8 September 2022

Re: International Collaboration, 2021-2023

To Whom It May Concern

This is to inform you that Prof. G.Ravindran and Dr. R. Shamala from the Department of Media, Communication, School of Communication, (Central University of Tamil Nadu, India) and Dr. Gerelene Jagganath, Senior Lecturer, Department of Anthropology (University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa) are engaged in research pertaining to discourses relating to contemporary diasporic identity constructions and negotiations. Our collaborative research focuses on the social media practices of Indian women and migrant youth as diasporic subjects in South Africa and India, and how these practices have a bearing on their negotiations in everyday life contexts and interpersonal networks. The collaboration aims to promote studies on South-South migration experiences of women and youth migrants. This collaboration is purely intellectual and does not involve financial relationships/budget/liabilities.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gerelene Jagganath
Senior Lecturer
School of Social Sciences
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban, South Africa
(W) 031 2607332
(C) 083 6455998
JagGANathG@ukzn.ac.za
gerelenei@gmail.com
Abstract

Global mass media, consumerism, and migration are reconfiguring the way in which people relate to one another, and anthropologists are increasingly concerned with how affect and intimacy relate to youth in these contexts. In a globalised world characterised by both internal and transnational migrations, young people use digital media to navigate...
Highly Skilled Migrant Youths: Emotional Intimacy

spaces in both familiar and new environments. This paper uses a mixed-methods approach to explore how, in the context of migration, highly skilled youth navigate emotional intimacy by adopting different modes of social media and online communications. The sample includes 23 migrant youth from three countries in the global south (South Africa, Nigeria, and India). While much literature exists on maintaining family communication across borders through online platforms, the role of these technologies in peer relationships, specifically, those that involve friendships and romantic or sexual relationships, has not received adequate attention. The study focuses on single and married young adults who are highly skilled migrants and the ways in which they negotiate potential and established romantic relationships in the digital world of communication. The findings of the study reveal that digital modalities are integral to maintaining transnational relationships between young people. Among single-status young adults, several social media forums were mediated to meet people, and an openness to form new relationships in the host environment with those of diverse cultural backgrounds was evident. The married young adults in the study adopted an array of social media platforms in their daily intimacies and to sustain long-term emotional and sexual intimacy.

Keywords: Social Media, Migration, Youth, Intimate Relationships, Digital Communication

Introduction

The human migration process involves moving from one place to (at least) another. Human patterns of movement are an indication of the conditions of a dynamic world that impact the cultural worlds of both the places people leave and the places in which they arrive or settle. Migration entails change and transformation and the consequent (re)negotiation of one self and others in both of these places. Inevitably, migration affects emotions as both corporeally embodied and societally embedded. Emotions are embodied and socially circulated, and both emotions and place are mutually co-constructive of social relations (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015). For migrants, the increasing accessibility, affordability, and functionality of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have emancipated people from temporal and spatial constraints and enabled a lifestyle of “perpetual connectivity”, where the distinction between absence and presence, near and far, and private and public, is indiscernible. ICTs such as smartphones, tablets, and portable laptops have found their way into our daily lives and have become indispensable in communication, enabling users to convey messages and images ranging from the most basic to the full assemblage of aural and visual features. The range of communicative platforms, modes, languages, and codes offered and powered by ICTs have become firmly entrenched in the communicative storehouse that people adopt to make social connections (Wang & Lim, 2020). For international
migrants and their remote family members, in particular, ICTs are revered as the “social glue of transnationalism” (Vertovec, 2004: 219). For migrant youth in particular, much of their ‘digital labour’ involves cultivating one’s online profile, sometimes on several platforms, by uploading pictures or videos and sharing information or tweets. It also includes checking apps frequently and engaging in conversations online… (Anschutz, 2022:489). ICTs provide ‘new possibilities for sustaining intimacy across time and space, providing revolutionary and ever more sophisticated avenues for the exchange of emotional support and for delivering a sense of emotional closeness or “being present” across distance’ (Baldassar et al., 2016: 135). This study explores the impact of social media and communication technologies on the relationships and socialising of young adult migrants within the host environment. It integrates previous studies in the presentation of data and the discussion of findings to contextualise migrant behaviours in the digital context.

Background

Migrants' dynamic emotional lives are a source of meaningful insights into their subjectivities, their interactions with old and new reference groups, and the complex interdependence between emotion, space, and place (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015). In the context of migration, the process of people leaving home or moving between homes means that emotions themselves are on the move and everyday life is reconfigured. People’s mobility often intersects with intimate issues, including love, sex, family, and conjugal matters, which shape mobility and people’s intimate choices across and between countries (Groes & Fernandez, 2018). In the discourse of transnational migration, most studies of migrant emotions and intimacies have focused on family life across borders that disrupts bonds of place and kinship relations. Research exploring what role transnational mobility plays in shaping migrant youth's emotional engagement in relationships beyond the family is relatively new. The lived experiences of migrant youths in digital migration scholarship deserve more attention, although there is a growing body of work that engages with the way in which migrants strategically navigate social media platforms and apps to keep in touch with both family and friends from a distance. Scholars such as Patterson & Leurs (2020), for instance, in their study on young adult expatriates in the Netherlands, affirm how cultural globalisation, high-tech capitalism, and the internationalising of education have resulted in intimacy practices becoming increasingly digitally mediated. Naus & Kinsbergen’s
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(2022) study of young Morroccan adults ‘who stayed behind’, highlights that in our urbanising, mobile, and interconnected world, it is essential to move beyond family relations, to include friendships while studying migration as a social phenomenon. Anschutz (2022:484) refers to the notion of ‘extraordinary everydayness’ in the affective engagements of Ghanaian-background youth with their country of origin, showing how emotion, mobility, and the digital are intertwined. Similarly, this paper examines an understudied group of highly skilled young adults from the global south (South Africa, Nigeria, and India) and the negotiation of digital intimacy in their personal relationships. It provides some insight into youth mobility and the formation of affective connections with people and places through digital media at different points of the migration trajectory. The study also contributes to the dating preferences of youth in the host environment, which are underrepresented in existing studies of youth in a transnational context. For the purposes of this paper, intimacy refers to affective relations (feelings of being close, emotionally connected, and supported) between mainly romantic partners, spouses, and friends, some of whom may live in close proximity and others who may reside abroad.

The study is situated in the development of digital media, which has a long history of technological developments that have shaped how the experience of migration is lived and represented. Understanding the emotional impacts of platforms requires an examination of particular practices, contexts, and consequences of media usage in social life. The increasing intrusion of web applications into more aspects of people’s everyday lives complicates an already diverse array of contemporary migration phenomena (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020). Social media has created a space for new kinds of intimacy practices, including intimacy at a distance. Madiamou & Miller (2012) have advanced research on polymedia, which refers to the choice individuals make between several forms of communication based on their personal circumstances within a wider media ecology (whether Skype, email, WhatsApp, or other channels of communication). Their choice of medium or platform depends on the type of relationship, where certain channels of communication are suitable for communicating with close intimates, some with parents, some for casual friends, and others for looser ties (Chambers, 2017). Digital media provides new and powerful tools for the circulation of emotions within affective economies. In the transnational context, digital technologies have become a means of keeping connected and maintaining long-distance relationships.
to mitigate social and physical separation (Marino, 2019), where loneliness is a common challenge.

**Research Methodology**

The study was conducted over a six-month period from July to December 2022 using a mixed-methods approach that included elements of both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Mixed-methods research involves a researcher or team of researchers who combine qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Schoonenboom & Burke Johnson, 2017). The primary source of data was collected using a Google survey due to the multi-site nature of the research and the mobility of the sample of 23 participants. The use of online surveys has grown rapidly in social science and policy research, surpassing more established methods (Lehdonvirta et al., 2020). In this study, the researchers involved in the project purposively selected participants from their own personal and professional networks, who then referred them to other suitable candidates. Network sampling operates on the principle that individuals are interconnected within networks, whether they be social, professional, or online. When a few individuals within the networks are identified, utilising connections as a researcher to recruit additional participants for the survey becomes possible (Aransiola, 2019). Overall, one could describe the process of recruiting participants for this study as a combination of network sampling, where investigators in the project leveraged their own social and professional networks for participation in the survey, followed by snowball sampling, where the initial participants made referrals to other potential respondents. While the survey sample emanates from three different countries and provides multicultural perspectives on intimacy in the age of digital connections, the small sample size is a limitation for accuracy (participants do not give honest details about issues that are sensitive or controversial, such as their sexual behaviour and fidelity in relationships), and making generalisations about the global trends of highly skilled migrant youths is not feasible.

The participants comprised young people who were already residing in the host country or region and could be classified as a highly skilled migrant group with a tertiary education background and some working experience. In the main survey sample, the data was supplemented with online interviews with three of the participants who agreed to participate in audio calls on Facebook Messenger. The audio online interviews are
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presented as minor case studies in this paper. The case study method also has a tradition of collecting multiple forms of data to gain a more complete understanding of the community and integrates well with a mixed-methods approach.

The Sample

A total of 23 young adult migrants comprised the sample, of which 16 males and 7 females participated. For the purposes of this paper, they are referred to as ‘youth’. All participants were proficient in digital communications and knowledgeable about migration processes through their own experiences. Their ‘homeland’ or countries of origin were primarily India, Nigeria, and South Africa. Tables 1 to 6 to follow, provide details on the background of the sample.

Table 1: Age Groups of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE GROUP</th>
<th>NUMBER OF YOUTH</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 to 29 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 35 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specifically for the purposes of this paper, ‘migrant youth’ refers to that category of young people between the ages of 20 and 36 who have some form of tertiary education. Table 1 indicates that while most of the participants belonged to the age group of 21 to 29 years of age (N=14), a significant number were of the age range of 30 to 35 years (N=9).

Table 2: Region of Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRIES</th>
<th>NUMBER OF YOUTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INDIA</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIGERIA</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH AFRICA</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL = 23

Geographically, the global south refers to the countries of South and Central America, Africa, and Asia. Medie and Kang (2018) define ‘countries of the global south’ as countries that have been marginalised in the international political and economic system. Politically, the South has been constituted through a long history of unequal encounters with, and diverse forms of resistance to, different structures and entities across what can be variously designated the North, West, or specific imperial and colonial powers (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Daley, 2018). The sample of migrant
youth hails from the countries of South Africa, Nigeria (West Africa), and India, countries of the global south. In Africa and India, despite youth being more educated and connected than previous generations, they are confronting escalating climate impacts and high rates of underemployment. Approximately 16 million youth in Africa, for instance, face unemployment, and 40% consider their living situations to be very or fairly bad. They confront three issues that are accelerating youth migration: the youth ‘population bulge’, high unemployment, and mounting climate impacts. The ability of young people to move is an important adaptive response to these challenges (Mbiyozo, 2022).

Table 3: Current Migration Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF YOUTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International/transnational migrant</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal/regional migrant</td>
<td>10 TOTAL = 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this sample, the youth were either studying and/or working as international/transnational migrants (residing in an overseas country) or as internal/regional migrants (residing in a different region within the country or continent of origin). While most were living abroad in countries outside of their continent of origin (including France, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates), a significant proportion of the sample were internal/regional migrants residing in South Africa (from Durban, Gauteng, and the Western Cape), India (from Delhi, Telangana, and Karnataka), and Nigeria (from Abuja and Ekiti State).

Table 4: Highest Levels of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION LEVEL</th>
<th>NUMBER OF YOUTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PHD (DOCTORATE)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MASTERS DEGREE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACHELORS DEGREE</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSTGRADUATE DEGREE (HONOURS)</td>
<td>4 TOTAL = 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table indicates that almost 74% (N=17) of the sample had a postgraduate degree and 26% (N=6) a bachelor’s degree. Recent migratory trends show that an increasing number of international students hail from the Global South. In 2014, 9.5% of international graduate students in the OECD countries came from Africa and 53.1% from Asia (OECD 2016:...
For the countries in the Global South, student migration and academic mobility have two-fold implications. On the one hand, it provides increased access to education, further resources, and career opportunities. On the other hand, it also compromises homelands when highly skilled youth move abroad during their most productive years. Hence, some students, upon completion of their studies, may prefer to return to their home country within a few years (Adu, 2019) to work within the country or region of origin. Most governments define highly skilled immigrants in terms of both education and occupation. Scholars of public policy, on the other hand, conceptualise the highly skilled through the notion of “skills.” This preference responds to the clear utilitarian view of highly-skilled migrants, notably as vessels of specific knowledge and competences; much scholarship refers to them as “skills” or “human capital” (Wiener & von Koppenfels, 2020).

Table 5: Marital/Relationship Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF YOUTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MARRIED</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINGLE</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN A RELATIONSHIP</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIDOWED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIVORCEE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 provides insight into the marital/relationship status of the sample. Six of the young adults were married; 13 were single (this was defined by the sample as ‘going solo’ or ‘casually dating’ with no committed emotional attachments); 2 were in exclusive long-term relationships; 1 was widowed, and 1 was divorced. The latter two participants also considered themselves ‘singles’.

Table 6: Religious Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELIGION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF YOUTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHRISTIAN</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HINDU</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUDDHIST</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUSLIM</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGNOSTIC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMNIST</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATHEIST</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 provides insight into the religious background of the sample.
The sample came from a range of different belief systems. Most belonged to the Hindu religion (N=10), followed by the Christian faith (N=8). Fewer in number were affiliated with Buddhism, Islam, Agnosticism, Omnism, and Atheism.

The tables presented above provide insight into the background of the participants and their profiles in the migration trajectory of highly skilled young adults from the global south.

**Findings and Discussion**

Young people’s regional and transnational mobility and their engagement with specific places, people, and digital platforms provide opportunities for new forms of subjectivity and affective experiences to emerge (Anschutz, 2022). This part of the paper explores this engagement and focuses on key research questions that address three main themes: 1. what social media platforms were most frequently used for communication in the host country/region; 2. how social media facilitated socialising in the host environment; and 3. how established intimate relationships were navigated and maintained over long distances. These questions are presented as themes in the sub-sections to follow.

**Frequently Used Social Media Platforms**

Young people moving to another province, region, or country often choose social media platforms and apps to familiarise themselves with the people, social, and work cultures of the place. Finding out about the new environment and how to access services in the new location is a basic yet crucial requirement for young migrants. Digital social capital (information circulated on the Internet, social media, and virtual connections between young migrants and their kin) influences a range of decisions before migration. A thorough knowledge of the most convenient and cost-effective ways to communicate with family and friends being left behind, as well as forming social networks in the new destination, is necessary to maintain and establish social and occupational connections. The following findings were most evident in the sample:

The social media platforms most popular among the sample to familiarise themselves with a new region and its culture included Facebook, Instagram, Tinder, and Meet Up.
For regular communication with family, WhatsApp was the overwhelming choice (N=22). Only one participant used email for daily communication. To maintain daily communications with friends and colleagues: WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Skype, Facebook, LinkedIn, Gmail, and Botim were mostly used (in order of popularity).

Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn each served a different purpose. Young migrants navigate multiple platforms to address their communication needs and leverage the differences between these platforms to manage the relationships they have in their professional and personal lives. Facebook was the most popular platform among newcomers post-arrival. Facebook groups on the other hand, are used by potential migrants pre-arrival to get information and learn from others’ experiences (Monteiro, 2022). The choices individuals make between numerous forms of communication according to their personal circumstances are referred to as ‘polymedia’.

**Social Media Facilitated Socialising in the New Location**

Studies in youth mobility show that young people ‘on the move’ build affective connections with people and places through social media and digital communication technologies before, during, and after migration (Anschutz, 2022). Migration scholars tend to ignore the process of making friends, and this can be a key challenge to integrating into a new society (Westcott & Maggio, 2015). Like family and kinship, friendships are seen as strong, intimate relationships that give meaning to life, and they are acknowledged for regulating individuals' behaviour. However, they can also be distinguished from family relations because they are considered more fluid and less spatially bounded (Bunnell et al., 2012). Scholars such as Ryan and D'Angelo (2017) elaborate on how migrants, at a certain point in time, prefer to establish networks of friends in the host country to provide stability, continuity, and emotional support. In our rapidly mobile and interconnected world, friendship as social capital is often perceived as an increasingly important form of intimacy in the context of migration.

**The Negotiation of Intimate Relationships**

The formation of new intimate relationships in the host country and maintaining intimate relations between couples who are either together or apart due to migration decisions, is an understudied and complex
phenomenon. Studies in the discourse that examine how migrants maintain intimacy with partners are an aspect of migration that is even more scarce.

One of the simplest forms of intimacy expressed between couples is a show of appreciation that creates a sense of care and affection. In the migration context, where couples who live apart are no longer able to greet each other in person or share affection through physical gestures such as handholding, and hugging, they have to resort to other means of expressing their feelings. In the sample, the most popular form of showing appreciation to intimate and potential partners using digital technology was cited as follows:

- Sending a small token of appreciation via courier/postage network (N=8)
- Sending emojis, stickers, and/or music on social media (N=4)
- Writing a long email or letter of appreciation (N=4)
- Sending the gift of money (international monetary transfer) (N=3)
- Sending an e-voucher/gift card (N=3)
- Compiling a photo collage or album on social media (N=1)

The above responses provide some insight into the use of digital communication and social media in the lives of young people who are highly skilled migrants in the sample. Technological advancement has transformed the social and emotional relationships of people on the move as well as their interactions with friends and partners. The responses foreground that gift-giving and showing appreciation, for instance, have taken on a significantly different form of expression in the digital context.

The section to follow provides an overview of the responses elicited by both single-status and married participants in the sample, relating to issues of communication and socialising using social media. The sample constituted both single and married participants in varying forms of intimate relations. Those participants who were of single status shared their views on the following issues: (a) the platforms they chose to connect with friends and potential partners (b) the most acceptable way to meet or date someone for the first time (c) what form of intimate relationship they considered most desirable while living abroad and, (d) their religious, racial and linguistic preferences when dating or forming a relationship

**Single Status Respondents:** Five of the 13 single respondents lived with their partners in the host country. Those who were not in a serious relationship indicated a preference for WhatsApp and Snapchat to connect with friends and potential partners. Only three of the respondents had downloaded a dating app to meet potential partners. Six respondents
believed that to meet someone alone in a public place for the first time for a meal or drink (with the intention of forming a relationship) was acceptable, while 15 respondents indicated that it was most appropriate to meet new people at a planned cultural event (as the chances of meeting someone with a similar cultural and linguistic background were higher).

When asked which form of intimate relationship was most desirable while living and/or working abroad, both single and married respondents provided the following responses (in order of preference): 12 respondents stated that it was most favourable to form or stay in a single-partner relationship; 8 stated that it was most conducive to form strong friendships with no physical intimacy; 2 believed that casual ‘friends with benefits’ was most desirable; and 1 stated that multiple-partner relationships were most realistic.

When asked if they would consider forming an intimate relationship with someone of a different religious background, the responses were as follows: Yes (N=13) and No (N=10).
When asked if they would consider forming an intimate relationship with someone from a different race group, the responses were as follows: Yes (N=15) and No (N=8).
When asked if they would form an intimate relationship with someone who was not fluent in their spoken language, the respondents indicated the following: Yes (N=15) and No (N=8).

The general perceptions of the single-status sample, about meeting potential partners and forming intimate relationships in the host environment based on differing religious, racial, and linguistic backgrounds indicated a strong preference for a single-partner relationship and strong friendships (with no intimacy) and an above-average openness to consider forming intimate relationships with people of different backgrounds. The number of responses that leaned more towards a preference for socialising and forming relationships with partners of similar backgrounds (the NO response) did not dominate but were significantly close in number to those who were more open to differences in culture.

The married couples in the sample shared differing living arrangements with their spouses. Most participants had left their spouses behind in their country of origin, and only one couple was living together in the host country. They shared their experiences on the following issues: (a) what daily communications were adopted to maintain intimacy; and (b) how distance, religion, and culture influenced marital relations with spouses who remained in the country of origin.
Married Couples: Only one of the six married respondents lived with their spouse at the time of the study. The remaining five married migrants had left their spouses behind in their country of origin. In the latter cohort of the sample, for those who were living apart from their spouses, daily communication consisted of the following activities to maintain intimacy:

- Daily chatting on social media with photo sharing of myself in different environments;
- Frequent sexting on a social media forum;
- Sharing personal videos of myself or acts that evoke feelings of intimacy in my chat.

The dynamic was different for couples who lived apart and belonged to specific cultural backgrounds. In a Facebook call on Messenger, one of the participants from India candidly explained how migration impacts marital relations in both positive and negative ways:

Case Study 1: Mehul (software engineer, 31 years) noted:
...it is a big decision for the whole family when someone moves to a new country. It means economic prospects for the family will improve and social status will be raised. If the wife stays behind, she has to listen to her husband's parents and take extra care of the children. That is Indian tradition. Living under the supervision of extended family is a pressure for young women today. It works when there is commitment to each other and men visit families regularly. It is also a big problem. Men get lonely, and it is so easy to hook up with someone online these days. I know many fake profiles that hide identities and are created by top young professionals to meet women and start love affairs. If this thing gets serious, then home visits get fewer, and it can be a mess. Social media is good and bad. Being away from home for young couples can also break marriages and start new families in the new country. Yes, sometimes it won’t go that far, but men who live away from home are also getting addicted to online pornography, and this also spoils their psychology and relationships.

Transnational mobility is generally considered a threat to maintaining intimacy among romantic partners, as couples have to rely on digital technologies to forge and sustain sexual relationships across distances. In a study on how transnational digital intimacy practices relate to transnational mobile subjects in negotiating emotional uncertainty, Patterson & Koen (2020) examine the selective smartphone and social media practices of young expatriates living in the Netherlands. The study affirms that during the COVID-19 pandemic, people around the world were compelled to isolate themselves from loved ones and friends and had to be resourceful in sustaining relationships. Intimate relations and sexual interest through
digital platforms like Zoom, WhatsApp, Skype, and FaceTime to connect romantic partners both within and across geographical borders have since increasingly become the norm for young couples and intimate partner relations.

In another audio call interview on Facebook Messenger, a young married Nigerian man shared his experience:

Case Study 2: Abeo (post-doctoral candidate, 29 years old)
As a married man who stays abroad with a young family living in another country, I find it stressful to cope with the demands of providing for everyone and managing the marriage. I try to go home as much as possible; it depends on the available time and expenses. During COVID-19 we were apart because of the travel restrictions; now we are apart because we have to support our families and make up for the losses during the pandemic. My children are very young now, but when they are ready for school, I would like for them to stay and be educated in my presence. I am working towards that. My wife is at home with the children and my parents, but she wishes for our small family to be together. We make time for the relationship to keep the romance alive, but it is not easy when you are living in a large household. We also have to work around different time zones to get some private time online. Our love for music and sharing our favourite videos is what keeps us going. I send romantic voice notes on WhatsApp to remind her of our love and to keep the flames burning until we are together again...

The two case studies presented above (Mehul and Abeo) express the lived experiences of two young, married migrants. Through discussion with them via audio calls on Facebook Messenger, a snapshot of the challenges of sustaining intimacy for married couples in the context of transnational relationships was provided. It was also a glimpse into the cultural challenges experienced by young migrants, their partners, and the cultural expectations of those who are left behind.

**Conclusion**

The role of social media platforms and mobile devices serves a twofold purpose, namely in producing emotional experiences of togetherness under conditions of long-distance, long-term separation, as well as facilitating fast-paced, more direct, immersive, conversational modes of communication (Alinejad, 2019). This study is a multi-sited, multicultural exploration of young migrants that considers the role of these technologies in peer and spousal relationships that involve friendships and romantic or sexual relationships, areas of youth migration that have not received adequate attention. It reveals that social media platforms play a crucial role
in the facilitation and socialisation of migrants, especially for young adults to familiarise themselves with the people, social, and work cultures of the host environment. Socialising in the host environment is essential to negotiating the new terrain and understanding the social dynamics of forming friendships and possible relationships. The responses of the young single-status adults in the sample suggest that they are open to new experiences. However, not far behind in the response rate were those who expressed more caution when socialising in the new environment, indicating a preference for interacting with people of similar backgrounds to themselves. Married couples that had migrated without their spouses had to consider daily communication with their partner through various social media platforms in order to maintain intimacy. This is a complex process that requires effort, planning, and consideration of cultural factors. Creating co-presence through digital communication and social media has two faces: one that supports long-distance relations and the other, that presents further social complexities in the virtual space. This study is an exploration of the intimate relationships of a small sample of highly skilled youth from the global south and cannot be generalised to other migrant groups. It is an attempt to contribute to the discourse of digital intimacy in the context of migration and encourage further studies of youth in the global south.

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