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Facebook and WhatsApp as Elements in Transnational Care Chains for the Trinidadian Diaspora

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Abstract: Despite being separated by great geographical distances, the Trinidadian Diaspora community has managed to stay in regular communication with those back “home” using the latest available technologies. Trinidadian migrants living abroad have established multi-directional care chains with family, kin, and friends that have endured for decades. This social connection has evolved from letter writing, telegrams, telephones, emails, and most recently, internet-based social media which includes: Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, Facetime, Snapchat, Twitter, and Google Hangout. This paper examines how social media, focusing on Facebook and WhatsApp, are tools being used by the Trinidadian Diaspora to provide transnational care-giving to family and friends kin left behind in the “home” country and beyond. The analysis is based on the results of two online Qualtrics surveys, one implemented in 2012 ($n = 150$) and another in 2015 ($n = 100$) of Trinidadian Diaspora participants and in-depth interviews with ($n = 10$) Canadian-Trinidadians. This paper explores how social media have become a virtual transnational bridge that connects the Trinidadian Diaspora across long distances and provides family members with a feeling of psychological well-being.

Keywords: transnational; care chains; diaspora; Trinidad; family; immigrants; social media; Facebook; WhatsApp

1. Introduction

“A few years ago, I discovered Facebook, it allowed me to connect with my family in Trinidad, Miami, and New York. More recently, I discovered FaceTime and WhatsApp . . . these two applications on my smartphone allow me to hook up to everyone for free. Trini’s like free you know No really what it means is that I am talking to everyone all the time and I keep track of all the happenings my nieces and nephews are getting up to. They use the technology and keep me up to date on Trinidad and their parents . . . my sister and brother. It use to cost me \$2.00 a minute when I first moved to Toronto to call family, so you know that only happened on special days like Christmas day, New Years, birthdays, and the like. Using the new technology I can now maco everyone’s business as it happens.”

(Linda, a fifty-four year old, Indo-Trinidadian)

Since the 1960s, international migration has become less traumatic in terms of the forever severing of family ties. Less expensive real-time communication and airline transportation links have meant that families living in the Diaspora have not had to completely sever the emotional associations between family members (Baldassar et al. 2006; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). At the heart of today’s transnational family obligations and emotional ties has been the ability to stay in immediate communication with family members who are sprinkled throughout the international Diaspora and those still in the home country. The Internet and social media have become the latest communication revolution that facilitates

the free flow of news and updates that are taking place. Family members, kin and fictive kin can now use this relatively free technology to know about what is happening to each other. Having this communication flow, results in individuals across vast reaches of the Diaspora feeling a sense of mattering and belonging.

Trinidadian people have a long history of surviving economic adversity by moving north to the United Kingdom, the United States, and to Canada where jobs and opportunities for mobility were perceived as more abundant. The contemporary Trinidadian Diaspora is a product of a “culture of migration” which developed as a survival strategy in the context of a long secular decline in sugar production and plantation agriculture starting in the early 1800s (Marshall 1982). Despite migrating away from their place of birth in pursuit of better opportunities, Trinidadian people always brought with them aspects of their Creole cultural socialization and a desire to return one day (Lowenthal 1972). Immediate family and extended kin from both the home country and from the Diaspora play significant roles in the migration strategy of Trinidadian men and women. They often assist in the financing of initial migration, caring for the children of absent parents, and helping to obtain employment in settlement communities (Basch 2001). Consequently, most sojourners carried with them a cultural obligation to care for and worry about those family members left behind. This obligation could be satisfied by staying in touch, sending back regular remittances or by creating avenues for family, kin, and fictive kin to also migrate through sponsorship.

Since the 1960s, a Trinidadian international “Diaspora” emerged in some major cities in the Eastern United States. Approximately 181,290 Trinidadians reside in New York, Boston, and Miami. Another, 21,285 reside in the United Kingdom (London, Manchester, Birmingham) and approximately 78,965 live in Canada (Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg) (Simmons and Plaza 2006). The formation of large Trinidadian-origin migrant communities in these cities and the resources that such immigrant communities provided to new migrants strengthened and transformed the culture of migration. Trinidadian migrants living in the Diaspora began to see themselves as both “here” and “there” in Caribbean social spaces although they were living abroad. “Home” began to be viewed not just as the place where one was born or just where one lived, but more generally anywhere friends, relatives, and members of the cultural community were to be found (Simmons and Plaza 2006). In effect, this began as a Trinidadian culture of migration¹ that expanded over time to become a Caribbean transnational cultural Diaspora community. Thus, the culture of migration was retained as one key element in this geographically spread out transnational community. Despite being separated by great geographical distances, the transnational Trinidadian community has managed to stay in regular communication as a survival strategy and as a means to maintain psychological and social well-being.

A moral obligation dimension is crucial to understanding the caring about and caring for kin relationships within transnational Caribbean family and kinship networks in general. Finch and Mason (1990) advocate the concept of “kinship morality” to suggest that a set of moral discourses inform the behavior of individuals toward their kin in the Caribbean. Similarly, Williams (2004) suggests that people negotiate their transnational familial relationships within these moral guidelines, and act as moral agents involved in negotiating “the proper thing to do” in and through their commitments to others. These caring commitments may cross the boundaries of blood, marriage, residence, culture, and country (Reynolds 2006). Caring about family encompasses contact and emotional support and refers to emotional functions connected with sociability, advice, comfort, and self-validation. Activities which express caring about family include communication by social media, telephone, letters, email, return visits, participation in family decision making and sending of remittances, whereas caring for family refers to concrete, hands-on care-giving. An example of the

¹ According to Foner (1997), “Migration has been a constant motif of the Caribbean story.” Migration is the single most common response to blocked mobility associated with living in the Caribbean region. People grow up thinking that economic success is more viable to those who have an opportunity to travel abroad for work and better opportunities.

latter is sending for elderly relatives to live in the metropolitan countries so that they can be eligible to receive good healthcare (Finch and Mason 1990).

Caring about family members and kin seems to assume a crucial relevance in the context of migration and geographically dispersed families. The very existence of transnational families rests on the vitality and durability of kin ties in spite of great distances and prolonged separations (Reynolds 2004). Reynolds (2005) notes that cultural remittance represents emotional attachments and the way in which migrants abroad utilize their family links to maintain cultural connections to their place of origin (Levitt 2001). Other forms of cultural remittance include owning property and building a future retirement residence back “home”, the celebration of traditional cultural rituals and/or recognition of national events from back “home”, and keeping abreast of news back “home” through the Internet and newspapers (Horst and Miller 2006). Cultural remittance reinforces ethnic identity and is viewed as a sign of continued commitment to the kin left behind, as well as a commitment to keeping kin together.

As the Internet emerged to give immigrants a sense of community (Grudz and Takhetev 2011; Karim 2003; Mitra 1997), the notion of fixed communities has been questioned (Cohen 1997; Okafor and Honey 1998; Klak 1998). Ignacio (2005), in her study of the Filipino Diaspora, explored how this group has used the Internet and computer-mediated communication particularly, newsgroup debates, list servers, and website postings, as platforms to build relationships and communities and to create and reinforce their national ethnic and racial identity. Asal (2012), in a study of Lebanese Diasporas concluded that these new technologies have enabled immigrants to create and sustain links with their homeland, host country, and each other, share information, and organize transnational networks (Brettell 2007; Graziano 2012; Nurse 2000; Smith and Bakker 2008; Tekwani 2003; Enteen 2006).

As a networking platform, Facebook has been the most used social media communication technology that continues to unite the Caribbean Diaspora community.² WhatsApp on the other hand, is a smartphone application that enables people to share information directly via their phones. Since its introduction in 2009, its growth has steadily increased, and as of April 2016, it numbers over 1.5 billion users and WhatsApp sees 60 billion messages sent each day.³ While many alternatives to WhatsApp are currently available, (e.g., Kik, Telegram, Line Messenger, BBM, WeChat), WhatsApp is currently the most popular messaging application used by Trinidadians in the Diaspora. WhatsApp has the largest name recognition, by far the largest user base, and the strongest corporate backing since it was acquired by Facebook in 2014.

The quote at the beginning of this paper shows that Trinidadians like Linda use the Facebook platform and other social media applications like WhatsApp and FaceTime as tools to maintain friendships and acquaintances, keep in touch with family, provide long distance caring and nurturing, and to reminisce about the nostalgic past. These are all important tools for the Trinidadian Diaspora because the technology helps to fulfil an individual’s feeling of obligation to remain in touch with family and kin. In this study, we will focus on the Trinidadian immigrant cohort living in Canada in order to determine just how importantly social media have been used in terms of helping to maintain, and solidify linkages of transnational caring chains (Olwig-Fog 2012). Social media provides a number of latent transnational functions for Caribbean people living in the international Diaspora. These functions include, acting as a tool to solidify linkages of obligation and transnational caring; reducing the degree of alienation; and cultural mourning experienced after migration (Ainslie 1998), thus rekindling a sense of mattering and belonging, thereby improving an individual’s self-esteem in the

² In 2000, there was an estimated 414,794,957 internet users worldwide, which represented 6.8% of the world’s population. By 2016, the number of internet users had jumped to an estimated 3,424,971,237 or approximately 46% of the world’s population. The number of internet users in the Caribbean is approximately 42,401,541. In Trinidad, fifty-seven percent of the 1.2 million people report having Facebook users accounts (www.internetworldstats.com 2017).

³ The average WhatsApp user sends over 1000 messages per month with over 2000 messages being received. Average users upload 40 photos, send 13 voice messages and 7 video messages (Statista). Facebook paid \$19 billion dollars in 2014 to acquire WhatsApp.

Diaspora (Schlossberg 1989). This is particularly important for Caribbean-origin individuals and families who are now separated by physical space, time zones, and other barriers like immigration policy which may restrict the Caribbean-origin immigrant's desire to open the door and allow kin and fictive kin an opportunity to reunite in a single metropolitan space.

2. Theoretical Background

The term transnational was originally conceived as a reaction to the vague nature of the term Diaspora as well as, a means of accounting for the ways in which new technology and transport makes possible multiple associations (Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 1999). The original distinction between transnational and Diaspora has been blurred together to such an extent that the two terms have become almost interchangeable when describing Caribbean migrants living outside their home countries like Trinidad, Jamaica or Guyana. Transnational existence is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations between their societies of origin and settlement (Basch et al. 1994). Wise and Velayutham (2006) use the term "transnational affect" to describe the emotional aspects of transnationalism that involve mourning for "home" and a feeling of obligation to help those left behind that many members of the Diaspora feel. Members of transnational families live in geographically dispersed locations (Herrera 2001). Despite the separation caused by national borders and distances, transnational families often look after one another, share resources, and maintain their social relations (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). Kofman and Raghuram (2006), refer to care as "the work of looking after the physical, psychological, emotional and developmental needs of one or more people", thus arguing that this work 'embraces a range of human experiences and relationships of obligation, trust, loyalty and commitment concerned with the well-being of others'. The members of transnational families also provide emotional care and guidance despite the distance of separation (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). The effect of transnational family life on children is examined by (Mazzucato and Schans 2011). Glick (2010) provides a review of the literature on immigrant families, while Carling et al. (2011) explore the difficulties of transnational parenthood.

Di Leonardo (1987) calls the transnational activities that take place between kin members a symbiotic relationship that includes the development, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household kinship ties, as "kin work". The concept of "global care chains" has also been used by researchers to explore the nature and dynamics of transnational care. The concept used by Hochschild (2000), and expanded by Parreñas (2005a, 2005b), refers to "personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring." Sorensen and Vammen (2014) advance the work on transnational care chains by examining the place of motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood in global spaces. Dossa et al. (2017) note that these transnational care chains can become overbearing particularly when migrants feel compelled to take on extra employment in order to fulfill a perceived cultural obligation for sending a steady stream of remittances to individuals who are in greater need.

Most of the research which has been done on remittance practices focuses mainly on the magnitude and impact of remittances on households and communities in other developing countries (Rubenstein 1983; Massey and Parrado 1994). Policy initiatives to enhance the development impact of remittance flows have also been the subject of a number of policy reviews by international agencies (Orozco 2002, 2004). However, much less is known about the volume, frequency, or cultural practices related to the sending of soft goods by Diaspora migrants to their family, kin and fictive kin who live in the Caribbean. Recent research on remittances has taken a positive view of the overall volume of remittances celebrating migrants' role as agents of development (Fajnzylber and López 2008; De Haas 2010; Levitt and Nieves 2011) in connection with the formation of transnational communities. Social remittances connections occur through direct contact between a sending and receiving culture, or through the exchange of letters, videos, photos, emails, blog posts and phone calls. The transnational network enables cultural reproduction of social remittances; the ideas and practices migrants bring with them actively shape who and what they encounter in the countries where they move, which then

shapes what they send back. This pressure can have detrimental effects on an individual's physical and mental health particularly if they are dealing with multiple variables so that they may be able to save and sacrifice so that family back "home" or scattered throughout the Diaspora may be cared for (Parreñas 2005a).

Initially introduced by Becker (1960), the term "negotiated family commitments" refers to the compromise and re-negotiation of family responsibilities over time. This family responsibility is often associated with the physical co-presence and touch as well as emotional, moral, practical, and financial types of care. One person in the chain helps another person out in crisis and the other person then wants to return the kindness to others in the chain once they are back on their feet (Finch and Mason 1993, p. 167). The expression "obligation" refers to cultural expectations of caring assigned to someone's social role as defined by age, gender, and family position

Finch and Mason (1993), used Becker's idea to create the term "transnational care-giving". Later, Baldassar et al. (2006) expounded on the earlier theories to establish the paradigm of transnational family care giving. This paradigm draws heavily on a view by Bryceson and Vuorela (2002, p. 3) who defined trans-national families as "families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely "family hood", even across international borders." According to this description, family care is a main feature of transnational families (Kilkey and Merla 2014). Moreover, transnational care giving is understood as a process that embraces family members of multiple generations, including the able-bodied as well as those in need of care. A key to the concept of transnational care giving is the understanding of care as a multi-dimensional, multigenerational, and multidirectional phenomenon.

Care giving has received significant attention in studies on migration (Ackers and Stalford 2004). A number of studies examine the transnational activities of women in relation to family and kin (Alicea 1997; Foner 1997; Zontini 2004) but only very few researchers have focused on caring for elderly relatives in transnational settings (Baldassar et al. 2006; Baldock 2000; Ackers and Stalford 2004; Lan 2002). Caribbean scholars like (Barrow 2010; and Jokhan 2008) note that migrants from the English speaking Caribbean are part of multi-directional care giving chains that ensure children left behind are taken care of by kin and fictive kin. Members of transnational Caribbean family chains often feel a strong obligation to keep in touch with, care for and look after members of their family despite the physical distance or the time that has passed since migration.

Various studies observe that Caribbean migrants do "kin work". They do not forget their home communities or lose contact with families, community organizations, and political movements in their countries of origin as they become part of a new society (Ho 1993; Olwig-Fog 2002). In the Caribbean, a majority of individuals belong to extended family networks that provide a sense of identity and belonging (Ellison 1985). This cultural pattern of two way kin care acts as an insurance policy whereby the migrant knows that if she/he becomes in need of personal care due to old age, sickness or some other affliction, they can rely on their kin and fictive kin networks to reciprocate care.

Caribbean family researchers (Reynolds 2005; Jokhan 2008; and Barrow 2010) have differentiated between two forms of family obligations that provide a useful starting point for understanding Caribbean transnational family care chains. The two forms are caring about family and caring for family (Ackers and Stalford 2004). Caring about family encompasses contact and emotional support and refers to emotional functions connected with sociability, advice, comfort and self-validation. Examples of caring about family activities include communication by social media, telephone, letters, electronic mail, return visits, participation in family decision-making and sending of remittances. Whereas caring for family refers to "hands-on" care-giving on a personal level. Examples of this include sending for elderly family relations (e.g., mothers, aunts and fathers) to live in the metropolitan countries so that they may be eligible to receive healthcare support not available in the home country (Finch and Mason 1993).

Multi-directional caring for practices, obligations and responsibilities continues to operate within the family networks of Trinidadian Diaspora families. Their accounts of daily activities and family

relationships provide a wealth and range of examples of transnational care provision between family members. The most common is care between parents and children, siblings, grandparents and grandchildren, affluent and less wealthy family members (Olwig-Fog 2012).

A moral obligation dimension is crucial to understanding the caring-about and caring-for-kin relationships within transnational Caribbean family and kinship networks in general. Another pressing factor that helps to solidify the relations between family in the Caribbean and Diaspora is the decline in economic and material conditions in the Caribbean due to government policies like structural adjustment (Barrow 1996). Finch and Mason (1993) advocate the concept of “kinship morality” to suggest that a set of moral discourses inform the behavior of individuals towards their kin in the Caribbean Diaspora. Similarly, Wilder (2006) suggests that people negotiate their transnational familial relationships within these moral guidelines, and they act as moral agents involved in negotiating “the proper thing to do” in and through their commitments to others. These caring commitments may “cross” the boundaries of blood, marriage, residence, culture and country. This can manifest itself in terms of caring for fictive kin (Reynolds 2006).

Caring about family members and kin seemed to assume a crucial relevance in the context of Caribbean migration and geographically dispersed families. The very existence of transnational Caribbean families does, in fact, rest on kin ties being kept alive and maintained, in spite of great distances and prolonged separations (Reynolds 2004). Reynolds (2005) adopted the term cultural remittance to advance the theory of transnational caring about relationships. She noted that Caribbean cultural remittance represents people’s emotional attachments and the way in which migrants abroad utilize their family links to maintain cultural connections to their place of origin (Burman 2002; Levitt 2001). Other forms of cultural remittance included owning and building property “back home”, the celebration of cultural rituals and national events in the new country of residence, and keeping abreast of national news “back home” through the Internet and newspapers (Horst and Miller 2006). Cultural remittance reinforced ethnic identity and was viewed as a sign of continued commitment to the kin left behind and a commitment to keeping kin together.

The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed tremendous advances in internet technology. Vertovec (2004) argues that nothing has facilitated processes of multi-directional caring for practices than the boom in cheap telecommunication options, especially among non-elite social groups. Advancements in communication technology have facilitated higher rates of connectivity between migrants, kin and, fictive kin still living in their homelands. More recently, high speed internet connections have begun to be incorporated into the repertoire of transnational communication options for immigrants living in metropolitan countries (Senyurekli and Detzner 2009). This has provided transnational migrants with an additional, extremely versatile, tool of communication. Panagakos and Horst (2006) suggest that newer modes of communication technology, such as teleconferencing (e.g., Skype, Facetime, or Google Hangouts), provide a visual and real time medium that has the potential to amplify emotional connections and may in some ways decrease the need to physically visit “home.” Many migrant groups report that the increased ability to communicate across borders has been beneficial for maintaining social ties (Horst 2006; Parreñas 2005b; Senyurekli and Detzner 2009). Having real time information via social media about the material, economic, and general conditions in the Caribbean; family members in the Diaspora cannot claim they were oblivious and, therefore, not responsible for helping. Social media has elevated the level of responsibility a migrant might experience from his/her kin and fictive kin left back in their place of origin.

3. Methods and Procedures

This paper is based on both quantitative and qualitative data. The data sources include the results of two online Qualtrics surveys, one implemented in 2012 ($n = 150$) and another in 2015 ($n = 100$) of Trinidadian Diaspora participants and interviews with ($n = 10$) Trinidadian-origin men and women over the age of forty who live in Toronto Canada. We found that Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, Facetime, Snapchat, Twitter, and Google Hangouts were used to facilitate long distance care giving because these

free applications allowed Trinidadian family members living in the Diaspora to communicate verbally and visually twenty-four hours a day. This was unlike earlier times when the cost of a phone call from North America or Europe to Trinidad was almost two dollars per minute. These high costs meant that communication between the two locations was often restricted to emergencies or special family event gatherings like Christmas, birthdays, and special events like Mother's day. Prior to the Internet, much of the communication was done by regular mail using the postal services. The respondents to the surveys came from various Trinidadian-origin ethnic groups which included: African, Indian, Chinese, European and other mixed ethnicities. It was important to have representatives from these ethnic groups because families who originated from Trinidad are heterogeneous.

A purposive snowball sample was used in which the interview participants were selected through their acquaintance with the researchers (whose origins are Trinidadian), through references provided by friends, colleagues, relatives and the participants. All of the interviews were audio taped and took between one and two hours to complete. The surveys were distributed through Qualtrics, an online internet survey platform. Facebook respondents were solicited through friendship networks using a snowball sampling method. We used family, friends and acquaintances of the researchers' social media networks to inform potential participants about the survey online. Once participants completed the survey they were asked to forward the survey URL link to at least five of their Trinidadian friends. The survey results are not based on a random selection of the population. There is an inherent bias in using the researchers' Facebook networks because we both tend to know Trinidadians who are middle to upper middle class, college-educated men and women. We were not successful in attracting working class individuals to complete the survey. The sample size being small and focused on Trinidadians means that the results from both surveys need to be interpreted with caution and may not be generalizable to other Caribbean Diasporas (Jamaicans, Barbadians, Guyanese etc.). Despite these limitations this study represents the first time that any Caribbean researchers have been able to look at the use of social media as a tool for long distance caring. Future studies will need to be implemented that focus on improving the sampling methodology to capture different classes of Trinidadians' and expand to include Jamaicans, Barbadians and Guyanese immigrants living in the Diaspora.

The qualitative interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the strategy of the "constant comparative method of analysis," a strategy of data analysis that calls for the continual "making comparisons" and "asking questions" of the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The data were coded and sorted according to emerging themes. These themes were then compared to each other to determine which were showing consistency. According to Patton (2002), inductive analysis allows for "categories or dimensions to emerge from open-ended observations as the inquirer comes to understand patterns that exist in the phenomenon being investigated". Essentially, as Patton (2002) notes, this type of analysis involves identifying categories, patterns, and themes in one's data through one's interaction with the data. After this analysis, similarities and differences in each code were documented based on our personal understanding, professional knowledge of transnational migration, and the literature on family care-chains.

The use of multiple research methods for studying transnational family care chains has allowed us to explore the way in which social media applications are being used as a tools to facilitate long distance care. We were also able to examine how social media provide Trinidadians living abroad who are experiencing cultural mourning (or alienation) an opportunity to rekindle a sense of mattering and belonging in the international Diaspora. This case study approach for examining social media as it applies to Trinidadians is exploratory and cannot be generalized due to the small sample size. What is important about this research is that it begins to shed light on the way the Trinidadian Diaspora of migrants are using social media to assist in the maintenance of transnational care-chains.

4. Characteristics of the Trinidad Facebook and WhatsApp Sample

Table 1 in the appendices provides a summary of the ten Trinidadian-origin men and women who were interviewed for this study. The oldest person was sixty-eight while the youngest was forty-one.

The youngest person interviewed was included in this researcher's because he spent a great deal of time reflecting on the loss he felt after his uncle returned to Trinidad to retire. The sample consisted mainly of women who were generally much easier to recruit. The women in this sample were in general high users of social media in order to stay in touch with relatives in the Diaspora. The men in the sample were mixed in terms of their reported use of social media to stay in touch with family. The men reported staying in contact using WhatsApp and texting while women used all aspects of social media to stay in touch with family and kin in Trinidad. The sample was fairly diverse in terms of their length of time living in Canada. Most had migrated twenty or more years ago. This sampling bias occurred because of the researchers network of potential interviewees from Trinidad were all first and second generation men and women currently living in Toronto. These subjects were willing to provide their time to be interviewed. One person reported that they migrated to Canada forty-four years ago. In terms of occupation, there was a mixture of job titles ranging from professionals like social worker, barrister, architect, teacher and nurse. Most of the respondents reported still having many family members living in Trinidad. This ranged from twenty-five to one hundred relatives. All of the respondents reported having many family members living in Canada. This ranged from twenty-two to sixty-six relatives. Because of the large number of families both in Trinidad and Canada, it is of little surprise that these respondents in general reported high levels of social media usage in their quest to stay in touch and provide family and friends long distance emotional care.

Table 1. Characteristics of interviewees for the Trinidadian transnational caring study.

| Interviewee Pseudonym | Age | Generation | Gender Self-Identified | Ethnicity Self-Identified | Citizenship Status | Social Class Canada | Occupation | Work Status | Length of Time in Canada | No. Family Living in Trinidad | No. Family Living in Canada | Social Media Use | Remittance Sending |
|-----------------------|-----|------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Rhonda | 66 | 1st | Female | Trinidadian | Trini/Can | Middle Class | Social Worker | Retired | 37 years | 25 | 45 | Low | Infrequent |
| Linda | 54 | 1st | Female | Indo/Trini | Canadian | Middle Class | Teacher | Employed | 28 years | 55 | 33 | High | Frequently |
| Malcom | 68 | 1st | Male | Afro/Trini | Canadian | Lower Class | Custodian | Employed | 33 years | 80 | 30 | Medium | Infrequent |
| David | 48 | 1st | Male | Black | Canadian | Working Class | Machinist | Employed | 28 years | 75 | 22 | Low | Infrequent |
| Suzanne | 61 | 1st | Female | Mixed | Can/Trini | Lower Class | Retail Sales | Retired | 44 years | 60 | 35 | High | Frequently |
| Paula | 41 | 2nd | Female | Indo/Trini | Canadian | Middle Class | Barrister | Employed | 32 years | 54 | 42 | High | Frequently |
| Michelle | 52 | 1st | Female | Mixed | Canadian | Middle Class | Nurse | Employed | 21 years | 49 | 38 | High | Frequently |
| Norman | 62 | 1st | Male | Chinese/Trini | Can/Trini | Upper Class | Architect | Retired | 38 years | 23 | 66 | Low | Infrequent |
| Joan | 51 | 1st | Female | Afro/Trini | Canadian | Middle Class | Real Estate | Employed | 26 years | 29 | 50 | High | Frequently |
| Robert | 41 | 2nd | Male | Indian | Canadian | Lower Class | Entrepreneur | Unemployed | 22 years | 66 | 29 | Medium | Never |

Note: All names used above are pseudonyms. We have tried to keep the interviewees anonymous when constructing the matrix. All first-generation interviewees were born in the Caribbean and migrated to Canada after age 12. All second-generation interviewees were born in Canada of Caribbean parent(s) or arrived in Canada before the age of 12.

5. Facebook and WhatsApp Use in the Trinidadian Diaspora

Of the thirty five questions from the online surveys (2012 and 2015), some interesting trends were found in the way Trinidadians used Facebook and WhatsApp. Almost half of the respondents opened a Facebook account in the time frame 2008 to 2013. Given the fact that Facebook only became accessible to the general public in 2006, it makes this group of respondents a fairly seasoned early adopter group of Facebook users⁴. Most of the respondents in both surveys reported accessing Facebook from their home; others reported using their work computer as a location to check their account. Forty-five percent of respondents in the 2012 survey reported using WhatsApp whereas by 2015 eighty-two percent of respondents reported regularly using WhatsApp. This increasing trend parallels the enormous global growth of WhatsApp usage since its launch in 2009. Most of the respondents checked their Facebook account at least once per day, or once per week. Overwhelmingly, the respondents to both surveys ranked themselves as very good, or good with respect to their knowledge of the workings of Facebook. In addition to Facebook, the other social media platforms most often used by these Trinidadian respondents were YouTube, Skype, and Twitter. The other sites used consisted of an array of different applications that included: Periscope, Snapchat, and Google Hangouts. The vast majority of the respondents also indicated that they would directly text message their friends and relatives on a regular basis. More than fifty percent of the respondents indicated that they received regular WhatsApp messages from family and friends living in Trinidad. Almost forty percent of the respondents indicated that they used FaceTime for communicating with a family member in Trinidad. Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that they had used Skype communication technology to connect with someone in Trinidad and Tobago.

Most of the respondents felt that Facebook was a unique social media platform because it allowed them the possibility of keep track of old friends and acquaintances. Forty-seven percent of the respondents reported that they used Facebook to keeping track of their family and kin network. These patterns fit with [Winnicott \(1969\)](#) theory that immigrants living abroad often find a space to engage in activities, “that bridge the emotional gaps” created by their feelings of dislocation and loss ([Ainslie 1998](#)).

The respondents reported that they had certain preferential activities that they consistently engaged with on Facebook. The activities were in ranked order, checking the status of friends, viewing the photographs posted by family, friends and kin, checking the status of family members, sending email messages, and finally, updating one’s own profile page and photos. The respondents who reported using WhatsApp on a regular basis indicated that they did so because it allowed them to have free and instant voice communication with friends and family members in Trinidad. Having that ability to use their existing smart phone as a device to learn the latest news or gossip from back home was ranked as very satisfying on the survey. These activities are not surprising given the way in which this group of respondents was tied into living transnational lifestyles. The respondents are both here and there, where time and space have been compressed by access to the modern conveniences of cellular telephones, the Internet, and inexpensive airline travel back “home” ([Basch et al. 1994](#)). The distribution of responses also suggests that this sample of Trinidadians was using Facebook as a tool for maintaining contact with their most important support networks of family and friends who lived in the Diaspora. This regular communication also acted as a temporary escape from the routines of life in a foreign country where many reported feeling alienated as foreigners. Having an ability to engage in these transnational activities with family, friends, and acquaintances seems to give the respondents a feeling of belonging and mattering to others both close and far away ([Schlossberg 1989](#)). By using Facebook as a tool to be able to check up on others from “back home” or in the Diaspora, Trinidadian migrants continue to be engaged in the construction of transnational social fields ([Basch et al. 1994](#)).

⁴ Facebook went public on 26 September 2006. After this date anyone 13 years and older with a valid email address could start an account.

In terms of which of the respondents used Facebook or WhatsApp to connect with, there was a clear hierarchy of who they maintained regular communication with. That list varied by the age of those in the home country, the number of return visits the individual reported making, the individuals' self-reported experiences of racism in the country of settlement, and their self-reported socio-economic status. Respondents who had made regular return visits had the highest reported use of technology to remain in regular contact with family, kin, and fictive kin in the diaspora overall. Individuals who reported experiencing medium or high rates of exposure to racism or racist incidents at work on in their new communities also tended to report using Facebook, WhatsApp or other social media tools to communicate with family living back home in Trinidad. It appears that these individuals were using social media as a tool to stave off feelings of alienation and marginalization in their new countries of settlement. Respondents who felt they were middle or upper middle class in the Diaspora reported being the highest users of social media technology to stay in contact with relatives, friends and acquaintances from Trinidad. This middle class group seems to be self-burdened with the responsibility of being the international caregivers for anyone left behind in the home country. Having a mental rank order of extended kin, family and friends shows evidence of the theories put forth by (Sorensen and Vammen 2014; Dossa et al. 2017; Parreñas 2005a; Baldassar et al. 2006; Reynolds 2004) about transnational care chains. Eight-two percent of the respondents indicated a preference for establishing contact with family, friends, and acquaintances that are of Trinidad origin. They also reported that they accepted friend requests mainly from Trinidadian people they already knew or Trinidadian people they attended school with while growing up. The criterion that was used by respondents to accept friend requests were also quite interesting to note. Sixty-five percent of the respondents only became friends with someone that was kin or a fictive kin member, who they were once a close friend of, a person who went to the same school, or that they knew a family member who the respondent was close to. This pattern of carefully selecting who to re-friend, befriend or to communicate with using social media suggested that Trinidadians like other people on Facebook, are weary of strangers with nefarious intentions. Thus, just having the same ethnicity was not enough commonality to encourage a Trinidadian Facebook user to open their virtual "door" and allow a stranger to have access to their most intimate photographs, memories, or backstage aspects of their lives (Goffman 1956).

6. Facebook and WhatsApp as Multi-Directional Transnational Care Bridges

Multi-directional caring, satisfying feelings of obligation to friends, family and kin are all possible using Facebook features like real time video streaming, scrapbooking, or the posting of photos. WhatsApp was reported as an easy to use technology for real-time communication with Trinidad. These opportunities may be particularly significant since family and kin are readily available online at almost any time, and the social media tools make communication easy to accomplish.⁵ Such contacts may foster the development of family relationships, including friendships as well as long distance romantic relationships.⁶ The contacts allowed individuals to be in real time communication especially when a health crisis was unfolding for an older family member. By being able to communicate for free via an individual's smart phone was reported to be psychologically comforting.

It is with the theory of cultural mourning, obligation, and transnational lifestyles in mind that we set out to explore how current social media is facilitating a transnational bridge to connect members of the Trinidadian Diaspora and ultimately helping to provide long-distance care to members of the

⁵ Facebook, enables its users to present themselves in an online profile, accumulate "friends" who can post comments on each other's pages, and view each other's profiles. Facebook members can also join virtual groups based on common interests, see what classes they have in common, and learn each others' hobbies, interests, musical tastes, and romantic relationship status through the profiles.

⁶ According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), Social Networking Websites are "web-based services that allow individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and (c) view and traverse their list of connections within the system.

community who are aging. By acting as a communication bridge that is free and available twenty-four hours a day, social media like Facebook and WhatsApp helps to facilitate reminiscences about the nostalgic past and becomes a mechanism to maintain and solidify linkages of obligation and caring to family, kin, and fictive kin in the international Diaspora. In the next part of the paper we will focus primarily on the use of Facebook and WhatsApp as the social media platforms which are being used by members of the Trinidadian Diaspora to maintain links with family, kin, and fictive kin who are aging. Evidence of how the transnational family care network operates using a combination of low cost smart phone calls, the opportunity to send instant text messages, and the use of social media are all evident from the reflections of Linda, a fifty-four year old Indo-Trinidadian who lives in Toronto but who has family spread out across the Diaspora. She said:

“In my family the hub is actually in three geographical locations. One is in Toronto, another is in Miami, and the third is of course in Trinidad. How we communicate is essentially through the telephone and sometimes social media. Social media means email or more recently through a network of Facebook friends and family. Through all of this technology, I am on top of family issues all the time. Cheap telephone calls mean that we can stay in touch anytime we want. Communication is constantly going back and forth on either side of the triangle, but essentially what happens is if a need is communicated from Trinidad, to let’s say Miami, this message is quickly relayed to Toronto and then something is quickly organized and someone takes action. This is how we do it round the triangle. So if a need is here in Toronto, then of course you go to the States, then to Trinidad, then it comes back.”

This Diaspora linkage means that Linda’s relatives both young and old have a social safety net that cocoons them in family care “twenty-four hours a day and three hundred and sixty five days of the year.” So long as members of her family are able to seamlessly communicate then they can come up with a solution to whatever happens in the family and from various locations. This was particularly so when Linda’s mother became ill in Trinidad. An arrangement was made immediately for a family member in Miami to fly to the Port of Spain to assist their mother with admittance into a private hospital for her illness. On another occasion Linda’s nephew in Miami suffered an injury from a motorcycle accident. Once the call went out from her sister, an older retired aunt from Toronto flew down to Miami to keep vigil at his bedside in the hospital. This transnational multi-generational care model seemed to exist for many of the families in this study. The model is dependent on fast, inexpensive and reliable communication services. This can involve varied combinations of communication modalities that includes text messages, telephone calls, live stream video through Facebook, and WhatsApp. Families can be using single or multiple channels of communication to stay on top of real time family problems in Trinidad or the Diaspora. Michelle a fifty-two year old mixed woman shared her use of WhatsApp on a regular basis at work.

“I used texting and WhatsApp every day to stay in touch with my best friend Rachel in Trinidad. When I am at work and I am bored at my desk I will text Rachel. On my lunch break we will WhatsApp call the whole hour. I will find out about the latest murder, crime bust, gossip or fete!! Rachel and I have been friends since we were 12 years old and going to St Joseph Convent. I moved to Canada twenty-one years ago but I go back every year for Carnival. Since WhatsApp is free, we have no problem talking for hours. I can also ask Rachel to check on my old uncle Dave who lives alone in Diego Martin but he is not too far from Rachel’s workplace.”

It was not uncommon to hear stories of family sacrifice for the care of the older and younger members of the households, despite their geographical location or economic circumstance. This was also the situation for Rhonda a sixty-six year old Trinidadian living in Toronto. Her older sister Jean was reported to be the hub of a transnational care chain that included London, Toronto, and, the Port of Spain. Her older sister Jean would act as the “quarterback” who would orchestrate the family response

when something came up. Rhonda is now using Facebook as her latest tool to ensure that everyone in the family is aware of each family member's needs or accomplishments. Rhonda said:

"Facebook acts as the catalyst for our international families' communication. My sister Jean in London, England who is now in her 70s and is the main spoke in the hub. She retired five years now but for some reason she got onto Facebook with her own children. She went from there to be the family historian and keeper of all photos and family stories. Jean does not move around on airplanes anymore but she uses the technology to know everyone's business. To some of us it's annoying but when you think about it, it's really our older sister Jean's way of caring for all of us. When she knows something is up, you can expect a phone call fairly quickly."

A similar transnational health story was told to us by David a 48-years-old African-Trinidadian male. His aunt was diagnosed with a terminal illness but because the family could all be virtually part of her chemotherapy treatments then it was much easier to find closure when she died of cancer a few months later. David says:

"Since I got my iPhone 5, I have been using FaceTime and WhatsApp with my cousins in Trinidad. We are in touch on such a regular basis I sometimes think that we are both living in Toronto. This new social media technology was especially helpful last year when my aunt Inez who lives in Guelph was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I could use FaceTime and WhatsApp with my cousin to keep my mother in Toronto updated on all the treatments her sister was having. I would then WhatsApp my uncle in Trinidad status updates about her treatments. The sad part is that aunty Inez died five months after the diagnosis. I think the technology made her passing much easier on everyone because we saw her right up till the end and we knew everything that was going on treatment wise. We could emotionally support each other using the technology and in some ways I think it made us less sad because we all had a sense of closure once the cancer took her life."

Overwhelmingly, we heard from the interviewees that Facebook has become an important tool for connecting and reconnecting people with their Trinidadian family, kin, and friends in the international Diaspora. The telephone both landline and cellular networks, continue to be the most important communication tool due to the fact that family members in the Diaspora do not all have high speed fiber optic internet cable connections. Another growing trend was to send text messages to family and friends for immediate status updates. The respondents also spoke in endearing terms about live stream video options, scrapbooking, and the posting of nostalgic or funny photos as ways to develop and maintain a caring relationship with family, kin and fictive kin spread out in the Diaspora. Having an ability to access this relatively free technology meant for many respondents, that they could better cope with feelings of cultural mourning, alienation and feeling marginalized in locations where they were considered as the perpetual "outsider" despite the length of time they have lived in their new country of settlement. Evidence of experiencing racism in the Diaspora was evident from the results of both surveys we conducted. Almost sixty-eight percent of the respondents reported having experienced some form of racism or discrimination in the place they lived in the Diaspora.

From nine out of ten of our interviewees, it was clear that the most important feature that Facebook has to offer them is the ability to share nostalgic and current photograph updates that recorded celebrations and other special times. The older photographs were seen as a "time machine" that psychologically transported individuals back to their early fond memories of family, friends, or events. According to Michelle, the photographs she views daily on Facebook allow her to experience a sense of mattering and belonging to a culture and group that was once close in terms of proximal location (Schlossberg 1989). The photographs also helped other individuals to alleviate feelings of alienation and marginalization in the Metropolis of Toronto. This was certainly what we heard from Paula, a forty one year old Indo-Trinidadian woman who has lived in Canada for thirty-two years. Paula said:

“Facebook is a great means of communication and picture sharing. It’s been great finding old friends and being in touch with family all over the world. Normally you wouldn’t be able to keep so in touch with the people who have been a part of your life whether it be from school days or present day. Facebook allows me to keep my finger on the pulse of what’s going on in my family When you’re homesick it helps you feel connected, sometimes as though you’re still there . . . Pictures posted, FaceTime and chat on Facebook are the most important features for me to show my love.”

Another important function that Facebook and social media provides for many Trinidadians is fulfilling the void of cultural mourning. Seven of the ten respondents felt that logging into their Facebook account and reading a status update from a friend who was making a reference to family, food, music, or a short video taken at a fete (party) provided a much needed feeling of a virtual connection to being back “home”. Trinidadians living in the Diaspora seem to use Facebook as a virtual space to engage in activities that help to bridge the emotional gaps created by their feelings of dislocation and loss (Ainslie 1998). This was evident in the sentiment voiced by Michelle, a fifty-two year old mixed Trinidadian-origin woman who reported getting a warm feeling when she heard something about back home mentioned on Facebook. Michelle said:

“Facebook keeps you current with what people back home are concerned about. A lot of nostalgia comes into play when I’m using Facebook. When someone mentions some local food they had for breakfast in a status update—like salt-fish buljol. It can put a smile on your face or bring back a warm memory It helps you keep up with everything that happens in T&T the moment it happens. You do not feel so removed from the country when you live abroad for many years I use to host a game on Facebook I called “Ex-Pat Question of the Day”. A fun trivia game open to my network of three hundred Trini’s to remember words, people, and places in Trinidad.”

Michelle also reported that her family sometimes used the live stream feature through Facebook or the video attachment in WhatsApp to send each other visual updates. These visual connections provided Michelle with a warm feeling of nostalgia and a temporary break from her monotonous routine in Canada. The visual technology gave Michelle a sense of belonging and an opportunity to participate in family events taking place in Trinidad. She tells us:

“My sister Verol has always been into celebrating her children’s birthday by going all out in Trinidad. She will hire clowns, rent a bouncy house, go to Chucky Cheese or have over a house full of family and friends. I get to experience these family events because Verol uses Facebook live stream or she posts short cellular phone videos through WhatsApp as attachments. I can see my nieces and nephews blowing out candles or the speeches that our uncle always makes about the importance of family. The technology allows me to participate in the event because inevitably the camera goes around to each person and I can say hello ... it’s not perfect but I get a real shot of true family love from those times.”

Cultural mourning was also evident within our sample for the men and women who now have children who have grown up and left Trinidad. Norman a sixty-two year old Chinese Trinidadian was quite clear that in old age, he has come to be an avid user of Facebook so that he could keep in touch or re-connect with people he grew up with in Trinidad. He also felt that Facebook could help him to cope with the nostalgic longing for a connection with the past which was positive. Norman said:

“Facebook has been good for my friends who are aging gracefully . . . ha ha It’s funny when I look at the photos my Trini posse posts, they are always young and vibrant and without gray hair. I guess that’s human nature? We all want to look good and make others think that we are doing well especially as migrants. Despite our putting on a face on Facebook, I think that the technology allows us to know that we are all still alive and kicking with

children, and grandchildren. Being alive and feeling like others care about us adds to one's life. It gives us a meaning that might otherwise not be there if we just lived out our day to day routine of retirement in Canada."

Reminiscing about the good old days through Facebook was a sentiment we heard from Suzanne. As a retired retail sales worker who lived in Canada for forty-four years, she felt that her internet connection at home was a "God send". She felt that the Internet allowed her to gain access to vast amounts of knowledge and experiences. She called it the "encyclopedia of everything" at the touch of a key. This was very positive for her because her entire working life was about meeting people in a department store, talking to them and then showing them something to purchase. This required a gregarious high energy "Trini personality" which Suzanne claimed to still have. Being retired, part of her identity linked to meeting and serving new people has withered since she lives in a condo building. With Facebook however, she has found new life. Suzanne said:

"Facebook takes me back to the good old days living in Princess Town as a youth coming of age. My village was mainly Indians living side by side and each of us living as a big family. Living as an older woman now in Toronto is very depressing. I have seen my children grow up in this cold country and not be very connected. I have seen us own a nice house in Canada but not really feel part of the community. I discovered Facebook a few years ago through my daughter who is a computer programmer. Seeta, my daughter created an account on Facebook for me and then got me connected with a woman I grew up with in Princess Town who lives in Miami. What's funny is that we all reminisce about roti, doubles, cassadura fish, oil down or other foods we remember eating or making. I think this is really a healthy way to build a community and keep track of people who were once really near and dear to us in life."

Facebook was also described by Malcolm as a "pumpkin vine" that connected his wife, Veronica's family in a transnational care chain. Malcolm's own family was not quite as competent in their use of technology or their desire to stay in touch with each other. This loose connection made Malcolm somewhat jealous of Veronica's ongoing ability to know something about everyone in her extended Diaspora family. Malcolm said:

"I am really jealous of the relationships my wife maintains through Facebook. My wife uses Facebook to know everything about her relative's status. I often look over her shoulder with envy because she has such a large array of people who care about her. Veronica is aware through the pumpkin vine of Facebook just what is happening in Trinidad. That includes keeping track of her oldest living relatives who are now in their 80s and 90s. Veronica becomes aware in an instant when one of them is headed to the doctor or hospital or to take a treatment all because of her Facebook pumpkin vine."

Not everyone interviewed felt that Facebook was useful in their daily lives for maintaining transnational care chains. This negative sentiment about Facebook was most evident among men in our sample. A common sentiment was that participation in Facebook made these individuals susceptible to having their secrets or past digressions with members of the opposite sex back in Trinidad come back to haunt them. A desire not to reveal their current circumstance results in some men refusing to participate in social media. David a forty-eight-year-old African-Trinidadian referred to Facebook as "maco book" which is a colloquial phrase that translates as being overly mindful of other people's personal business. David said:

"I do not use Facebook nor do I have any intention of doing so. I have resisted numerous offers to join any of these networks better known as e-macos ... The one thing we might conclude so far is that "Facebook" and other such social media is really an age-bound thing. Old fellas like me shy away from the rapid-moving technological changes for fear of showing

up our incompetence or we don't like that plenty people know my business, so I closed down the account... I don't do very much outside of that because I have no interest in persons knowing my personnel business. If they would like to find out about me, they need to use traditional methods like visiting or calling me."

Second generation Trinidadian origin men and women tend to be avid users of Facebook and WhatsApp as tools to get in touch with their family and friends scattered throughout the Diaspora. Facebook and WhatsApp allowed these younger people to ask and answer questions about where they came from, who their ancestors were, and the growing up experiences of their mothers and fathers. WhatsApp gave them the ability to attach short videos to their text messages. The short videos gave more meaning to what they were seeing in real time. For example a christening, a birthday celebration, or a fete could be videoed and then added to an email message or a text. The opportunity to use Facebook to connect with their past also gave many of our interviewees a feeling of belonging and mattering in real time⁷ (Schlossberg 1989). What was also interesting was the language code switching that was being done in the typed comments and posts in a combination of patois creole and standard English. Robert a forty-one year old Indo-Trinidadian Canadian certainly articulated these feelings about the use of Facebook as the technology which gave him an instant connection with family and kin who are located throughout the Diaspora. Robert said:

"Facebook gives the younger generation a chance to know and keep in contact with their family abroad like me. I like to keep in touch with the pace of things in Trinidad, especially my cousins who still live there I like how my Trinidadian friends and family use Trinidadian lingo and refer to Trinidadian places and things and makes me feel I am still part of the island and its culture. Facebook allows me to send out likes to things my cousin posts. Over the years our relationship has grown stronger because he knows that I visit his page, comment on his political posts."

The second generation also used their Facebook account to keep in touch with important family members who had returned to Trinidad after having lived in Canada for a long period of time. In this case Facebook acts as the medium to facilitate the construction of transnational social fields that provide long distance care chains for family, kin and fictive kin (Sorensen and Vammen 2014; Dossa et al. 2017). This was certainly the case for Paula, a forty-one year old Indo Canadian-born Trinidadian whose favorite uncle moved back to Trinidad after having retired and lived in Canada for thirty-five years. Paula grew up with her mother in a single headed household in Toronto. When her uncle Rolly announced his intention to return to Trinidad to live, the news was devastating because her uncle had always been like a father to her while she was growing up in Toronto. Paula has turned to Facebook and other social media to stay in contact with her uncle Rolly. She reports getting advice and keeping up with Trini culture whenever she talks to her Uncle Rolly. Paula said:

"My uncle Rolly left Canada in 2010 for Trinidad. I thought that my life would change since uncle Rolly was like my dad. Lucky for us, Facebook has allowed me to still get advice from him and also to share my accomplishments at work. We exchange photos and talk to each other on Skype all the time. I have allowed him full access to my posts and photos so he knows everything. It's funny I think uncle Rolly knows more about me and my friends now than he did when he lived in Toronto. For us Facebook has ensured that our relationship remains solid because he can still help me out when I need him. I guess I also keep him connected to the rest of the family in Toronto."

⁷ Caribbean sojourners grew up in a world back "home" where life was different in that they knew their neighbors and they felt connected to their neighborhood through a shared feeling of mechanical solidarity. Living in Diaspora cities outside of the Caribbean region, individual contributions often go unrecognized; there is no real sense that their life is significant or meaningful to others. This often leads to feelings of alienation and not belonging in a predominately "white" culture.

7. Conclusions

Despite being separated by great geographical distances, the transnational Trinidadian Diaspora community has managed to stay in regular communication using conventional means such as letter writing, phone calls, and telegrams. In the twenty-first century, this communication has become more real-time and relies on the most sophisticated internet technology. The purpose of communication is the same as in earlier times. The Diaspora is desirous of maintaining a transnational bridge that connects individuals across long distances and provides family members a feeling of psychological well-being as well as, real-time help in sickness or in times of economic need.

Staying in contact using a Facebook platform or the WhatsApp network has become the latest means to maintain a psychosocial feeling of mattering and to help buffer the effects of mourning and nostalgia for back “home”. As new technologies like Twitter, and FaceTime become more readily utilized and mainstream both in the “home” and in metropolitan countries, it will affect the ways Trinidadian people stay in touch and provide transnational social and psychological care to family and kin.

Despite being an exploratory study, the data presented in this paper suggest that Trinidadian people in the international Diaspora are using social media applications like WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Skype to communicate and stay updated with each other. Currently, landlines and cellular telephones (texting) are by far the least expensive and most used technological mediums to remain in immediate contact. Social media platforms are changing the way that the Trinidadian Diaspora does “kin work” and communicates with friends and family about what is happening in the region and worldwide. The research from this paper suggests three preliminary findings: firstly, social media platforms like Facebook and cellular phone applications like WhatsApp are working as a tools for Trinidadian people in the Diaspora to help alleviate feelings of alienation and marginality in host cultures, secondly, social media is acting as a transnational care bridge that connects familiar cultural values and practices and helps to alleviate feelings of cultural mourning, and finally, social media platforms are increasingly being used to solidify linkages of obligation and provide transnational caring to family and kin. With every new social media innovation being introduced in the marketplace, it does not take long before its adopted and it becomes mainstream. The main criteria for its adoption seems to be the cost, the ease of use and if it can be downloaded onto existing smart phone or computer devices.

Social media seems to fit directly into the transnational orientation for Trinidadian migrants living in the Diaspora because it provides them with a means to communicate across vast distances in real time. Social media platforms also seem to have given Trinidadian migrants a feeling of agency that helps them to avoid feelings of object loss and cultural alienation. This acquisition of agency is particularly important for some Trinidadian immigrants who have felt powerless to have a voice in the global public square. Undoubtedly, the cyber space world of the Internet and the use of social media platforms have given the Trinidadian Diaspora a real-time virtual connection to family, kin, and friends. As a consequence, this acts as a therapeutic, social and psychological means for Caribbean-origin people to be able to alleviate their feelings of loneliness in their diasporic locations.

As social media evolves there is much need for new research about this topic and looking at ways to understand how the Trinidadian Diaspora will use social media in order to maintain a bridge to those elderly and young left behind or those individuals who are sick and in need of family assistance in London, Miami or New York. The applications currently existing within most social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype and YouTube have the potential to make life more tolerable for Trinidadians who may be located in spaces where they are racialized and alienated from the dominant White European, Canadian and American narrative that sees them as the perpetual unwanted “problem” foreigner.

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