

NEW DIGITAL PARADIGM AND MOTHERHOOD IN MIGRATORY CONTEXTS

Mónica Ortiz Cobo

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology,
University of Granada

Calle Rector López Argüeta s/n, 18001 Granada, Spain

E-mail address: monicaoc@ugr.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8721-1905>

Renzo Ismael Jeri Levano

Institute for Migration Research, University of Granada

Calle Zamora, Parcela 111-112, 18151, Granada, Spain

E-mail address: renzojele@correo.ugr.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5965-0257>

José García Martín

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Education, University of Granada

Campus de Cartuja s/n, 18071 Granada, Spain

E-mail address: jgarciamartin@ugr.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7401-0613>

ABSTRACT

Aim. This investigation seeks to explore the maternal role of migrants in pre-digital and digital contexts. For this purpose, the study analyses the relationships among migrant mothers in digital and pre-digital contexts and the impact of their mother-child relationship.

Methods. Virtual ethnography has enabled the analysis of various heterogeneous moments and contexts, as well as a virtual exploration of the social networks of the twenty-four participants in this study. Meanwhile, multi-sited ethnography has allowed access to and the utilisation of multiple interconnected spaces in migratory contexts.

Results. The inclusion of digital technology, the use of social networks, and the polymedia environment enable migrant mothers to challenge geographical and temporal barriers and devise strategies that allow them to maintain their mother-child relationship through ubiquitous and real-time transnational communication. This distinguishes them from migrant mothers of the pre-digital era, whose maternal

roles were threatened by physical distance and the limited availability, at that time, of communication tools.

Conclusion. A new digital paradigm has enabled the construction of digital motherhood in migratory contexts, representing a significant evolution in parental dynamics affecting 21st-century mothers, often referred to as “digital natives”. This technological shift has altered the traditional conception of motherhood and long-distance caregiving. Changes in family relationships redefine the migratory experience and motherhood, as well as influence processes of identity, belonging, and adaptation in virtual contexts.

Keywords: migrant mothers, education, mother-child relationship, technology, transnational communication

INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of gender migration studies, there is growing interest in the analysis of migration networks and family transnationalism, characterised by the care chains that have been significantly transformed by a polymedia environment and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Bacigalupe & Cámara, 2012; Baldassar, 2016; Baldassar et al., 2016; Hunter, 2015; Madianou & Miller, 2011a).

Another focus of attention with regard to female migration has been their participation in the segmented labour market, especially in tasks related to domestic work and care for the elderly and children, among others (Escrivá Chordá, 2003; Parella Rubio, 2003a; Poblet, 2022). Because this is the main means of subsistence for the collective in the destination country, dynamics occur that have caused the re-configuration of family roles, creating tension with regard to the traditional figure of women as caregivers in the family. For Nina Nyberg Sorensen and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (2007), migration often involves leaving behind restrictive family relationships and questioning the traditional roles of women and, therefore, mothers. However, digital technology has allowed migrant mothers to reconfigure family relationships, enhancing transnational communication from a distance, offering them new ways of “being”, marked by omnipresence, contemporaneity and promptness in interaction (Nedelcu, 2012; Ryan et al., 2014; Vertovec, 2004).

Thus, transnational families and technology-facilitated communication are the focus of attention, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of how closeness and distance are handled in family relationships between migrants and their loved ones.

In the pre-digital age, the limited development of telecommunication and Internet technologies did not sufficiently facilitate a sense of connection with the “there” or the exercising of motherhood from afar. The use of analogue technologies for trans-

national communication presented significant obstacles, limiting the effectiveness of communication. All this negatively affected the relationship of mothers with their direct offspring and the emotional well-being of both.

This paper aims precisely to investigate the role and use of transnational communication in the exercise of motherhood among Peruvian migrant mothers in both digital and pre-digital contexts.

FEMINISATION OF MIGRATORY FLOWS AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

Already in the early 1980s, the study by Annie Phizacklea (1983) addressed the feminisation of migratory flows. This analysis highlighted initially the shortage of statistical data broken down by gender, neglecting the presence of migrant women in the history of migrations. However, economic globalisation has impacted migratory flows, and in the last four decades women have participated in cross-border migration and in the feminisation of the labour market (Bastia, 2008).

Other studies suggest that low demand for female labour force and structural crises in developing countries have contributed to increased poverty, insecurity and job precariousness (Escrivá Chordá, 2003; Parella Rubio, 2003a; Torns et al., 1996). For this reason, women have been particularly affected in the search for employment locally, which has led them to seek new employment opportunities in societies with higher standards of development and allowed them to exercise their rights as economic and social actors (Zlotnik, 2003).

The organisation of the labour market in productive systems characterised by tertiarisation, de-industrialisation and the increase of the informal economy has offered greater employability opportunities for migrant women in a sector of the underground economy in the host country (Campani, 2000). They are relegated to a feminised labour sector, with greater precariousness, worse pay and greater risk of exploitation. In addition, when integrating into the labour market in migratory contexts, women migrants face a triple process of discrimination, on the grounds of social class, gender and ethnic-cultural origin (Catarino & Oso, 2000).

However, female migrations also have a liberating effect that allows them to dissociate themselves from patriarchal family and social environments (Anderson, 2000; Henshall Momsen, 1999; Parella Rubio, 2003b). In this regard, although economic emancipation brings them to the role of breadwinner and decision-making power within the family nucleus, this economic responsibility leads them to accept occupations that entail greater job vulnerability (Solé, 2000; Torns, 1997).

NATURE OF THE TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY

Although from the multidisciplinary perspective of the social sciences, it is difficult to establish a singular definition of the transnational family, authors such as Deborah Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela (2002) conceptualise it as:

The family whose members live part or most of the time apart from each other and are able to create bonds that allow their members to feel part of a unit and perceive their well-being from a collective dimension, despite the physical distance. (p. 2)

The transnational configuration is not restricted only to the idea of the physical separation of its members, since not all families with migrant members can be called transnational, but only those who are able to maintain and perceive continuity in their relationships and affective bonds, adapting to the new migratory reality (Solé et al, 2007).

Consequently, transnational families are characterised by maintaining frequent relationships and fostering ties with family members in the place of origin, which includes children, parents or aunts and uncles, among others (González Torralbo, 2016). However, there is debate about the relationship between geographical distance and the maintenance of family relations (Mason, 1999). In this sense, proximity or geographical distance is perceived differently by each individual. Although for some, kinship relationships are not significant in their lives (distance-thinking), for others such relationships are significant, but they show the capacity to tolerate and live at a distance (reluctant distance thinking) and, finally, some people cannot live separately and require closeness (local-thinking).

MOTHERHOOD AND ICTs IN MIGRATORY CONTEXTS

Migrant mothers' search for work, economic and social well-being involves taking on responsibilities in multiple dimensions, such as providing financial support, managing resources, monitoring daily family life, as well as affective care (Hochschild, 2000; Salazar Parreñas, 2001). The latter dimension implies that these migrant mothers retain their place in the family through transnational communication as a means to develop family practices that make it possible to (re)build expressions of affection and care (De La Fuente Vilar, 2011; Kondrla & Králik, 2016). It also allows them to establish new bonds, as well as to enrich and rebuild those they have lost (Hampton, 2004; Hiller & Franz, 2004).

Papers by Lana Rakow and Vija Navarro (1993), Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller (2011a; 2011b) and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2001) point out that ICTs are a means to perform maternal and parenting work, easing the situation of absence, giving them greater control over what their children do and ensuring that they comply

with decisions made from a distance. In fact, a key element provided by new media is the “live image”, considered essential to practice motherhood. Body movements and gestures allow migrant mothers to ascertain the emotional situation of their children, for example: if they are sad, happy, worried or if they are telling the truth or lying to them, etc.

Currently, migrant mothers have a greater variety of means to communicate in an audiovisual way and in real time, unlike previously. The study by Juan Pablo Ramírez Martínez (2014) argues that there is no homogeneous use and recognition of the usefulness of ICTs to maintain family contact, and that this will depend on the generational, cultural and economic aspects of each individual. In spite of this, in general, the ease and affordability of mobile phones (smartphones) makes them the preferred digital tools for diasporas and migrant mothers (Baldassar et al., 2016; Castro Cabalceta, 2018; Pavlikova et al., 2023). They are useful when it comes to sharing everyday situations, since their audiovisual nature brings a greater perception of closeness to communication.

GENERATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN DIGITAL CONTEXTS

The development of new ICTs has had a significant impact on today’s society, immersing us in continuous reflection on how individuals are assimilating information technologies within a new social model. The dissemination of digital tools facilitates the creation, distribution and manipulation of information. However, it is a scenario that, far from developing in an equal way, brings with it new differences between citizens, since technological evolution not only fails to reduce existing social differences but in fact increases them (Martín Romero, 2020). Thus, there is a generational fracture between two age groups called “digital natives” and “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001), caused by inequalities in digital competences and/or skills, as well as the access and use of digital technology.

This generational digital divide is accentuated among “digital immigrants” (those who have migrated from analogue to digital), characterised by fear or reluctance regarding the unknown, a lack of computer education and basic IT skills, as well as the insecurity produced by exposure of privacy on the web and data management.

In contrast, “digital natives” (born within the digital prism) view the web as a continuation of the real world. In fact, “digital natives” are multimedia; they prefer the graphic universe to the textual one, hypertextuality to linearity, they learn on the web and from the web, which acts as the backbone of socialisation. Digital means of production prevail, and, above all, they operate natively in digital spaces.

In short, the lack of homogeneity in the digital society highlights the existence of digital gaps in which the use of ICTs is no longer a universal experience, becoming exclusionary for certain older age groups and e-inclusive for other age groups. Hence,

people considered “digital natives” have a greater capacity to adapt to strategies that optimise experiences in virtual spaces through “digital skills / previous knowledge”.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to analyse the difficulties and benefits of the technological resources used in transnational communication, focusing on the mother-child link managed remotely and mediated by ICTs. Each technological tool is adjusted to the conditions and skills acquired by individuals through personal experiences that are determined by the migratory context. Therefore, this work proposes the following specific objectives:

- Identify and analyse how migrant mothers managed physical separation from their children in a pre-digital context;
- Investigate and explore in depth the importance of the use of technology in the exercise of motherhood (virtually) among “digital native” migrant mothers;
- Identify technological asymmetries between migrant mothers.

This study has applied an ethnographic methodology, which has allowed various research techniques to be applied, adapted to the heterogeneous nature of the study contexts and data (Velasco Maíllo & Díaz de Rada, 2006). The ethnographic methodology seeks to know and interpret the meanings that individuals attribute to development and ways of life, practices and relationships. The choice of an ethnographic method is based on our interest in approaching the daily practices of migrant women in relation to the use of technology in the exercise of motherhood in a transnational context.

Virtual ethnography has allowed us to analyse moments and heterogeneous contexts related to the interaction and construction of a sense of family through the use of ICTs. This methodology facilitates an interpretative analysis of contents due to the nature of the object of study (Hine, 2000; Vigna, 2017). In this sense, it is important to note that virtual exploration was carried out on the social media most used by our participants, such as Instagram and Facebook, during a period that spanned from January 2021 to February 2023.

On the other hand, multi-situated ethnography (Marcus, 2001) provided an analysis of different interrelated and contextualised spaces in multiple everyday environments. This methodology can be used to overcome geographical limitations and expand the unit of analysis and comparison of several localities, allowing us to develop a deeper understanding of the use of technology in the (re)construction of the mother-child relationship among migrant women residing in Italy and Spain. In this methodological context, the semi-structured interview provides flexibility and freedom in the development of guided conversations with our informants (Pujadas i Muñoz et al., 2010).

As for the access and selection of the sample, a non-probabilistic sampling technique known as the snowball technique was used, in which the selected participants recruit new participants from their contacts, with whom they share certain characteristics of interest for the study (Valles Martínez, 2003). The sample is composed of twenty-four Peruvian migrant mothers residing in Italy and Spain, of whom twenty-one mothers have been able to regroup with their children and three mothers will soon do so.

The Peruvian women's collective represents a significant part of the Latin American community in both countries. According to data provided by the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (2022), there are 94,131 Peruvians living in Italy, of whom 54,232 are women. As for the data provided by Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas de España (2022), the Peruvian population is the fourth largest Latin American community in Spain, with 111,681 Peruvians residing in the country, of which 62,166 are women. Table 1 below shows the profile of the participants.

Table 1

Profile of Peruvian informants living in Italy or Spain

Informant details		Before family reunification		
Informant	Age	City and years of residence	Communication or technological means used	Social media used
M1	58 years old	Genoa (Italy)—17 years	Call shops, international phone cards	**
M2	68 years old	Madrid (Spain)—20 years	Call shops, international phone cards	**
M3	45 years old	Madrid (Spain)—5 years	Mobile, computer	Facebook, WhatsApp
M4	36 years old	Cáceres (Spain)—9 years	Mobile, computer	Facebook, Skype, Windows Live Messenger
M5	61 years old	Madrid (Spain)—15 years	Call shops, international phone cards, mobile	Facebook
M6	66 years old	Pesaro (Italy)—25 years	Call shops, international phone cards, letters, audio cassettes	**
M7	63 years old	Genoa (Italy)—30 years	Call shops, international phone cards, letters, audio cassettes	**
M8	70 years old	Genoa (Italy)—14 years	Call shops, international phone cards	**
M9	48 years old	Genoa (Italy)—18 years	Mobile, computer	Facebook
M10	57 years old	Milan (Italy)—2 and a half years	Mobile	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp

Informant details		Before family reunification		
Informant	Age	City and years of residence	Communication or technological means used	Social media used
M11	59 years old	Genoa (Italy)—29 years	Call shops, international phone cards, letters, audio cassettes	**
M12	59 years old	Genoa (Italy)—29 years	Call shops, international phone cards, letters, audio cassettes	**
M13	49 years old	Genoa (Italy)—29 years	Call shop, mobile	Facebook
M14	59 years old	Genoa (Italy)—29 years	Call shop, international phone cards, computer, mobile	Facebook
M15	67 years old	Former resident of Genoa (Italy)—26 years (currently retired back in Peru)	Call shops, international phone cards, letters, audio cassettes	**
M16	51 years old	Genoa (Italy)—21 years	Call shops, international phone cards, computer	Facebook
M17	61 years old	Genoa (Italy)—19 years	Call shops, international phone cards, letters, audio cassettes	**
M18	67 years old	Milan (Italy)—35 years	Call shops, international phone cards, letters, audio cassettes	**
M19	57 years old	Genoa (Italy)—21 years	Call shops, international phone cards, computer	Facebook
*M20	24 years old	Genoa (Italy)—4 years	*Mobile, tablet	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp
*M21	52 years old	Bilbao (Spain)—2 years	*Mobile	* Facebook, WhatsApp
*M22	22 years old	Cáceres (Spain)—2 years	*Mobile, tablet	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp
M23	70 years old	Genoa (Italy)—33 years	Call shops, international phone cards, letters, audio cassettes	**
M24	71 years old	Genoa (Italy)—34 years	Call shops, international phone cards, letters, audio cassettes	**

Note. *Mothers not yet regrouped with their children, who used technological tools and online social media applications in order to exercise their motherhood from a distance. **No virtual social media used.

Source. Own research.

As we can see in Table 1, twenty-four women participated in our study, with a heterogeneous profile in terms of years of residence in the destination country, age range, and use of technological means before family reunification.

Finally, to identify and differentiate our informants, we use a code (example: M1, M2, etc.) when presenting excerpts from interviews and the contents of their Instagram and Facebook profiles.

RESULTS

In the context of the migratory experiences of Peruvian mothers and their relationship with ICTs, below we present the results of the analysis of the way both “digital native” and “digital immigrant” women handle the mother-child role from a distance.

Feminisation of Migratory Flows: Peruvian Mothers and ICTs

The feminisation of migratory flows of Peruvian women to European countries is mainly attributed to the economic crisis of the 1980s, the increase in political and social violence, the deterioration of living standards among the middle class and the lack of job opportunities (Luque Brazán, 2004; Paerregaard, 2007). Despite the difficulties derived from employability, labour exploitation and the conditions of marginality and illegality, these migrant women developed family strategies to connect with the “there” and maintain a mother-child relationship in an analogue society with few models of digital communication, characteristic of those years. For example, despite the high cost of telephone charges, these mothers made long distance calls to their children. They also used deferred means of communication such as letters or occasionally sending audio cassettes. These migrant women, now nearing retirement, managed to establish and maintain valuable family relationships in a context of limited digital and technological tools. One example is the story of M12 living in Genoa (Italy) for 29 years.

In around the year 1990, it was a difficult time to communicate with my two children. I spent my money on calls as it was expensive to call Peru from Italy. There weren't many call shops. [...] What I did was send letters to my children and they told me how they were doing at school and in their lives or how Grandma cooked for them. Sometimes I sent them audio cassettes, only when a friend was travelling to Peru, so they could hear my voice.

Madianou & Miller (2011b) noted that for almost two decades, letters and audio cassettes were the means used by migrants to reproduce everyday life in their place of origin and destination. Therefore, Peruvian migrant mothers were able to handle the difficulties in transnational communication with the resources available at the time. Later, in the mid-nineties, call shops appeared, offering new communication alterna-

tives to the Peruvian collective. In this innovative context, migrant mothers were able to articulate their role as mothers and carry on family life at a distance (Peñaranda et al., 2011), since the offers of low-cost international calls allowed them to keep in contact more frequently and for longer, also favouring the planning of the desired and complex family reunification with their children.

First Turning Point in Family Life from a Distance

Two decades ago, tools such as public telephones, audio cassettes or the use of international phone cards, among others, were part of the daily life of migrant mothers, allowing them to partially fulfil the role of emotional support, avoiding feelings of guilt, fear and reproach on the part of their children, who may feel some sense of abandonment, melancholy and pain, due to separation. These mothers were able to manage the physical distance with their loved ones, especially their direct offspring (children), satisfying the need for affective-parental communication, and exercising motherhood despite the distance (Carbajal, 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). In this sense, the testimony of M2, resident in Madrid (Spain) for 20 years, highlights how the technological resources used in the past, although obsolete today, provided a means to maintain family ties in migratory contexts.

I have had that responsibility of being the head of household and leaving my two children behind, one was small and the other was a teenager. I remember calling them using international phone cards, that was like twenty years ago and I remember the conversations were very short. Over the years we would constantly use call shops (they in Lima and I in Madrid) so that my son would call me mum and was more interested in my calls. The technology of that time partly helped my youngest son not to completely lose interest in me. However, it triggered a lot of sadness and depression in me; later I obtained Spanish citizenship and was able to bring my two children over.

As evidenced by the testimony of our informant, call shops were a turning point in the exercise of motherhood, reinforcing the feeling of belonging to the family nucleus (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002), and, in general, improving the collective well-being of the family (Borkert et al., 2018; Christensen, 2009). These places lowered the costs of calls and allowed greater fluidity in transnational communication, strengthening family proximity in a context of prolonged physical separation over time (Reist & Riaño, 2008). In this regard, authors such as Bruce Elliot et al. (2006) highlight the idea that technology has helped to sustain family relationships in the history of migration. Therefore, family bonds are linked to the technological development of each era and determined by the available media. In short, the contextual conditions of each historical moment have an effect on the frequency and intensity of contact between migrants and family members who have not emigrated.

Being a Mother in the Digital Age: The Intergenerational Gap

A generational gap is accentuated, manifesting asymmetries in the use of and access to new ICTs between the group of Peruvian women from the first waves of migration that arrived in Italy and Spain (now nearing retirement and regrouped with direct offspring) and the young migrant mothers who have arrived in the last decade and have not yet been able to regroup with their children.

It was found that the migrant mothers from the first waves of migration, from the late 80s up to the start of the new millennium, who were able to regroup with their offspring years ago, lack a firm intention to constantly connect to the web, motivated by the following factors:

- They lack that need to search for new technological resources, having been reunited with their children;
- Limited access to new ICTs and limited computer skills.

Usually, these migrant mothers require the help of external agents (children, relatives or friends) to connect to cyberspace or understand the operability and function of digital devices. They must also face new technological difficulties, which limit their independence and distance them from e-inclusion in the information society.

We should point out that migrant mothers from the first waves of migration are workers in the cleaning and care sector, which conditions them economically to be able to invest and acquire new ICTs. Their working conditions lead them to prioritise other types of needs such as paying the mortgage in their country of origin or rent in the destination country, planning their return to their country of origin once they are retired or simply saving for the future. For José Manuel Robles (2017), these factors limit e-inclusion, downgrading them to second-class citizens due to their scarce computer skills and lack of access to new ICTs, which limits them in an increasingly digitised society.

However, the global health crisis caused by COVID-19 has incentivised interest in the use of new technological devices, making contact with virtual means of communicating with children and grandchildren in the destination society and also restoring family bonds with second- and third-degree family members, located in the “there”.

Young migrant mothers, on the other hand, (also known as “digital natives”) experience a greater need to maintain constant communication with their children and reaffirm their maternal role through the various multimedia functions provided by online social media. In addition, there has been marked interest among these migrant mothers to communicate with the “there” especially in the context of uncertainty generated by the COVID-19 global health crisis. This need for communication is linked to concern for the health of their children, as well as the feeling of helplessness that the family could not be reunited due to their precarious illegal situation and lack of employment opportunities in the host country. Therefore, these migrant mothers resort to the use of multiple

digital devices, characteristic of the so-called “digital native” generation, which allows them to be e-inclusive in digital societies due to their knowledge of digital skills. This peculiarity enables them to maintain a constant presence in digital environments, which satisfies their mother-child needs through the wide variety of options available. One example is the story of M20 living in Genoa (Italy) for 4 years.

I constantly use my social media to find out how my 5-year-old daughter is doing. I myself manage her media because she knows that it is important for us to be connected even more in these latest waves of COVID in Peru. With my daughter we have added various social media, and we are always sharing photos and videos privately. Even though she’s small, they are constantly calling me, and I call her. We don’t separate from one another or disconnect from our media. There is always time for video calls or when I’m working, she often calls me.

The experience shared by M20 indicates that the constant use of virtual social media enables two-way communication, helping them to cope with maternal separation and allowing her to continue exercising blended control in childcare. However, the permanent use of online social media does not exempt them from nostalgic representations on their social media, which is a common practice among informant mothers who have not yet regrouped with their children.

Figure 1

Informant M20 remembering her daughter on social media.



Note. Translation of main text: My little one, such beautiful memories my baby may God always take care of you, my girl.

Source. Extracted from M20’s Facebook.

Maintaining Motherhood among “Digital Native” Women

Young migrant mothers (“digital natives”) have found ways to maintain their maternal role despite geographical distance across three dimensions that involve: a) monitoring daily life, b) affective care, c) economic support and resource management. In particular, the first two dimensions are carried out through digital social media applications, allowing them to take an active role in the upbringing of their children. Virtual chats are essential to develop strategies that allow them to support and exercise control over their children, learn about their behaviour and school performance, promote good habits, and prevent or diminish feelings of sadness caused by separation.

As for the last dimension mentioned, resource management and economic livelihood, it is a complicated matter for young migrant mothers to manage since it requires effective communication with grandmothers, responsible for the upbringing of grandchildren. The difficulty has to do with these grandmothers belonging to the pre-digital generation and having limited skills in the use of online social media, with grandchildren helping them use them. However, once two-way communication has been established between migrant mothers and grandmothers, family strategies are implemented to decide on the quantity and use of money orders, which are regularly allocated to children’s education, clothing, food and savings for future family reunification projects. Therefore, new ICTs facilitate the exercise of motherhood, maintaining and rebuilding the family structure from a distance (Bermejo & Sánchez-Duarte, 2019; Králik et al., 2023; Panagakos & Horst, 2006). In this sense, M22, who has been living in Cáceres (Spain) for 2 years, said:

I have so much responsibility despite having a low salary. I send money to my mother, for my children’s education, to buy them clothes and for medical check-ups. I always tell her to save and later on they can travel [...] Fortunately my children help my mother use social media and tell me how they are doing at school. [...] With my children we communicate daily and see each other through the mobile phone and camera, and there you can see what kind of mood they are in, often I see their sad faces on special days like their birthdays. I try to make my children feel comfortable, smile, get out and about, and don’t think about the fact that I’m far away. I also expect them to be responsible for their studies and to do their homework. It’s easy to know when they are lying, on Instagram or WhatsApp video calls, you just know when they are trying to trick you. [...] I intend to bring them to Spain, but first I need to get a better job and move out of my brother’s house.

The testimony of M22 shows that the use of video calls with social media apps is common practice and aims to help them fulfil their maternal role virtually, supporting their children in daily life, in their growth and development. They are also used to check on their children’s health, make sure they are doing their schoolwork (see Figure 2). In addition, visual online contact allows them to see their children’s body movements and gestures, so they can ascertain their emotional state and mood. Furthermore, young

Peruvian mothers are independent from an economic point of view, with decision-making power in the management of money orders sent back home, which reaffirms their position of authority within the family.

Figure 2

Informant M22 makes sure her youngest child is doing his homework every day via Instagram video call.



Source. Extracted from M22's Instagram.

CONCLUSIONS

Information and communication technologies are essential in transnational life and as a strategy in the fulfilment of motherhood among our informants, 24 Peruvian women. Although the limitations of this study prevent generalisations from being made, we have been able to observe significant trends.

For example, the decision of Peruvian women to emigrate is not purely a personal choice, but responds to a need to improve the living conditions of the family and obtain economic benefits. However, these women must cope with feelings of sadness and sorrow over separation from their children. To overcome the barrier of distance, they resort to technological tools (pre-digital or digital), which allow them to establish transnational communication, reinforcing the mother-child affective bond. The technological development of smartphones, in particular, gives them greater versatility

and multiple opportunities for constant interaction with their children, through calls and video calls on social media, which stimulates communication without time restrictions. It also allows them to see their children “in person”, so to speak, exercise control over their activities and observe their gestures, mitigating the impact of physical separation. Thus, ICTs have become a fundamental part of migration processes and are part of the life stories of migrant mothers. Moreover, the development of such technologies is adapted to every decade, facilitating the transnational communication demanded by “long-distance mothers” (Elliot et al., 2006; Judák et al., 2022).

Another scenario analysed encompasses the asymmetries in the use of and access to ICTs, which are marked by a generational gap between migrant mothers in the Peruvian collective. The difficulties are visible in the digital society, where both inclusion and social exclusion are manifested, especially for the first women who migrated, belonging to the pre-digital age. In previous times, generational gaps among migrant mothers were less pronounced due to the poor development of mobile telephony and the internet. There were only international call shops or phone cards that limited transnational communication time. However, these tools were a source of support in (re) building of the maternal role through sporadic interconnections sustained at a distance, and communication mechanisms in which common projects were forged, in particular the planning of family reunification.

It is important to note that Peruvian women who migrated two or three decades ago (today grandmothers, close to retirement and regrouped with their offspring) have become self-taught users of new digital ITCs. They have adapted to new technological scenarios with an elementary level in computer skills. In addition, the global health crisis due to COVID-19 has increased interest in the use of new technological devices, and they feel more motivated to communicate virtually. This allows them to get even closer to the family environment in the destination society (children and grandchildren) and rebuild ties with second- and third-degree family members in their home country.

In contrast, young Peruvian emigrant mothers, in this case “digital natives”, have a higher degree of “e-inclusion” in digitalised societies, using multiple technological tools. Although family reunification projects have been postponed due to the pandemic, daily practices mediated by new ICTs allow contact to be permanent and in real time. It is in the virtual space where they exercise their role as mothers, and everyday life makes it possible to weave and/or maintain affective bonds with the children who stayed “there”. This is how transnational family life mediated through ICTs facilitates the development of strategies for the survival of that family life. In particular, the use of video calls offers that feeling of closeness with loved ones, and direct contact resembles a face-to-face encounter. Furthermore, new ICTs allow mothers to manage decision-making regarding the money orders sent back home to the family and children.

In short, ICTs have allowed times and distances to be reduced and transformed virtually within migration processes, facilitating the cohesion of family members and glimpsing new forms of family communication in migratory contexts.

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