Separated Household? Effects of Personalized Communication Devices on Nigerian Families' Communication Pattern

Ifeoma Vivian Dunu (Ph.D.)
Mass Communication Department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

*Gregory Obinna Ugbo
Mass Communication Department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

In recent times with the emergence of newer communication technologies, concerns are raised over the possible alterations in family patterns of communication and interactions. This study using survey research methodology investigated the effects of new personalized communication devices (NPCD) on family communication patterns. 400 respondents were randomly selected from families in urban cities in South East Nigeria. Findings show that majority of individual family members own NPCDs with most possessing mobile/smart phones. The result shows that these families have high internet connectivity yet face to face/domestic conversation still appears to be the dominant and the preferred mode of communication within the family units. The result demonstrated a high level of interactivity as family members indicate spending a great number of hours interacting with mostly friends using these devices. Though the study significantly revealed that there is no noticeable alteration in family bond, family communication pattern seems to be altered from collectivist communication orientation to a more individualistic pattern owing to the solitary nature of these devices. Again, effects are still minimal and concentrated in urban areas especially among families that are educated and affluent. We conclude that with the invention of more sophisticated personalized communication devices there will be a rapid incursion into other sections of the Nigerian society and family communication may develop on unpredictable pattern that will lead to a complex communication pattern where these devices enhance communication and connections with family members and at the same time, create individualistic communication pattern.

Keywords: New Personalized Communication Devices (NPCD); Family; Integration and Separation; Family communication; Family Dynamics.

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of the new digital technologies of communication, there has been an avalanche of study evaluating the possible effects of the emerging media on social interaction among human elements in the society. Several research efforts (eg. McGratt, 2012; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts, 2010; Hughes & Hans, 2001; Stoll, 1995) have concentrated on investigating and unraveling the possibility of the new personalized communication technology devices (NPCTD) creating more social isolation due to the solitary nature of the devices at the point of use. Amidst the fear of possible social displacement, the discourses and narratives emanating from other scholars across the globe seem to be polarized as there is yet to exist concrete research evidence establishing extreme isolation or integration (Bala, 2014; Salman, et al, 2011; McQuail, 2006; Bachen, 2004; Avery and Baker, 2000). In family relationship (generally seen as the first point of contact in social integration) for instance, it has been observed that in recent times with the emergence of newer communication technologies, there seems to be a noticeable shift in family patterns of communication. The very nature of the newer communication technologies – their portability and multiple platforms – have gone a long way in personalizing communication, with the potential of altering family communication pattern and arguably, enthroning individualism and limiting social interaction among kin.

Although, research into the ways these communication technologies especially the newer forms are integrated into social life exists in western countries; it is grossly underexplored within the Nigerian context. Previous research conducted on the American and Australian families for example, presents ambivalent results but largely suggests that there is no strong indication that this increasing use and personalization of the newer communication technologies displace contacts with family members or other human elements in the society, rather, there is an indication that the internet is increasing interaction within families as well as in virtual communities (Radhakrishnan & Chandrasekar, 2012; Bachen, 2004; Kayany & Yelsma, 2000; Avery & Baker, 2000; and Global Strategy Group Inc., 1999). Since Nigerian families in recent times have begun to predominantly use these new devices of communication (as the rate of internet access increases every day among the elites and in urban cites), the need arises for empirical enquiry on the nature of effect personalized communication devices have on family communication pattern –whether personalized technology devices displace or unify people within the family unit. It also becomes necessary to examine other promises or challenges they hold for effective interpersonal communication and ultimately familial bonding. This study chiefly argues along the findings of previous studies that even as these new media draw people together with a

common purpose (see Hughes & Hans, 2001; Rheingold, 1993), they could also alter social interaction, creating new forms of networked communication that could overtime lead to a reduction of the amount of physical socializing among family members and even those outside the family (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Stoll, 1995). However the degree of such effect may vary depending on a number of factors, especially the social dynamics of Nigerian Families.

Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are Nigerian families connected with personalized communication technologies?
2. To what extent do Nigerian families interact using personalized communication technology devices against the conventional means of interaction with other family members?
3. How does the perceived change in communication pattern if any, impact on face-to-face human contact and domestic conversations?
4. How do these new personalized communication devices empower family communication and/or interaction or disband family bonds?

2. A Review of Literature
2.1. Family in Context
The concept of family calls up the singular meaning of cohesion and bond among especially human elements. Such bonds are fundamentally achieved through communication. The family is therefore, seen as the epicenter of socialization and the life-wire of the society. Although there could exist variation in structure and organization of families based on socio-cultural differences, the idea of familial bond borne by relatedness or commonality of interests still remain the universal denominator. According to Ekong (1988, p.203) family is a kinship group linked together by blood or marriage with members occupying a common household. Ekong further asserts that the family comprises of human elements of a man, a wife or wives and children who live under the same roof. This definition though restricts the idea of family to those related by blood (which is of course the focal point of this study); the overriding idea is that these human elements that constitute a family constantly interact and influence each other's behaviour in a more intimate manner than with others outside the family group (Rotimi, 2005). The interactions though they occur in a variety of ways, have communication at the center that either fosters/solidifies family bonds or cause disunity and in some cases, isolation. Perhaps, this could account for the worry in recent times amongst scholars concerning the state of family relationships and the possible effect of modern communication technologies in enthroning family collectivism rather than individualism. Since according to Strong et al., 'family is the foundation upon which the society is built…'(1983, p.7); such that what happens within family structure may have ripple effect on the society as a whole. The family introduces the child to values of cooperation and reciprocity and to expectations of social interaction (Chukwu, 2015). The trend that exists within families therefore, becomes a focal point in understanding what is tenable in the larger society.

The family in Nigerian context is an inviolable institution, nurtured and protected as the only means of sustaining the human lineage. In Igbo society, South East Nigeria, which is the area of this study, the family is sacrosanct; expressed in such concepts as '*Ama echina*'- 'May my home never go into extinction'- and *'Aham efuna'*- 'May my name never get lost'. These two beliefs are the sole motivating factors behind the reasons 'pre-modern' parents in Igboland *married for* their children (especially male children) at a very early age; with deep rooted interest in child bearing (especially male child) and rearing in marriage. The Igbo family unit is characterized by:

➢ Strong emphasis on cohesion and family bonds;
➢ Polygamy and the extended family system (highly in vogue before the advent of westernization);
➢ Communalism as families collectively work for common goals and share individual experiences;

All these suggest the very idea of communalism and collectivism that governed the 'pre-western' Igbo families and at the centre of all of these is family communication in all its forms.

2.2. The Igbo Family in the Era of Personalized Communication Devices
Researchers have theorized that dominant family communication patterns may possibly affect family values, structures and organization in any given society and have equally argued on possible changes in these communication patterns as new form of communication technologies emerge. For instance, the advent of technology in general and New Media of communication in particular brought with it drastic changes in the way families communicate by extending and providing different communication devices for family members. These new devices some have argued may have resulted in strong 'familymorphosis' both in structure, organization and relationship in different families across the globe. However the extent of this effect in Nigerian families is still underexplored hence this study.

New media applications and technologies such as, "video games, computer games, the internet and e-mail" (Aarsand 2007, p.235) as well as televisions, mobile phones and Mp3 players play a major role in everyday life in modern society. As Mesch (2006, p.120) outlines "families with access to information and

communication technology differ from those without them, not only in access to technology but in family dynamics as well". McGratt (2012), states that existing literature suggests that new media technologies impact the social interaction within households in many different ways. New media technologies can assist in increasing interaction amongst families by bringing generations and family members together. As a result, it can help bridge generational and digital divides. On the other hand, new media technologies within a household can lead to a growing privatisation within family life, with individuals increasingly using technology independently rather than collectively.

Furthermore, research has indicated that new media can hinder family relations or conversely, foster it. Some researchers posit that computers and the internet represent a positive force that fosters greater communication and better access to education, promote global understanding, and make the world a better place to live (Rheingold, 1993; Hughes & Hans, 2001). Others disagree, arguing that computer technology will promote impoverished relationships, isolation of people within families, and distancing between families and the outside world (Stoll, 1995; Hughes & Hans, 2001).

In modern Igbo society, the relationship within family units has greatly become redefined. Instead of the former communalism that engenders collectivism, education, westernization, urbanization, and changes in workforce environment has resulted in more individualistic lifestyles. This change is also noticed in shared responsibilities in the family. Women for instance have become recognized bread-winners (traditionally women in Igbo land are known as 'oriaku'– one that consumes wealth (wealth that is presumably acquired by men)). Even children have been co-opted in the workforce for economic sustainability. In addition to these changing family dynamics, Nigeria's present economic depression and increased population have increased the intensity and time of working hours which has led to an increase in times spent outside the home. This has in turn impacted on the family structures and socialization. Turtiainen et al. (2007) is correct as he argues that change in working life and the labour market "have affected family life" (p. 478) so much so that family members no longer spend time together. Olayiwola and Owagbemi, (2014) went further to observe that changes in family organization such as an increase in non-family work and education may stimulate new venues of interaction, such as youth clubs. Such clubs serve as forums for social interaction for youths, where they may spend their spare time with other youths. These clubs increase social interactions among young people and, open opportunities for the spread of new ideas and creation of shared experiences. The increase number of work hours by parents and new trend of long hours spent at schooling are also other major areas of worry that threaten to destabilize the family cohesion. However, within such context, many view the use and access to mobile devices as a means of family communication, networking and integration, bridging the gap on family cohesion occasioned by the aforementioned factors.

New media technologies have become embedded within daily routines of most Nigerian families and are now as (Church et al. 2010, p.264) point out an "intrinsic part of contemporary life". The adaption of such new media technologies has impacted on contemporary society in a number of different ways. Social scientists and other scholars (see Olayiwola and Owagbemi, 2014; Holmes and Sachs, 2007; George and Ukpong, 2013) have raised concern over the prevalent strains caused by these emerging technologies and evolving diffused culture on Nigerian family values in general, especially declining marriage rates, and, increased individuality in spousal relationship. These are seen as a threat to community (Olayiwola and Owagbemi, 2014). On the other hand, scholars have argued that internet enhances social ties: by putting users in more frequent contact with families and friends; re-establish and intensify familial relationship via constant contact between members; allows individuals to strengthen their connections with extended family beyond their own nuclear family and provides a means of increasing interaction with family members and closeness to friends (DiMaggo et al, 2001; Yoon, 2006). It is able to achieve this by filling communication gaps between face-to-face meetings (Wellman et al, 2001) including its ability to bridge the time and space limitations that could challenge and hinder family communications.

In developed societies, the frequency of use of mobile devices is higher than what obtains in Nigeria. For instance, with the use of mobile devices, Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010) found that 8- to 18-year-olds spend an average of 7 ½ hours a day, seven days a week with media, and 66% of all 8- to 18-year-olds own their own cell phone, making the image of a teenager with a cell phone in hand almost "iconic". In Nigeria although children and young adults as digital natives increasingly use the new media, income level of households and parental fear of effect of these devices have limited the wide use as we have in Western climes. Nevertheless the use of such mobile devices is also a common and popular occurrence in most families in the country especially among the elites and urban settlers, thus the reason for using this demography as the study focus. In Nigeria it is now a common sight to see parents reaching their children through their mobile handsets. More popular also is the use of Texting, WhatsApp, Facebook, Blackberry and other social media platforms to connect and communicate with family members. As some have argued, the introduction of mobile telephony in Nigeria has increased access to communication with loved ones and also fosters networking and bonding. Largely, most Nigerian youths even when they don't have money, use mostly WhatsApp and text (free) to reach their parents

and other siblings for daily communication and to stay in touch with each other. As the use of these new media of communication increases every day among the Nigerian family and as newer and better access seems to increase, we begin to ask, is it creating more ways for family bonding and integration by basically increasing the volume and enhanced means of communication among kin? Or on the other hand, does the personalized nature and other platforms it offers increase isolation and privatization within families? Answer to these among other factors will chiefly depend on the predominant use these new devices are put to by many families and how they are used. Is it to communicate, chat, connect, research or do business?

2.3. The Place of Communication in Family Bonding

Scholars had earlier on focused on the impact of the conventional/mainstream media in family communication and interaction. McQuail (2005) notes that "the mass media often provide topics of conversation for discussion and thus help to lubricate social life in families, workplaces and even amongst strangers" (p.148). However, they may be regarded less as an antidote to the individualism, rootlessness and loneliness associated with modern life than as logical development towards forms of social interaction that can be achieved to order, as it were (McQuail, 2005, p.144-145). Considering the fundamental role communication plays in family integration, arguments have been polarized on the survival of this all important aspect of family living. While the optimists argue that the new communication technologies rather than disband, further bolster family interaction and relationship through communication; the pessimist hold contrary views.

One of the strongholds of the optimists is the new communication technologies' potential for sociability and interactivity. McQuail (2005) for instance, maintains that "Media in the home are frequently a background to virtually every other kind of activity, without necessarily impeding or displacing these activities" (437). He further observes that there is no clear evidence that the classic forms of interpersonal 'sociability', such as conversation and 'hanging out' have disappeared, although it is very likely that some domestic entertainments which were sociable, like card-playing, musical parties and family games, have declined (though for other reasons as well) (McQuail, 2005).

Conversely, the pessimists on the other hand hinge their argument on the personalized nature of most of the new communication devices. The scholars that support this view hold that while it is true that the computer machine does connect people with other people, at the point of its use involves solitary behaviour, individualistic choices and responses and frequent anonymity (e.g. Baym, 2002; Turner et al., 2001). Buttressing this further, Holmes (2007) posits that:

> Although today's technology simplifies many tasks for us, it is ever present in our life. Cell phones, e-mail, and new technology bombard us, creating many interruptions to family time. Yet, in other ways, this same technology helps us connect with those living farther away. The challenge is to make time to interact face-to-face with family.

With the prevalence of more personalized communication devices, a lot of families (husbands, wives and children) can best be described as neighbours as they merely live under the same roof, without familial interpersonal interaction (Holmes, 2007). This is because as McQuail posits, "Mass-mediated social contact can supplement and complement, as well as displace, real personal contacts with others" (2005, p.438). Despite the traces of social bond (Eliot Friedson, 1953), mass media use in general was often associated with forms of social isolation (Maccoby, 1954, Bailyn, 1959). There are obviously many individuals who are both socially isolated and also strongly addicted to media use behaviour that might reinforce their isolation (McQuail, 2005). This is perhaps owing to the fact that interaction on social media platforms or personalized communication device is largely built on virtual environment. Virtual community according to Lindlof and Schatzer (1998) is one founded intentionally by people who share a set of similar interests often revolving around certain texts or tropes imported from non-computer mediated channels venues, such as soap operas and their characters (p.24). Anderson (1983) opines that the internet communities are imagined in two ways inimical to human communities. One proposition is that audiences (sets of users) will become more and more fragmented and atomized and lose their national, local or cultural identity (pp.406-407).

Other argument projected that apart from the social utility, and affiliation associated with media use, people use it as a withdrawal mechanism. According to Dominick (2013, p.43) people also use the media to create a buffer zone between themselves and others. Such individuals that migrate from the real or physical world converge in virtual communities. The typical conditions for formation of a virtual community seem to include minority status, physical dispersal of members and a degree of intensity of interests (McQuail, 2002, p.149).

Furthermore, the link between communication and behaviour moulding cannot be over emphasized. Scholars have in turn observed the crucial role different forms of communication be it interpersonal or mass play in individual behaviour or attitude formation, and healthy interpersonal relationship in the human society (see Kolo 1993; Ekwe, 1992). In family relationship for instance, communication forms the centre of mutual understanding and bond between spouses and children. Parents are able to inculcate the desired societal norms

and values in their children. Children are socialized on the acceptable way of dressing and fashion, expectations and aspirations, choice of career and marriage partner, educational pursuit, relationship with opposite sex and sexual behaviour, relationship with elders within and outside the homes etc. (Asonibare and Olowonirejuaro, 2006). Effective communication is central to the success of every family and without it, there is bound to be distortion of fact among the family members. Such problem may at times lead to 'cold war' between parents and their adolescent children, which could affect family cohesion (Asonibare and Olowonirejuaro, 2006). In families, as children grow up, there is a fairly clear pattern of increasing dispersal of individual activities, which though closely related to the use of different media (von Feilitzen, 1976; Livingston, 2003), could also arise because of other factors that affect family life as these families metamorphose into different stages. Therefore the possibility exists that nature of family in terms of age (young families and older families), income status and level of education may affect the extent these personalized modern communication system impact on families in Nigeria.

New media technologies have the potential to foster or hinder communication in the family system. Using social media web sites is among the most common activities of today's children and adolescents. According to the Nigerian Communications Commission's (NCC, 2015) report, the internet and social networking sites, especially the Facebook, have grown exponentially over time with a population of over 97 million active users being 51.1% of Nigeria's population. The Commission also records that out of the over 181 million Nigerians, 97.06 million access the internet via Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) while 151 thousand Nigerians are connected to the internet via Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) networks (NCC, 2015). This is an indication that in Nigeria, Social network sites such as Facebook may have become a medium for heightened social interactivity especially in virtual communities. Such sites offer today's youth a portal for entertainment and communication but may also pose grave threat to core family values (O'Keeffe & Clark-Pearson, 2011). However if we consider that these new media devices are primarily used for communication and education including entertainment which basically forms the major activities in different homes, then we can safely argue that hindering or bolstering effect of such media is also dependent on individual use as we learn from the uses and gratifications theory. For as Fischer, (1992) suggests, people do not just react to technology, they actively shape its uses and influence.

New communication devices are mostly personalized and by extension do not offer the much needed forum for domestic conversations to thrive. Most personalized devices are solitary by nature and as such, solitary in use. Scholars like O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, (2011) and McQuail, (2005) buttressed this point stating that having separate television and radio receivers in different parts of a house helps in the dispersal of members of a household, how much more the more portable handheld communication devices? When we synthesize all the arguments what becomes apparent is the strong influence of the Nigerian family's economic status on determining the overall effect. That is why when we argue that, beyond the obvious general effect associated with new communication devices on family communication pattern and possibly relationships, in terms of less interpersonal relationship/conversations, the possibility exist for more interconnectedness and therefore reinforcing rather than separating households.

3. Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on the Relational Schemas Theory. The relational schemas theory bases family relationship types on the ways in which family members as individuals think about families. The propounders referred to these ways of thinking as *relational schemas*. One's relational schemas according to Littlejohn and Foss (2008) consists of one's knowledge about oneself, others and relations along with knowledge about how to interact in relationships (p. 200). It is this knowledge that provides an image of relationships based on one's own experience and guides one's behaviour within relationships. An individual in a bid to foster healthy interaction among family members calls up an organized set of memories generally drawn from previous knowledge and experiences. Koener and Fitzpatrick explain that people's interaction with other members of their family at any given time will be directed first by their specific schema, then by their family schema, and then by their general schema.

Fitzpatrick and her colleagues observe that family communication is not random but highly patterned based on particular schemas that determine how family members communicate with one another. These schemas consist of knowledge about:

1. How intimate the family is;
2. The degree of individuality within the family; and
3. Factors external to the family, such as friends, geographical distances, work, and other concerns outside the family unit.

Also, the family schema will include a certain kind of orientation to communication, viz.: the conversation orientation and the conformity orientation. They observe that various schema create different family types. Hence, different families have certain types of parents, determined by the ways in which they use their space, time, and energy and the degree to which they express their feelings, exert power, and share a

common philosophy of marriage. This study largely draws from the postulations of this theory, bearing in mind that families in South East Nigeria are culturally and socially schematized towards communality. Hence, there is apparent high level of interaction among family members even beyond the nuclear family units. This theory therefore supports the notion of family dynamics determining and affecting the use and outcome of these devices in family interactions and relationships, which is the argument of this work.

4. The Study Area and Methods

This study is delineated to cover the five states that make up the South-East geopolitical zone in Nigeria, namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. These states constitute the Igbo ethnic group- one of the three major ethic groups in Nigeria. They share common language and cultural practices. This ethnic group is widely speculated to have embraced and imbibed Western culture more than any other ethnic group in Nigeria. In fact, there is heightened fear that the Igbo language is on the verge of extinction. Although a large proportion of the Igbos still engage in farming, it is seen to be the exclusive reserve of the rural dwellers. While tertiary activities like teaching, legal and banking profession, bakery, carpentry, advanced trade, civil and public service jobs obtain in the urban cities. All these have had direct impact on the family values in Igbo land. Because these states share virtually everything in common-language, culture, values and norms etc., three states were randomly selected, viz.: Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi. The entire population of the selected states was 9,622,612 (National Population Commission, 2006). Using Philip Meyer's table, a sample size of 400 was derived from the total population. Thus, a total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the households within the urban cities of the selected states. Questions were determined from the research questions already formulated for the study.

All parents and children between the ages of 13 and above (early teen) dwelling in urban cities of the selected states in South East Nigeria were randomly sampled. Hence, in each household sampled any family member present was used as the respondent. And where more than one member is readily available, they fill out the questionnaire collectively.

The data obtained were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and descriptive analysis so as to determine the impact of personalized communication devices on the family communication patterns in South East Nigeria.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

In this study, the researchers recorded 81.5% return rate. Out of the 400 copies of questionnaire that were distributed, only 326 copies were returned and duly analyzed.

From the demographic data collated, result shows that the number of male and female respondents surveyed in this study is even. That shows 50% male and 50% female respondents. This result presents an evidence of no gender bias in the administration of the questionnaire as the entire human element within the study area and between 13 years and above had equal chances of selection.

The data on age distribution show that majority of the respondents are between the ages of 24 and 33years (48.3%), closely followed by those that are 34 years and above (37.6%), while 14.1% of the respondents are between the ages of 13 to 23 years. The results also show that 55.1% of the respondents constituting the majority are single, 44.3% is married, while 0.6% is divorced.

It was observed here that majority of the respondents (36.7%) engage in trade or artisanship. 33.5% are students, 27.5% engage in Civil services or public service jobs while 2.2% engage in farming. The data on the respondents' level of education show that 35.8% constituting the majority possess O'level qualification, 34.9% have obtained a degree or HND qualification, 14.6% are NCE or OND holders, 9.3% obtained only First School Leaving Certificate, while only 5.3% have an advanced degree.

Family Size and General Communication Pattern

Table 1:

Number in Respondents' Family

	Frequency	Percent
1-5	159	49.7
6-10	146	45.6
11 and above	15	4.7
Total	320	100

The data in the table above show the size of the families in South East with majority (49.7%) between 1 to 5 members making up the family. 45.6% having 6 to 10 members while 4.7% have 11 persons and above making up the family. Thus, about 50.3% of families surveyed are made up of at least six members. This by implication indicate the relatively large family size in South East Nigeria as is common with less developed and developing countries accounting for the high population in such countries.

Table 2:

Age Range of Respondents' Family Members

	Frequency	Percent
0-10 years	43	13.9
11-20	68	22
21-30	113	36.6
31 and above	85	27.5
Total	309	

The table above on the age range of the respondents' family members indicates that 13.9% have their family members' ages ranging from zero to ten, 22% responses present age range between 11 to 20, 27.5% range between 31 and above, while 36.6% constituting majority range from 21-20.

Table 3:

Respondent Owning New Communication Device and Internet Connectivity

	Respondent Owning New Communication Device		Respondent's New Communication Device Connected to the Internet	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	295	91	250	80.9
No	29	9	50	16.2
Can't Say	-	-	9	2.9
Total	324	100	309	100

Majority (91%) of the individual members of the families that participated in the study admitted to owning a NPCD, while the remaining 9% do not possess NPCD. The respondents not only own NPCD, but majority (80.9%) has internet connectivity. 16.2% do not have internet connection while 2.9% couldn't say if theirs are connected. The findings here are clear indication that the respondents have greater on-online presence; greater connection to social networks and perhaps rich interactivity in virtual communities. The finding above goes on to suggest that greater number of individuals in South East urban possess one form of personalized communication device or the other. This may as well point to the high level of accessibility of these devices in most families in South East urban areas in Nigeria.

Table 4:

Different Means and Preferred Means of Communication in Respondent's Family

	Different Means of Communication in Respondent's Family		Preferred Means of Communication in Respondent's Family	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Face to Face/Domestic Conversation	123	38.4	153	47.5
Meetings	22	6.9	23	7.1
Telephone Calls	122	38.1	124	38.5
Letter/E-mails/SMS	1	0.3	6	1.9
Social Networks	4	1.3	8	2.5
All of the above	48	15	8	2.5
Total	320	100	322	100

In assessing the general communication patterns in the families, findings show that the respondents adopt various means of communication. Using face-to-face domestic conversation and using telephone calls, at 38.4% and 38.1% respectively. 6.9% adopt family meetings, 1.3% communicate mostly via social network platforms, 0.3% make use of letter/e-mail and/or SMS, 15% make use of the various means of communication available to them in family communication.

Similarly, on the preferred means of communication, the families sampled communicated predominantly through face-to-face domestic conversation 47.5%, this is closely followed by telephone calls (38.5%), other means of communication in the family included organized family meetings (7.1%), but the families barely communicate using letter/e-mails/SMS (1.9%) and social networks (2.5%). Only 2.5% of the respondents admit to adopting all means listed above in their family communication.

Table 5:
Type of New Communication Device Owned and Used by Respondent's Family Members

	Type of New Communication Device Owned by Respondent	
	Frequency	Percent
Mobile/Smartphone	258	86.3
Computer/Laptop/Palmtop	30	10
Ipad/Ipod	9	3
Beeper/Pager	2	0.7
Total	299	100

When the respondents were asked the type of device they possessed, 86.3% constituting the majority indicated possessing Mobile/Smartphone. 10% own computer/laptop/palmtop, 3% own Ipad/Ipod, while only 0.7% own beeper/pager. This finding largely point to the prevalence of Mobile/Smartphone among Nigerian population which may be directly linked to the cost of procuring other devices such as Laptop, Ipad, etc. Mobile phones/Smartphones are more affordable and probably more portable and invariably, the most prevalently used NPCD in the families surveyed given at 97.5%.

Table 6:
How Much Time Respondent Spends Interacting with the Device Per Day

	Frequency	Percent
0-2 hours	137	44.1
3-4 hours	68	21.9
5-6hours	39	12.5
7 hours and above	67	21.5
Total	311	100

Beyond owning these NPCD and having internet connectivity, the amount of time respondents spend interacting with these communication devices per day was sought. The result shows that majority, almost half of the respondents (44.1%) spend approximately 2hours interacting with the devices; 21.9% spend approximately 3-4hours; 21.5% spend approximately 7hours and above; while 12.5% of the respondents spend approximately5-6hours interacting with the NPCD.

Table 7:
Whether Respondent Spends Same amount of Time Interacting with Family Members and the impact on Interaction with Family Members

	Respondent Spending Same amount of Time Interacting with Family Members		Engagement with Device affecting Interaction with Family Members	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	167	52.8	48	15.2
No	96	30.4	241	76
Can't Say	53	16.8	28	8.8
Total	316	100	317	100

Table 7 above shows that majority of the respondents (52.8%) still spend the same amount of time interacting with their family members, while 30.4% of the respondents indicate that they do not spend the same amount of time interacting with the families members. Only 16.8% of the respondents could not say if they spend the same amount of time interacting with family members.

Data from the table also show that respondents' engagement with the NPDC does not affect interaction with their family members significantly as shown by 76% of the respondents that indicated no effect in their relationship with other family members, while 15.2% affirmed that it affects interaction with family members. 8.8% do not know whether it has any effect on them or not.
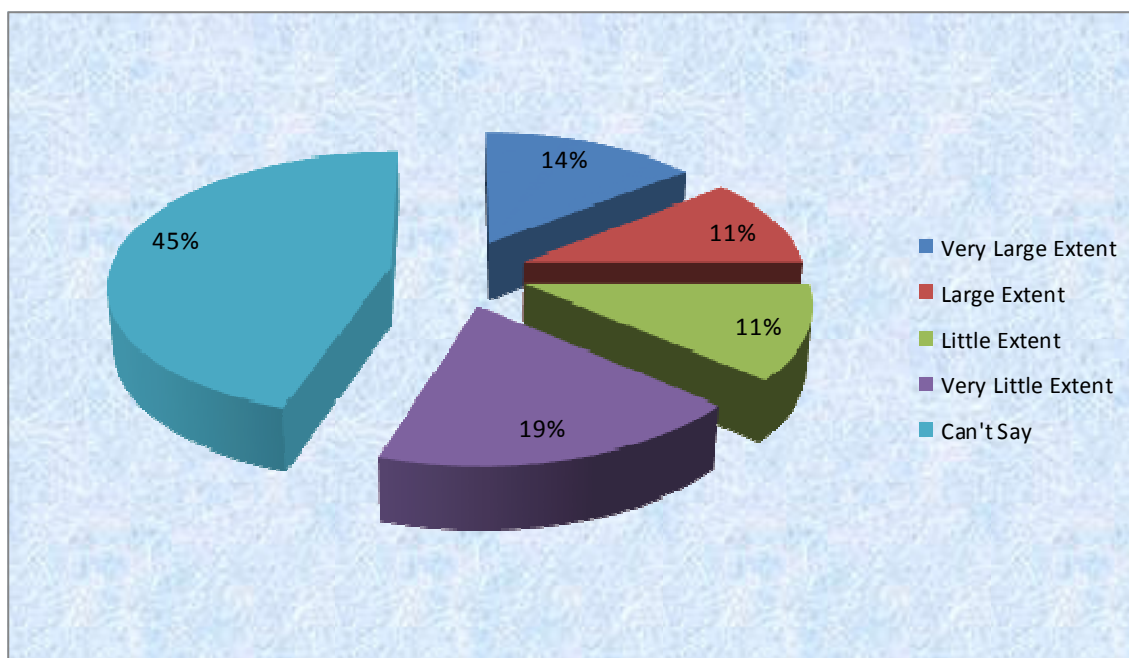
Figure 1: Extent of Effect on Family Interaction

The level of perceived effect was measured. 14% indicate that it affects their interaction with other members of the family to a very large extent, 11% state it affect them to a large extent. Conversely, 11% indicate that the effect is to a little extent and 19% maintain that is of very little extent. This goes on to show that the number that indicates that the use of NPCD has just little impact on their interaction with other members of their family is greater at 30%. However, almost half (45%) could not say to what extent they are affected going by the quality of time spent interacting with other family members.

Table 8:

What Respondent Mostly does with the NCD

	Frequency	Percent
Social Interaction with friends	72	22.4
Relating with family members	54	16.8
Academic Work	21	6.5
Business Transactions	40	12.4
All of the above	135	41.9
Total	322	100

On what the respondents mostly do with the NPCD, 22.4% state using the NPCD for social interaction with friends; 16.8% use the NPCD for relating with family members; 6.5% use it for academic work; 12.4% do business transactions with the device, while 41.9% of the respondents use the NPCD for both social interaction with friends, relating with family members, academic work and business transactions.
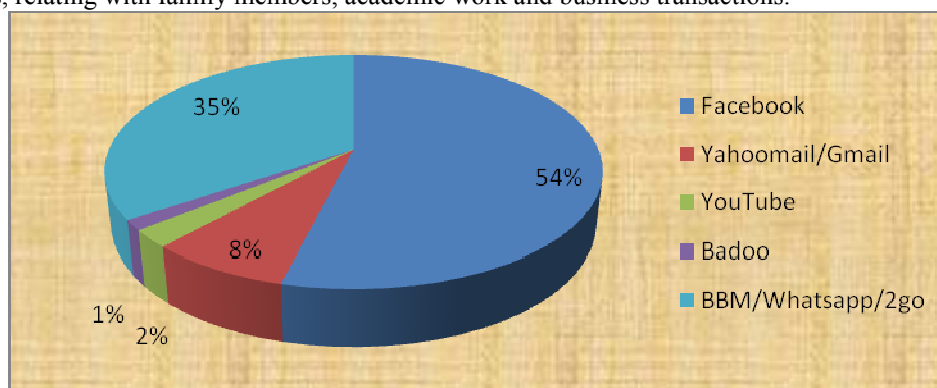

Figure 2: Site(s) Most Frequently Visited

Facebook ranked top among the sites most frequently visited by respondents (54%) followed by Blackberry Messenger (BBM)/Whatsapp/2go, (35%), Yahoomail/Gmail, (8%), YouTube (2%), and Badoo (1%).

Table 9:
Other Factors Affecting Family Communication

	Frequency	Percent
Work	160	54.8
Old Media of Communication	16	5.5
Social Engagement/Outing	65	22.3
Domestic Chores	27	9.2
Others	24	8.2
Total	292	100

Top in the list of factors that affect family communication is work or occupation of the respondents as shown in the table above. More than half of the respondents, 54.8% indicated work, this is closely followed by 22.3% that maintained that social engagement/outing affect their family communication, 9.2% indicate domestic chores as a factor, 5.5% said old media of communication while 8.2% indicated other factors other than those listed.

Table 10:
NPCD Encouraging Individualism Rather than Communality in Family Living

	NPCD Encouraging Individuality Rather than Communality in Family Living		NPCD Replacing Face-to-face Domestic Conversation in Family		NPCD Promoting any form of Social Bond	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	8	2.6	20	6.3	46	14.4
Agree	150	48.2	190	60.2	200	63
Undecided	52	16.7	23	7.3	36	11.3
Disagree	10	3.2	12	4	36	11.3
Strongly Disagree	91	29.3	70	22.2	-	-
Total	311	100	315	100	318	100

From the table above, 2.6% of the respondents strongly agree that the NPCD is encouraging individualism rather than communality in family living, majority 48.2% agree that it encourages individuality, 3.2% disagree, while 29.3% strongly disagree. 16.7% of the respondents were rather undecided. Similarly, while 6.3% strongly agree that the NPCD is replacing face-to-face domestic conversation in family, majority (60.2%) agree to that. Conversely, 36% disagree while 36% were undecided. On the question of whether NPCD promote any form of social bond, 14.4% strongly agree, 63% agree, 11.3% disagree while another 11.3% were undecided. This finding goes on to corroborate the evidence of solitary nature of the NPCD that results in a sort of end-users forming individual cells especially at the point of use.

Table 11:
With Whom Respondents Establish Bonds Through NPCD

	Frequency	Percent
Family Members	85	32.1
Friends	124	46.8
Colleagues	13	4.9
All of the above	43	16.2
Total	265	100

Having established the fact that the use of new communication device actually fosters social interaction among end users; findings from the table above show that the greater level of bond is established between user and friends, 46.8% of the respondents shared this view, 32.1% indicate that they establish bond with family members using the NPCD, while 16.2% establish bond with family members, friends and even colleagues using the NPCD.

Table 12:
Implication to the Nigerian Families

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	159	50.8
No	96	30.7
Can't say	58	18.5
Total	313	100

From table 15 above, majority of the respondents (50.8%) hold that the nature of interaction and relationship cultivated using the personalized communication technology devices has implication to the Nigerian families, while 30.7% expressed contrary opinion. The views expressed on these implications through the

follow-up open-ended question include but not limited to the danger of on-line/internet addiction, breeding moral corruption and other social vices and ultimately isolation from members of the immediate social groups.

6. Discussion of Findings

The question of new media effect on family interaction has been widely debated, yet without concrete conclusion pinning down the nature and extent of this interaction among users. Findings in this study equally revealed and corroborated this ambivalence and polarity in the on-going discourse, bringing in the Nigerian family perspective. The demographic data, from the study show that majority of the family members surveyed are between the ages of 24 to 33 (48.3%), well educated (54.8%) and technologically savant.

Data results also demonstrate that a greater part of family members owned new personalized communication devices (91%) with internet connectivity (80.9%), indicating high availability and accessibility of these devices as also found by Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010). These availability and accessibility is also enhanced by other attributes of NPCD, such as portability, and affordability which may have accounted for the reason smart phone/mobile remained the dominant device possessed by the family members studied. As shown in table 5 above, the mobile phone/smart phone topped the chart (86.3%), and invariably accounted for the high preference as a means of conversation among the families sampled.

Looking at the general communication patterns in the Nigerian families surveyed, we found that communication in the family still largely centers on face-to-face domestic conversation (38.4%) even with the prevalence of the New Personalized Communication Devices (NPCD. Interestingly, data revealed that families still have a high preference for face-to-face conversation pattern of communication despite the high use of and access to these new devices. Reading critically, the point of interest is that the prevalence of face-to-face type of communication and consequently its preference is an indication that family communication pattern in Nigeria as at now may not be altered by these devices, but rather has been enhanced. Since face-to-face and telephones are dominant means and preferred ways of communication, then one enhances and complements the other. Instead of isolation as feared, it may be enhancement and reinforcing social values and family interactions and relationships. Analyzing the data on platforms these households use, we found that majority use Facebook and WhatsApp. These two popular platforms are mostly used to share information among family and friends – further strengthening the idea of cohesion and integration.

Again, the idea of 'personalized' and 'individuality' was upheld and reinforced from the data collated. Almost all the respondents reported using the new communication devices individually (75.5%) rather than collectively (6.7%) or interchangeably (15.6%). And in a similar vein, majority spends an average of over two hours interacting with these devices (55.9%). This finding in conjunction with the pattern of usage of the NPCD in the families (where respondents reported individual usage, (75.5%) may be directly attributed to the nature of these devices; because as McQuail (2005) observed, these devices at the point of their uses involve solitary behaviours, individualistic choices and responses and frequent anonymity. However, since average use is just two hours, its effect may not be as profound as feared unless it increases overtime. Subsequent findings from respondents indicate spending same amount of quality time interacting with their family members (52.8%). This result largely coincides with the findings of Bachen, (2004) and Avery & Baker's, (2000) studies on the American and Australian families respectively, where it was observed that no significant disbanding or disintegrating effect yet exists as a result of the availability and usage of the NPCD. This development maybe directly linked to the propositions of Koener and Fritzpatrick's (n.d) Relational Schemas in family communication theory that family communication builds on or depends on the very nature, structure, typology and principles upon which it is found, and not without the influence of the socio-cultural environment it exits.

We could infer that family communication and/or interaction still subsists in the families in South East Nigeria as shown in tables 4 and 7, but may not be unconnected to impact of other intervening factors other than the mere incursion of the new communication devices in family communication. Although these intervening factors like the economic status and the literacy level of the individual households were not interrogated in this study, we could extrapolate from the extant data gathered that the high cost of internet subscription and absence of free Wifi as evident in developed countries may be a major contributory factor to the preference to face-to-face conversations and interactions in the families surveyed. Because of these reasons, most families will still largely rely on the conventional mode of communication and interaction, and use these devices basically to communicate and not necessarily to navigate in the virtual world for a longer period of time (as is common in developed countries), hence reducing the chances of separation and disintegration in family bonds.

Findings in table 9 show that other factors like work (54.8%), domestic chores (9.2%), social engagements/outings (22.5%), etc, contribute to reduction in family communication rather than the NPCD. When we consider the upward mobility of family members due to economic squeeze, we then can argue that time spent away from families in work places by members of families even children, may have greater effect to family cohesion while these devices may now act as bridges of connection even when not at home. That maybe why many of the respondents agree that telephone constitutes a major source of communication as they may

substitute and complement the face-to-face conversation so that when not together family bonding will still continue.

Other noticeable area of ambivalence played out when the respondents' views were sought concerning whether the NPCD encourage individualism rather than communality in family living; replace face-to-face human contact and domestic conversation; and promote social bond. The views expressed were polarized. The majority, 50.8% agreed that it encourages individualism rather than communality in family living, while 32.5% disagreed to that. Similarly, 66.5% agreed that NPCD is replacing face-to-face domestic conversation in family, while 26.2% disagreed. Meanwhile, majority indicate that NPCD bolster social bond (77.4%), while 11.3% disagreed. This particular finding is instructive in that it called attention to the ambivalence dominant among scholars in this regard.

The respondents went further to state that they establish bond with friends more than any other social group including their immediate family through the NPCD. 46.8% shared this view, while 32.1% indicate establishing bond with family members instead. This finding buttressed Holme's (2007) view that with the prevalence of the personalized communication devices, members of household become neighbours, sharing same roof but not communication. The findings in this study go on to show that there is an element of separation in the household as a result of the increasing incursion of the NPCD into the family life. But as shown earlier, evidence of familial bonding still prevails as the families sampled prefer face-to-face domestic conversation among family members to any other mode of communication, and also agree that even when it promotes individualism, it encourages social bonding. The controversy here as it appears collapses when we realize when and what these technologies are used for within the family. In the Nigerian setting predominantly, the platforms indicated as most popular are those used by family members to share information, update each other on new events and basically stay connected.

7. Conclusion

Lull proposes that, "the social environment in the family home is a major contributor to differential uses of the medium by individuals" (1980, p. 1). In other words, the way these new devices are used in the home depends on the dynamics of the family. This to an extent played out in the course of this work. The findings from this study require us to take into consideration not only the use of a medium but also how it is being used and what it is being used for. This information helps us to understand the beginning of how these devices shape the relationships and interactions within the household and what effect they have on the family dynamics. Media as we know can be used in a variety of ways and for many purposes – communication, education and social interaction. In the case of South-East Nigeria, we found that a vast majority of individuals in the family use media devices as a means of communication and/or connection with others, such that it provides opportunities for continued conversation, interactions and bonding even when physically not present. Within this context, we recognize it as an important resource for upholding family relationships and a platform for socialization with physically distant family members. Because in the words of Littlejohn and Foss (2008)

Indeed, our constant social interactions with others structure our individual lives, provide ways of understanding experience, create interpersonal relationships and build social institutions…even the most mundane talk is significant in defining who we are and producing the cultures in which we live (p.185).

References

Aarsand, P.A. (2007). Computer and Video games in Family Life: The Digital Divide as a Resource in Intergenerational interactions. *Childhood. 14*(2), 235-256.

Asonibare, J. & Olowonirejuaro, O. (2006). Family Cohesion and Level of Communication Between Parents and Their Adolescent Children. *TNJGL, Vol. 11, No.1*

Avery, G. & Baker, E. (2000). Understanding Technology Use Within Australian Household. *Electronic Journal of Communication*

Bachen, C. (2004). The Family in the Networked Society: A Summary of Research on the American Family. *French Journal of Media Research.*

Bala, K. (2014). Social Media and Changing Communication Patterns. *Global Media Journal- Indian Edition Vol.5/No.1*

Baym, N. (2000). *Tune in, log on: Soaps, fandom and online community*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chukwu, C. O. (2014). Online journalism and the changing nature of traditional media in Nigeria. *International Journal of African Society Cultures and TraditionsVol.2, No. 3, pp.1-9.*

Church, K., Weight, J., Berry, M. & MacDonald, H. (2010). At Home with Media Technology. *Home Cultures. 7*(3), 263-286.

Dominick, J. (2013). *The Dynamics of Mass Communication (12th ed.)*. New York: McGraw-Hill

Ekong, E. (1988). *An Introduction to Rural Sociology*. Ibadan: Jumak Publications.

Ekwe, T. (1992) Communication Breakdown Between Parents and Their Teenage Children: Implication for Discipline and Counseling. Paper Presented at the 8th National Conference of National Association of Educational Psychology (NAEP) at Aice, Owerri.

George, I. N. & Ukpong, D. E. (2013) Combating the 21st Century Family Challenges in Nigeria for Social Stability through Family Counseling Services. *Developing Country Studies www.iiste.org ISSN 2224-607X (Paper) ISSN 2225-0565 (Online) Vol.3, No.4*

Holmes, P. H. & Sachs, M. (2007) Family Communication: Overcoming Obstacles. *Fact Sheet Family & Consumer Sciences HYG-5192-07*

Hughes, R., & Hans, J. D. (2001). Computers, the Internet, and families – A review of the role new technology plays in family life. *Journal of Family Issues*, *22*(6), 776-790.

Kayany, J. & Yelsma, P. (2000). Displacement Effects of Online Media in the Socio-Technical Contexts of Households. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 44:2 (2000), 215-229.

Koerner, A. F. & Fitzpatrick, M. A. (n.d.) Toward a Theory of Family Communication. *Family Communication Journal.*

Kolo, F. (1993). A Survey of Pleasant and Unpleasant Communication Among Married Couple: Some Implications for Marital Dysfunction. Paper Presented at the 6th Annual Conference Counseling Association of Nigeria. Lagos Nov. 30-Dec.04.

Littlejohn, S. & Foss, K. (2008). *Theories of Human Communication (9th ed.)* USA: Lyn Uhl

Livingstone, S. (2003). *Young People and New Media*. London: Routledge.

Maccoby, E. (1954). Why do Children Watch Television. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 18(3), 239 – 244.*

McGratt, S. (2012). The Impact of New Media Technologies on Social Interaction in the Household. Available at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/SiobhanMcGrath.pdf on June, 11, 2014.

McQuail, D. (2005). *Mass Communication Theory (5th ed.)*. London: SAGE Publication Ltd. (pp.136-159)

Mesch, G.S. (2006). Family relations and the internet: exploring a family boundaries approach. *The Journal of Family Location. 6*(2), 119-138.

National Bureau of Statistics (2010) Annual Abstract of Statistics. Federal Republic of Nigeria.

O'Keefe, G.S. & Clarke-Pearson, K. (2011). Clinical report- the impact of social media on children, adolescents and families. *American Academy of Paediatrics*. Retrieved from www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2011-0054 doi:10.1542/peds.2011-0054

Olayiwola, F. O. & Owagbemi, O. G. (2014). Strains in Traditional Family Values in a Yoruba Community: A Study of Families in Akoko-Land in Ondo State, Nigeria. European Scientific Journal November edition vol. 8, No.26 ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857- 7431 160

Raacke, J. & Bonds-Raacke, J. (2008). MySpace and Facebook: Applying the Uses and Gratifications Theory to Exploring Friend-Networking Sites. *Cyber Psychology and Behavior*, *11* (2), pp. 169-74.

Rheingold, H. (1993). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.

Rideout, V., Foehr, U., & Roberts, D. (2010). Generation M2: Media in the lives of 8- to 18-year-olds: *A Kaiser Family Foundation Study*. Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Retrieved from: http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/8010.pdf

Rotimi, A. (2005). Paradox of "Progress": The Role of Western Education in the Transformation of the Family in Nigeria. *Kamla-Raj, Anthropologist, 7(2): 137-147*

Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation (2011). Tracking Social Media: The Social Media Tracking Center and The 2011 Nigerian Elections.

Stoll, C. (1995). *Silicon snake oil: Second thoughts on the information highway*. New York: Doubleday.

Strong, B., Vault, C., Said, M. & Reynolds, R. (1983). *The Marriage and the Family Experience*. St. Paul Minnesota: West Publishing Company.

Wellman, B., Smith, A., Wells, A., & Kennedy, T. (2001). Networked Families. A report of the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved June 10, 2014 from http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/Networked-Families.aspx