyond mere entertainment; they also serve as repositories of memory and sources of information. With the advent of camera services in various towns, families transitioned from relying on oral traditions to recording significant events such as marriages, child naming

ceremonies, and funerals. These recordings are preserved in family archives, marking a shift from oral to documented storytelling.

The introduction of electronic media brought significant consequences. The presence of these technologies began to impact attendance at crucial family events, as the option to view recorded videos became an alternative to physical participation. Family members unable to attend ceremonies often opted to watch recorded footage later. This practice sometimes necessitated the presence of a camera operator during private family occasions, which could undermine the sanctity of certain rites. For example, tribal cultures traditionally hold corpses and marriage rituals in high reverence, and their documentation on film can diminish their perceived sacredness.

Furthermore, the broad reach of electronic media exposed children to images and scenes previously restricted by tribal culture. The influx of new values and models through media left younger family members increasingly confused. Parental control shifted to regulating the types of electronic materials and channels accessible to children. Although parents attempted to manage the content of movies and other media, the availability of these materials in open markets made it challenging to prevent breaches of these regulations. This context has paved the way for the current influence of digital communication tools, which have increasingly affected African family dynamics and relationships. The subsequent section of this paper will analyze the impact of digital communication on family relationships in detail.

Analysing the Impact of Digital Communication Tools on African Igbo Family

Currently, a new family paradigm is emerging, integrating technological values into traditional family structures and thereby inducing changes in authority, power dynamics, control, learning, knowledge frameworks, and communication patterns, including customs and rites (Widjaja, 2024).

The principal challenge for 21st-century families is the pervasive influence of digital communication tools, particularly those within the realm of social media. Unlike televisions, where "destructive themes" can be regulated, controlling social media remains notably difficult (Nnamene, 2021). Initially, social media platforms were designed to build community, enhance interpersonal interactions, facilitate the sharing of online content, and foster improved relationships (Rouse, 2019). While social media has indeed fulfilled these objectives, it has simultaneously led to the development of virtual communities and relationships, often at the expense of traditional, face-to-face interactions (Nnamene, 2021).

Singh (2015) provides an in-depth analysis of the challenges posed by digital communication tools such as social media, emphasizing that their primary issue lies in their excessive consumption of time, which encroaches upon designated family time. Social media platforms often dominate family discussions, displacing regular, meaningful interactions and common activities. They contribute to addiction, diminish the quality of family interactions, and expose children to inappropriate adult content. Furthermore, social media fosters short attention spans during family activities, disrupts sleep patterns, and leads to nocturnal habits that result in daytime drowsiness.

These platforms often serve as distractions rather than enhancing family bonding, compromising privacy by sharing content in a nearly public domain. They also present risks associated with excessive interaction with individuals outside the immediate family, potentially leading to the fragmentation of familial relationships (Adamson, 2017).

Given the nature of the African family and the relationship inherent in it, this situation hangs a noose on its neck and threatens to snap at any time. Over the years, the African family has been scarred by horror encounters that violated her institutional virginity. The encounter with the West through slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism has far-reaching effects be it on polity, economy, culture or otherwise. With new education, new religion and their attendant values that have ushered in gender liberation and economic benefits, the cultural family has an enormous kneel on its neck and might likely run out of breath in the contemporary age of globalization armed with the ring lights of digital communication tools (Akam, 2023).

The advent of the internet, which facilitates the interconnection and communication of computers across vast distances, has effectively transformed the world into a global village. This development marks a significant transition from analogue to digital culture. This shift is not merely technological but also deeply cultural. Unlike traditional electronic media, interactive media enables real-time communication between diverse locations, which can occur either synchronously or asynchronously depending on the communication mode (Akam, 2023). A mode refers to a computer-mediated communication platform that supports the exchange of information through text, voice, video, or combinations thereof. Interactive media processes voice, video, and data into digital signals, thus enabling enhanced communication. The core of interactive media lies in its ability to foster connectivity, transforming media gadgets from simple communication tools into platforms for building relationships and community (Akam, 2023).

The emergence of interactive media has ushered in a new digital culture, fundamentally transforming daily living as individuals, institutions, and relationships increasingly shift to virtual environments. For families, establishing a digital presence has become integral to their identity. Contemporary families actively engage in creating and maintaining their virtual presence, connecting, sharing experiences, and discussing matters of mutual concern.

This digital presence often extends beyond more restricted platforms such as WhatsApp, which limits group membership, to broader social media channels like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, which facilitate public interaction with opportunities for in-group engagement. Additionally, individual family members now maintain private accounts where personal moments, once confined to electronic family archives, are publicly shared (Akam, 2023).

In traditional Igbo families, there was a strong culture of vigilance where spouses were well-acquainted with each other's social circles. They were aware of new friendships and could provide guidance and caution if a partner's relationship began to seem problematic or unhealthy. This mutual watchfulness contributed to maintaining harmony and trust within the household. However, the advent of digital communication tools has led to a significant shift. Many Igbo families have experienced disruptions due to unhealthy relationships initiated through social media. The lack of oversight over a partner's online connections often results in complications. Spouses may engage in secretive behaviour due to inappropriate interactions on social media, leading to a breakdown in trust. To conceal their activities, individuals might secure their smartphones and restrict their partners' access to their social media accounts, thereby exacerbating familial discord.

Additionally, some spouses are prone to making unwarranted comparisons between their own lives and the idealized representations seen on social media. This tendency often leads to unrealistic expectations regarding the financial or sexual aspects of their relationship, thereby disrupting domestic harmony. The availability of digital communication tools facilitates the

rapid dissemination of these issues online, where individuals may encounter unhelpful or detrimental advice. Furthermore, conflicts and disagreements between spouses are frequently aired on digital platforms before any reconciliation occurs. In contrast, traditional Igbo families would typically resolve such issues through the intervention of elders or more experienced family members, who provided counsel aimed at preserving the union and addressing concerns with a vested interest in the couple's well-being.

The advent of digital media has fundamentally altered the dynamics of authority, power, and control within the family unit. Previously, authority was rooted in age, literacy, and institutional media as seen in oral, literate, and electronic cultures. However, the rise of digital media has shifted power dynamics, redistributing authority to individuals in a panoptic model of governmentality, where subjects operate with a sense of freedom under subtle surveillance (Akam, 2023). Social media has blurred the boundaries between families and diminished parental control, significantly impacting the knowledge access of children. Given that children learn predominantly through observation, they are increasingly vulnerable to negative influences, often beyond their parents' awareness. The traditional role of family elders as repositories of sound reasoning has been undermined, as digital platforms offer alternative models and ideas that can overshadow the guidance of experienced family members.

Conversely, digital media has facilitated the formation of a dispersed community, enabling virtual engagement for members seeking to participate in significant family events (Akam, 2023). The focus has shifted from merely capturing videos or photos for memory preservation to maintaining a real-time connection with events as they unfold. This shift emphasizes virtual presence over physical participation, often rendering actual presence a secondary concern. It is increasingly common to witness virtual ceremonies, such as online weddings, among Igbo families. This trend underscores the profound impact of technology and digital communication on traditional practices within African Igbo families.

Currently, there is a concerning trend where children and adolescents increasingly prefer to engage with their smartphones rather than interact with their parents. Concurrently, some parents, motivated by monetization opportunities on social media, spend extensive periods creating and sharing detailed content about their lives. This preoccupation with digital engagement often marginalizes their children and disrupts the essential bond of physical presence that traditionally unites African families. This shift undermines the communal spirit inherent in Igbo and broader African cultures, fostering a more individualistic society. For a culture that relies on physical presence as the foundation for its rites, rituals, and familial connections, the rise of virtual presence has intruded upon and altered its core values. This situation highlights the urgent need to address the preservation of traditional family structures, which are deeply rooted in direct, physical interaction and connection.

Possible Solutions

The significance of technology and digital communication tools in the modern world is undeniable. These advancements have simplified various aspects of life, facilitating easier communication among family members separated by work or geographic distance. They have also contributed to maintaining family relationships by fostering new interests that bring family members together. Despite these advantages, the negative impact of digital communication on African family relationships often outweighs the benefits. Given the pervasive nature of these technologies, it is crucial to establish a balance in their use to preserve and strengthen family bonds. The following are strategies for achieving this balance:

1. **Comprehensive Education on Digital Communication Tools:** It is essential to provide extensive education on the appropriate use of digital communication tools. Such education will significantly enhance families' understanding of social media platforms, their functionalities, and their potential to meet familial needs effectively. By acquiring this knowledge, parents can access a wealth of information and resources on parenting through websites, blogs, and online forums. This empowerment will bolster parents' confidence and effectiveness in their roles, fostering a more cohesive family unit.
2. **Cultivating Self-Discipline:** It is imperative for families, particularly young ones, to develop self-discipline regarding the use of digital communication tools. This process should commence with parents who must model restraint in their use of social media and smartphones in the presence of their children. Given that children primarily learn by observation, constant parent engagement with digital devices may set a detrimental precedent. Therefore, establishing designated family times free from phones and televisions, especially during shared meals, is crucial to reinforce meaningful family interactions.
3. **Promoting Effective Use of Technology:** Given the central role of science and technology in contemporary society, it is more productive to educate children on the effective and beneficial use of digital communication tools rather than attempt to restrict their use, which may only increase curiosity. Early introduction to technological skills, such as data analytics and data science, will enable children to engage with these tools purposefully, thereby reducing their exposure to inappropriate content and fostering constructive use.
4. **Developing Family-Friendly Social Media Platforms:** Recognizing that social media users are active participants rather than passive consumers, communication experts must enhance the functionality of social media by developing and promoting family-friendly software. Such platforms should be designed to support and strengthen family unity, thereby fostering positive interactions and connections within the family unit.
5. **Balancing Work and Family Life:** The integration of communication technology into the workplace has significantly altered the traditional demarcations between professional and personal life. Remote and flexible work arrangements, facilitated by digital communication tools, can enhance the amount of time parents spend with their families. However, this flexibility also introduces challenges, such as the potential for work-related stress to encroach upon family time. The pervasive connectivity provided by smartphones and email creates an expectation of constant availability, complicating efforts to disconnect and concentrate on family interactions. Establishing a healthy equilibrium between work and family life is essential for sustaining positive family relationships in the digital era (Chesley, 2014).
6. **Bridging and Blurring Boundaries:** Digital communication tools offer the advantage of overcoming physical distances, enabling family members to remain connected across geographic locations. This capability is particularly advantageous for maintaining relationships with extended family members and those who frequently travel. Conversely, the omnipresence of technology can obscure the boundaries between work and home life, potentially leading to stress and burnout. To address these issues, families should implement "tech-free" zones and times, such as during meals or before bedtime, to prioritize meaningful interactions and enhance familial connections (Kyalo, 2024)., to ensure that quality interactions are prioritized (Kyalo, 2024).

Conclusion

This paper has thoroughly examined the impact of technology and digital communication tools on family relationships, with a specific focus on the African-Igbo family model. It reveals how

these technologies have significantly transformed traditional family structures, almost entirely reshaping them. The findings underscore that the influence of digital communication technology on family relationships is profound, necessitating a strategic approach to leverage its benefits while mitigating its challenges. Accordingly, the paper advocates for fostering open communication, establishing clear guidelines and modelling healthy technology usage as a means for families to effectively navigate the digital era. Emphasizing the importance of balance and intentionality in the use of digital communication tools, this study highlights the potential for both beneficial and detrimental outcomes based on how these tools are integrated into family life.

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