

## **INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL DEVICES ON PATTERNS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION IN ETSAKO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE**

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### **Abstract**

The inclusion of digital devices in contemporary communication patterns has significantly transformed how families interact and spend quality time together. While these technologies facilitate connection across geographical distance, concerns persist regarding their effects on face-to-face communication and family cohesion. This study examined the influence of digital devices on family communication patterns in Etsako Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. Adopting a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 368 respondents using structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Findings revealed high levels of digital device usage within families, with 71% of respondents reporting frequent or very frequent use at home. More than half (56%) indicated that digital devices have changed the way family members communicate. Although a large majority (83%) agreed that digital devices enhance communication with distant relatives, substantial proportions reported negative outcomes: 79% stated that device use interferes with family quality time, 52% observed reduced time spent talking or playing together, and 68% acknowledged frequent device use during shared family activities. Additionally, 64% reported experiences of being ignored due to device use, while 68% indicated that digital devices have caused disagreements within their families. The study concludes that digital devices exert a dual influence on family communication enhancing connectivity while simultaneously undermining direct interpersonal interaction when use is excessive or unregulated. It therefore recommends the establishment of clear screen-time guidelines, the promotion of technology-free family periods, and the encouragement of shared digital activities to foster healthier family communication. This study contributes empirical evidence from a Nigerian local government context, underscoring the need for balanced and mindful digital media use within families.

**Keywords:** Digital devices, family communication, quality time, technoference, Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

The widespread application of digital technologies have transformed the way families communicate and spend quality time together. Smartphones, tablets, computers, and home smart systems have transformed family communication, bringing new ways to remain connected but

also threatening deeper interaction (Kardefelt-Winther, 2017). The increased use of these technologies in daily life has left one wondering if they enhance or detract from family communication. While digital technologies facilitate instant messaging, video calls, and social media activities, they can also minimize face-to-face interactions and create digital

distractions that undermine family bonding (Uhls et al., 2017).

Evidence suggests that digital technology has a dual-edged function in building family relations. On the positive side, family members are brought closer together by digital communication tools to be in touch, even from physical distances (McDaniel, Coyne, and Holmes, 2017). Additionally, the family engages in collective digital activities such as online play, video watching, and interactive apps that could be used as bonding rituals (Hiniker, Schoenebeck, and Kientz, 2016). This capacity for constant and immediate communication has redefined traditional notions of proximity and presence within family relationships.

Beyond facilitating interpersonal contact, digital devices have also introduced new forms of shared family engagement. Families now participate collectively in digital activities such as streaming media, playing online games, and using interactive or educational applications. These practices may function as contemporary bonding rituals that encourage cooperation, shared enjoyment, and joint participation within the household (Hiniker, Schoenebeck, & Kientz, 2016). In addition, digital technologies support family organisation and coordination by enabling parents and children to manage schedules, monitor activities, and maintain communication related to safety, education, and household responsibilities.

Despite these benefits, growing scholarly attention has focused on the potential negative implications of pervasive digital device use for family communication. Frequent engagement with personal digital devices can divert attention away from face-to-face interaction, thereby limiting opportunities for meaningful dialogue and emotional exchange. Research indicates that digital distraction during shared family moments often weakens conversational

quality and reduces emotional presence, as family members may be physically co-present yet psychologically disengaged (Uhls et al., 2017). This shift reflects a broader transformation in communication patterns, where mediated interaction increasingly competes with direct interpersonal engagement.

Furthermore, excessive or poorly regulated digital device use may disrupt established communication norms within families. The phenomenon of technofence describes situations in which digital interruptions intrude upon interpersonal exchanges, leading to reduced relational satisfaction and heightened tension among family members (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Differences in digital literacy between generations may further exacerbate communication gaps, particularly between parents and children, thereby undermining mutual understanding and effective dialogue. In culturally structured family systems, such as those prevalent in many African societies, the individualised use of digital devices may also challenge traditional norms of authority, attentiveness, and collective interaction that have historically underpinned family communication (Kardefelt-Winther, 2017).

In Nigeria, the impact of digital technologies on family communication is shaped by socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural conditions. Increased mobile phone access and improved internet connectivity have accelerated digital device adoption, even in semi-urban and rural communities such as Etsako Local Government Area of Edo State, where traditional family values emphasising communal living and face-to-face interaction remain strong. However, empirical research on how digital devices influence family communication at the local level is limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the influence of digital devices on family communication patterns in Etsako Local Government Area,

offering context-specific insights into the evolving relationship between digital media and family life in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The increasing integration of digital devices into everyday family life has significantly reshaped patterns of interpersonal communication. Smartphones, tablets, and other digital technologies now mediate how family members interact, coordinate activities, and sustain relationships. Although these devices facilitate instant connectivity and information exchange, growing concerns persist regarding their implications for the quality of face-to-face communication and emotional engagement within families (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016).

Research indicates that excessive or poorly regulated digital device use can disrupt meaningful family interaction through practices such as technofence and phubbing, where attention is redirected from co-present family members to digital screens (Uhls et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020). Such communication disruptions have been linked to reduced emotional closeness, weakened parent-child relationships, and increased interpersonal tension within households (Radesky & Christakis, 2016; Turkle, 2017). Given the central role of family communication in emotional development, socialisation, and value transmission, these disruptions present important social and relational concerns.

In Nigeria, the rapid diffusion of affordable smartphones and expanding internet access has intensified digital device use across urban, semi-urban, and rural communities (Oyadiran & Oyesomi, 2020). Nigerian families increasingly depend on digital platforms to maintain contact with extended relatives and to manage daily communication, particularly in contexts shaped by migration and economic mobility (Okon & Eyo, 2020). However,

this growing reliance on digital technology has also been associated with reduced shared family activities, conflicts over screen time, and concerns about declining interpersonal engagement within the household (Omoera & Iredia, 2019).

Despite the increasing relevance of these issues, empirical studies examining how digital devices influence family communication patterns within Nigerian households remain limited. Existing research has largely focused on general media consumption or youth-centred digital behaviour, with insufficient attention to intra-family communication dynamics and quality time at the community level. This limitation is more pronounced in semi-urban and rural contexts, where cultural norms and patterns of digital adoption may differ from those of major urban centres.

This research gap is particularly evident in Etsako Local Government Area of Edo State, where traditional family values emphasizing communal living and interpersonal interaction coexist with increasing digital device penetration. The absence of context-specific empirical evidence limits the ability of families, educators, and policymakers to understand how digital devices shape communication patterns and family relationships within this locality. Consequently, there is a clear need for systematic investigation into the influence of digital devices on family communication patterns in Etsako Local Government Area. Addressing this problem is essential for informing balanced digital media practices and supporting healthy family communication in contemporary Nigerian society.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The ultimate goals and purpose of this study is to seek the following:

1. To examine the extent of digital device usage among families in Etsako Local Government Area.

2. To determine how digital devices influence the pattern and quality of family communication.
3. To identify the positive and negative effects of digital device use on family interaction and bonding.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions are raised in order to achieve the aforementioned objectives:

1. To what extent are digital devices used among families in Etsako Local Government Area?
2. How do digital devices influence the pattern and quality of family communication?
3. What positive and negative effects do digital devices have on family interaction and bonding?

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Family Communication Patterns**

Family communication patterns refer to the established ways family members interact, exchange information, and maintain relationships. These patterns influence decision-making, conflict resolution, emotional expression, and the transmission of values across generations (Galvin, Braithwaite & Bylund, 2015). Communication within the family is guided by shared norms, expectations, and relational histories.

A core component of family communication is emotional expression. Families provide the first environment where individuals learn to share feelings, seek comfort, and offer support. Open and supportive communication fosters trust, empathy, and psychological well-being (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Conflict resolution is also shaped by communication

patterns; effective communication helps families address disagreements constructively, while negative communication habits can lead to long-term relational strain (Vangelisti, 2013).

Family communication further supports socialization, as parents transmit cultural norms, moral values, and behavioural expectations through everyday interactions (Galvin et al., 2015). Communication is also essential for coordinating daily activities, managing routines, and making joint decisions, increasingly through digital tools such as group chats and phone calls (Sillars, 2016).

In the digital age, technology offers new modes of family interaction. While digital platforms facilitate long-distance connection, excessive device use can diminish face-to-face engagement and weaken family bonding (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Achieving balance is therefore essential for maintaining healthy communication patterns.

#### **The Impact of Digital Devices on Family Communication Patterns**

Digital technologies have significantly transformed family communication, with both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, digital devices enhance mutual understanding, facilitate learning, and create new opportunities for bonding. However, they also introduce distractions, reduce traditional family activities, and contribute to screen dependency.

Shin and Li (2021) found that digital technologies have reshaped how families consume media, noting that streaming platforms such as Netflix and YouTube allow families to share entertainment experiences even across distances. Similarly, López et al. (2020) reported that digital learning platforms like Khan Academy and interactive e-books promote collaborative learning, enabling parents and

children to participate jointly in educational activities.

Digital technologies also improve family organization. Tools such as electronic calendars, family group chats, and reminder apps help coordinate routines, manage tasks, and reduce misunderstandings. Yet McDaniel and Coyne (2016) caution that constant digital connectivity can blur boundaries between individual and family time, creating stress and reducing opportunities for meaningful rest.

Padilla-Walker and Coyne (2019) noted that digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram help families maintain emotional closeness by sharing real-time updates, photos, and milestones. However, the performative nature of social media interactions may create unrealistic expectations and contribute to tension within families.

Digital devices also influence parenting and child development. Radesky and Christakis (2016) found that parents now access a wide range of online parenting resources, enabling more flexible care giving. However, excessive device use by parents and children has been linked to decreased quality time and weakened parent-child interactions.

## **Review of Empirical Studies**

### **Positive Effects of Digital Devices on Family Communication**

A major advantage of digital devices is their ability to bridge geographical distances. Lanigan (2020) emphasizes that digital communication helps maintain emotional connectedness among family members who live apart. Hall and Baym (2021) found that video calling strengthens relationships between parents and children, especially in families separated due to work or school. Group messaging apps also reinforce family rituals and routines,

enhancing emotional bonds (Kirkpatrick, 2019).

Digital devices also support shared experiences and collaborative activities. Hiniker et al. (2016) reported that co-viewing movies, playing online games, and participating in virtual watch parties enhance emotional bonding and teamwork. Hertlein and Chan (2020) found that families with higher levels of social media engagement report stronger feelings of connectedness, particularly with extended family members.

### **Negative Effects of Digital Devices on Family Communication**

Despite their benefits, digital devices pose challenges that can disrupt family relationships. Studies show increasing privatization of device use, with each family member engaging in individualized digital activities (Haddon & Vincent, 2014; Baron et al., 2019). This can weaken collective family experiences and create emotional distance.

Technoference interruptions in interpersonal communication caused by digital devices is a growing concern (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Brandon et al. (2025) found that technoference affects parent-child communication and leads to poorer child behavioural outcomes. Similarly, Przybylski and Weinstein (2017) observed that even the presence of a smartphone during conversations reduces emotional closeness and relationship satisfaction.

Phubbing "phone snubbing" occurs when individuals ignore others due to device use. Wang et al. (2020) reported that parental phubbing contributes to children's anxiety, low self-esteem, and weakened family bonds. Radesky et al. (2019) noted that parental smartphone use during interactions harms children's emotional development, leading to feelings of neglect. Stockdale et al. (2018) found that adolescents often

interpret parental phone use as emotional rejection, reducing trust and closeness.

Turkle's (2017) concept of "alone together" describes how families may occupy the same physical space yet remain emotionally disconnected due to device absorption. Excessive screen time has also been linked to anxiety, depression, and social isolation (Twenge et al., 2018).

Digital communication may also replace meaningful face-to-face interaction, reducing emotional intimacy (Shin & Li, 2021). Social media comparison creates additional tensions, especially among adolescents (Chou & Edge, 2018). Conflicts may also arise when parents restrict children's device use; however, positive parental engagement such as commenting on posts or participating in online activities can strengthen relationships (Uhls et al., 2017).

Overall, digital devices offer significant benefits but also have the potential to disrupt traditional communication, reduce emotional intimacy, and introduce conflict within families.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Media Ecology Theory and Family Systems Theory. These theories provide complementary perspectives for explaining how digital devices influence communication patterns and quality time within families.

#### **Media Ecology Theory**

Media Ecology Theory, proposed by Marshall McLuhan (1964), posits that communication technologies shape human interaction by altering the environment in which communication occurs. The theory emphasizes that media are not neutral channels but structures that influence behaviour, social relationships, and patterns of interaction. In family contexts, the pervasive use of digital devices restructures

everyday communication by prioritizing speed, multitasking, and mediated interaction over sustained face-to-face engagement. Within this study, Media Ecology Theory explains how the constant presence of smartphones and other digital devices reshapes family communication environments in Etsako Local Government Area, potentially encouraging technoferece and reducing emotional attentiveness during shared family time (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). The theory is therefore useful in understanding how digital technologies redefine communication norms within households.

#### **Family Systems Theory**

Family Systems Theory, developed by Bowen (1978), views the family as an interconnected emotional unit in which the actions of one member affect the entire system. The theory emphasizes interaction patterns, emotional interdependence, and communication as key elements that sustain family stability and cohesion. Effective communication is central to maintaining balance within the family system. Applied to digital device use, Family Systems Theory suggests that excessive or unregulated technology use by individual family members may disrupt shared routines, reduce collective activities, and generate conflicts, thereby affecting overall family functioning. Conversely, shared and regulated digital engagement may support cohesion and positive interaction among family members.

The integration of Media Ecology Theory and Family Systems Theory provides a coherent framework for examining the influence of digital devices on family communication patterns. Media Ecology Theory explains how digital devices transform the communication environment, while Family Systems Theory explains how these changes affect interpersonal relationships within families. Together, the theories justify the study's focus on both

communication patterns and quality time among families in Etsako Local Government Area of Edo State.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design to examine the influence of digital devices on patterns family communication. The survey method was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection of numerical data from a large population and allows for the assessment of attitudes, opinions, and behavioural patterns related to digital device use within family settings. This design has been widely employed in communication studies investigating media influence on interpersonal relationships (Creswell, 2014).

The study was conducted in Etsako Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. Etsako LGA comprises both semi-urban and rural communities, making it a suitable setting for examining family communication dynamics within a context where traditional values coexist with increasing digital technology adoption.

The population of the study consisted of all residents of Etsako Local Government Area. Based on the projected population figures provided by the National Population Commission, the population of Etsako Central Local Government Area was estimated at 139,200 at the time of the study.

The sample size was determined using the Sample Size Determination Table by Cozby and Bates (2015), which recommends 384 respondents for populations above 100,000. Since the population of Etsako LGA is estimated at 139,200, the use of 384 respondents is statistically adequate at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

A simple random sampling technique was employed to select respondents from different communities within Etsako Local Government Area. This technique ensured that every eligible member of the population had an equal chance of being selected, thereby reducing bias and enhancing the generalisation of the findings.

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire was divided into sections that elicited information on respondents' demographic characteristics, frequency of digital device use, patterns of family communication, quality of family time, and perceived benefits and challenges associated with digital device use in the family. Responses were measured using close-ended questions with multiple-choice options and Likert-scale items.

The questionnaires were administered directly to respondents physically. A total of 384 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, out of which 368 were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 96 per cent. This response rate was considered adequate for statistical analysis and interpretation.

Data collected were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25). Frequency counts and simple percentages were used to summarize respondents' responses and to address the research objectives. The analyzed data were presented using tables to enhance clarity and ease of interpretation.

### **Data Presentation**

Data for this study was presented using tables, percentages, and the descriptive analysis below

:

**Table 1: Digital Device Usage in the Family**  
**How often do you use digital devices at home?**

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Rarely	45	12
Sometimes	62	17
Often	107	29
Very often	154	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

(Field survey 2025)

Table 1 shows that digital device usage among families is very high. A clear majority of respondents (71%) reported using digital devices **often** (29%) or **very often** (42%) at home, indicating that digital technologies are deeply embedded in everyday family life. This suggests that families rely heavily on digital devices for routine communication and interaction.

**Table 2**

**Do you think digital devices have changed the way you communicate with your family?**

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	205	56
Not Sure	103	28
No	60	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

(Field survey 2025)

In table 2 more than half of the respondents (56%) agreed that digital devices have changed the way they communicate with their family members, while only 16 per cent indicated otherwise. This confirms that digital technologies have significantly altered traditional family communication patterns.

**Table 3**

**What type of communication do you use digital devices for the most with family?**

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Voice Calls	118	32
Video Calls	102	28
Text Messages	66	18
Social Media	56	15
Emails	26	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

(Field survey 2025)

In terms of preferred communication modes, table 3 shows that voice calls (32%) and video calls (28%) were the most frequently used, ahead of text messaging (18%) and social media

(15%). This pattern suggests that families favour communication channels that allow real-time interaction and emotional presence, particularly for maintaining close family ties.

**Table 4: Impact on Family Quality Time**

**Do you feel that digital device use interferes with your family’s quality time?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Strongly Agree	<b>155</b>	<b>42</b>
Agree	<b>135</b>	<b>37</b>
Disagree	<b>30</b>	<b>8</b>
Strongly Disagree	<b>48</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

(Field survey 2025)

Table 4 reveals that digital device use substantially interferes with family quality time. A combined 79 per cent of respondents either *strongly agreed* (42%) or *agreed* (37%) that device usage disrupts family time, indicating widespread concern about its negative effects.

**Table 5**

**How often do family members use their phones/devices during shared family time (e.g., meals, outings)?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Always	<b>161</b>	<b>44</b>
Often	<b>89</b>	<b>24</b>
Sometimes	<b>58</b>	<b>16</b>
Rarely	<b>34</b>	<b>9</b>
Never	<b>26</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

(Field survey 2025)

The table 5 further shows that device use during shared family moments is common. A total of 68 per cent of respondents stated that family members always (44%) or often (24%) use their devices during activities such as meals or outings. This suggests that digital multitasking has become normalized within family settings.

**Table 6**

**Has the presence of digital devices reduced the time your family spends talking or playing together?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Yes	191	52
No	74	20
Not Sure	103	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

(Field survey 2025)

Table 6 shows, that half of the respondents (52%) reported that digital devices have reduced the amount of time families spend talking or playing together. This indicates a decline in direct interpersonal engagement due to competing digital attention.

**Table 7 : Benefits and Challenges of Digital Device Use**  
**Digital devices help me stay in touch with distant family members**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Strongly Agree	176	48
Agree	128	35
Disagree	45	12
Strongly Disagree	19	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

(Field survey 2025)

**Table 8**  
**We sometimes bond as a family through shared digital activities (e.g., watching movies, playing games)**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Strongly Agree	136	37
Agree	99	27
Disagree	77	21
Strongly Disagree	56	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

(Field survey 2025)

Table 3 highlights the dual nature of digital device use within families. On the positive side, a large majority of respondents (83%) agreed that digital devices help them stay connected with distant family members, emphasizing their importance in sustaining long-distance family relationships.

**Table 9**

**I or my family members sometimes ignore each other because we are focused on our devices**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Strongly Agree	<b>128</b>	<b>35</b>
Agree	<b>108</b>	<b>29</b>
Disagree	<b>60</b>	<b>16</b>
Strongly Disagree	<b>72</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

(Field survey 2025)

Similarly, 64 per cent of respondents acknowledged that families sometimes bond through shared digital activities such as watching movies or playing games together, suggesting that digital devices can support collective family interaction when used collaboratively.

**Table 10**

**Digital devices have caused disagreements or arguments in my family**

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	136	37
Agree	115	31
Disagree	65	18
Strongly Disagree	52	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100</b>

(Field survey 2025)

Table 10 also shows notable challenges. A combined 64 per cent of respondents agreed that family members sometimes ignore one another due to device use, indicating the presence of phubbing behaviour. Furthermore, 68 per cent reported that digital devices have caused disagreements or arguments within their families, pointing to the potential of unregulated device use to generate conflict and weaken emotional bonds.

**Discussion of Findings**

This study examined the influence of digital devices on family communication patterns and quality time in Etsako Local Government Area of Edo State. The discussion is presented in line with the study objectives.

**Objective One: To examine the extent of digital device usage among families in Etsako Local Government Area.**

The findings from Tables 1, 2, and 3 reveal a consistently high level of digital device usage among families in the study area, indicating that such technologies are deeply embedded in daily household routines. This pattern aligns with Media Ecology Theory, which argues that communication technologies not only facilitate interaction but also fundamentally shape the environment and norms in which communication occurs (McLuhan, 1964). The pervasive presence of digital devices suggests a notable shift in family communication dynamics, moving from predominantly face-to-face interaction to a hybrid model combining mediated and interpersonal exchanges. This transformation implies that digital technologies are not merely tools for

connection but are actively reconfiguring relational practices, attention patterns, and modes of engagement within the family. These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating that widespread digital adoption significantly influences family interaction, reinforcing the argument that technological presence increasingly structures how families communicate and experience shared time (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014).

**Objective Two: To determine how digital devices influence the pattern and quality of family communication.**

The findings from Tables 4, 5, and 6 indicate that digital device usage substantially shapes both the patterns and quality of family communication, particularly by disrupting shared family time and reducing opportunities for meaningful interaction. This supports prior research linking pervasive device presence to diminished conversational depth, lowered emotional attentiveness, and fragmented engagement during family interactions (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Turkle, 2017). From the perspective of Family Systems Theory, such interruptions can compromise relational cohesion, diminish emotional reciprocity, and alter

the balance of interdependent roles within the household. These results suggest that while digital devices offer avenues for connection, their unregulated or excessive use may paradoxically undermine the very interpersonal engagement they are intended to facilitate, highlighting the complex and dualistic impact of technology on family dynamics.

**Objective Three: To identify the positive and negative effects of digital devices on family interaction and bonding.**

The findings from Tables 7, 8, and 9 further confirm the dual influence of digital devices on family interaction. On the positive side, digital technologies facilitate connectivity among geographically separated family members, reinforcing prior evidence that highlights digital media as critical tools for maintaining relational ties (Okon & Eyo, 2020). Conversely, the prevalence of behaviours such as phubbing and device-induced conflicts indicates that excessive or unregulated use may erode emotional closeness and heighten interpersonal tension within households (Wang et al., 2020). These results suggest that the impact of digital devices on family bonding is largely contingent upon usage patterns and the presence of household communication norms. In the context of Etsako Local Government Area, the findings demonstrate that digital devices are a significant determinant of family communication patterns and quality time; their influence is neither entirely positive nor wholly negative, but shaped by families' capacity to regulate digital engagement in ways that sustain collective interaction and emotional connectedness. This dualistic effect underscores the relevance of Media Ecology Theory and Family Systems Theory in explaining contemporary family communication dynamics, highlighting how technological environments interact with relational processes to redefine family interaction.

## Conclusion

This study examined the influence of digital devices on family communication patterns and quality time in Etsako Local Government Area of Edo State. The findings show that digital devices are deeply embedded in family life and play a significant role in shaping how family members communicate and interact. While digital technologies facilitate communication with distant relatives and support shared digital activities, they also interfere with face-to-face interaction and reduce the quality of family time when used excessively or without regulation.

The study concludes that the impact of digital devices on family communication is dual in nature. Consistent with Media Ecology Theory, digital devices reshape the communication environment within families, while Family Systems Theory explains how unregulated device use can disrupt relational balance and cohesion. These findings indicate that the effects of digital devices depend largely on patterns of usage rather than their mere presence.

## Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to provide insight on how families can balance digital usage and family time through maximizing the benefit and minimising the negative impact on communication:

1. **Regulation of digital device usage within families:** In response to the high level of digital device use identified among families, it is recommended that families establish clear rules and limits for digital device usage at home. This will help prevent excessive screen time and promote healthier communication practices within the family.
2. **Promotion of intentional face-to-face family interaction:** Given the observed interference of digital devices with family

communication patterns and quality time, families should prioritize regular technology-free periods to encourage meaningful face-to-face conversation, shared activities, and emotional engagement among family members.

3. **Encouragement of balanced and shared digital engagement:** To maximize the

positive effects of digital devices on family bonding while minimizing negative outcomes, families should be encouraged to use digital technologies collectively for communication, learning, and entertainment rather than in isolated or individualistic ways.

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