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Connecting Across Borders: A Systematic Review of How Information and Communication Technologies Influence Emotional, Social, and Cultural Dynamics in Transnational Families

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review examines how information and communication technologies (ICT) shape emotional, social, and cultural dynamics within transnational families (TNFs). Drawing on 113 articles identified through a Zotero bibliographic library developed by Working Group 1 of the COST Action Transnational Family Dynamics in Europe [TraFaDy], the study synthesizes research on ICT-mediated family practices within TNFs. Through descriptive coding and thematic analysis, we examined participant profiles, research designs, communication practices, origin and host countries, the drivers of ICT use, and emotional, social, and cultural consequences. Findings show that ICT enhances communication, facilitates co-presence across distance, and supports emotional bonds, while also generating complex ambivalences shaped by socioeconomic conditions, digital literacy, migration status, and intra-family power dynamics. Although digital tools strengthen family roles, caregiving arrangements, and transnational belonging, they may simultaneously reinforce inequalities, intensify surveillance, or create emotional strain. Cultural processes such as enculturation, acculturation, and cultural integration were shown to be deeply intertwined with ICT use, revealing how digital communication sustains cultural continuity while enabling hybrid cultural formations. The review concludes with recommendations for strengthening research and policy initiatives related to digital inclusion, family support, and integration, with the aim of enhancing the well-being of TNFs.

1 | Introduction

In the past two decades, digital technologies have profoundly transformed how people maintain family ties across geographical distance. The increasing prevalence of international migration, global mobility, and displacement has led to the formation of what scholars define as a transnational family (TNF), understood as "maintaining a sense of familyhood despite being physically dispersed across multiple countries due to international migration" (Budginaitė-Mačkinė et al. 2026, 12).

Correction added on 4 September 2026, after first online publication: Olga Nenonen's name and affiliation 3 have been corrected.

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Relationships within TNFs have come under increasing pressure amid recent global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, and widening socioeconomic inequalities (Popyk and Pustułka 2021), all of which have deepened physical separation and increased family vulnerability worldwide (Végh et al. 2025). As global conditions continue to shift, understanding how ICT shapes these relationships has become increasingly urgent (e.g., Baldassar 2016).

ICT-mediated communication practices, ranging from mobile messaging (Romanowski 2025) and social media (Madianou 2016) to video calls (Baldassar et al. 2022), have become vital instruments for preserving intimacy, organizing care, and sustaining belonging when physical co-presence is not possible. Research has increasingly highlighted the emotional (Zhao 2019), social (Toumi 2023), and cultural (Ahn 2017) complexities that emerge as family life unfolds across borders. These dynamics suggest that ICT use within TNFs cannot be understood solely as a matter of technological connectivity but must also be examined through theoretical perspectives that explain how family relationships are enacted and maintained across distance. Family practices theory conceptualizes families not as fixed structures but as sets of everyday practices through which family relationships are enacted and sustained (Morgan 2011). From this perspective, activities such as communication, emotional support, and the coordination of daily life constitute the ongoing process of doing family. In transnational contexts, these practices occur through digital communication technologies that enable family members to maintain relational ties across geographical distance. This perspective allows us to conceptualize ICT-mediated communication practices as digital family practices through which TNFs sustain intimacy, coordinate care, and negotiate social and cultural expectations across borders.

Existing scholarship demonstrates that ICT facilitate connected presence (Licoppe 2004) and enable practices of doing family online (Qian and Hu 2024), but their emotional and social consequences are far from uniform. Studies highlight ambivalent outcomes: while technologies strengthen intimacy and caregiving across borders, they can also deepen inequalities, create emotional strain, and blur boundaries between care and surveillance (Wang and Lim 2020). These findings call for a systematic synthesis of research to understand how ICT shape family dynamics in diverse transnational contexts. Our review systematically examines how ICT use within TNFs has been studied, with particular attention to participant profiles, research designs, ICT-mediated communication practices, and their emotional, social, and cultural implications.

The accumulation of empirical research over recent decades has encouraged researchers to conduct review studies synthesizing findings concerning TNFs. Previous research findings have emerged in a wide range of origin and host-country contexts, including Latin American, African, and Asian migrants in the United States and Europe (Cuban 2016; Madianou 2016), Iranian and Filipino migrants in Australia (Cabalquinto 2020; Farshbaf Shaker 2018), as well as Central Asian, African, and Eastern European families living in Western and Northern Europe (Ducu et al. 2023; Van Der Horst et al. 2019). Given this diversity, a growing body of research has produced a rich but fragmented landscape that necessitates systematic synthesis.

Existing literature reviews have included meta-syntheses (Larrinaga-Bidegain et al. 2024; Seidel et al. 2022) and a theoretical overview (Alinejad and Ponzanesi 2020). Researchers conducting meta-syntheses have focused on evaluating connections among members of TNFs and the importance of family for unaccompanied minors (Seidel et al. 2022) as well as examining migration and family roles, affects, negotiations of gender, subjectivity and family expectations, family cohesion and tensions, communication and the digital relational space, and narratives of family reunification (Larrinaga-Bidegain et al. 2024). From the perspective of family practices theory (Morgan 2011), TNFs sustain family life through everyday practices of communication, caregiving, and the continuous negotiation of family roles and relationships despite geographical separation. However, this expanding body of work has largely been synthesized through reviews with a narrow focus such as specific migrant groups, particular platforms, or crisis-related contexts like the COVID-19 pandemic.

By combining descriptive mapping with thematic synthesis, our review provides a broader account of the scope and characteristics of the relevant literature. In doing so, we identify patterns, underexamined areas, and conceptual and methodological gaps, thereby offering clearer directions for future research and guidance for scholars and policymakers interested in understanding how ICT shape family life across borders. Our review addresses four key questions:

RQ1. *How are participant profiles, research designs, and geographical distributions (origin and host countries) defined in studies conducted in the context of TNFs*?

RQ2. *What ICT-mediated communication practices are identified in studies of TNFs, and what factors shape these practices*?

RQ3. *How does ICT use shape (a) emotional, (b) social, and (c) cultural dynamics within TNFs*?

RQ4. *Which theoretical approaches to ICT use are employed in the analyzed studies and how do these approaches contribute to the analysis of relationships*?

2 | Conceptual Framework

Our systematic review is framed around existing review studies on TNFs (Larrinaga-Bidegain et al. 2024; Seidel et al. 2022). Building on their work, we developed a conceptual framework based on thematic analysis. Our review focuses on three components, including methodology (RQ1), topical foci (RQ2 and RQ3), and theoretical approaches (RQ4) (see Figure 1).

Using a hybrid inductive–deductive coding strategy (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006), we first examined the methodological dimension of the literature (RQ1), focusing on participant profiles, research designs, and geographical configurations, including countries of origin and destination. This dimension provided a systematic mapping of how empirical studies of ICT

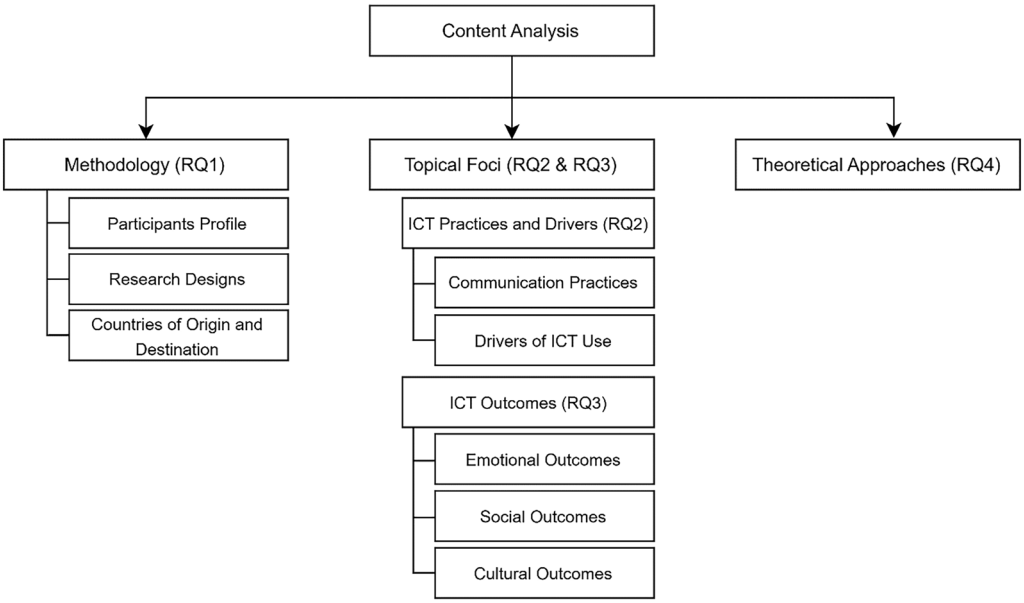

FIGURE 1 | Analytical framework of the systematic review.

use within TNFs were designed and conducted across different geographical contexts.

Second, the review addresses the topical foci of the literature (RQ2 and RQ3), which encompass two interrelated dimensions. The first concerns ICT-mediated communication practices and the drivers shaping these practices (RQ2), with particular attention to communication behaviors and the socio-demographic, technological, and relational factors influencing ICT use. Prior research indicates that socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, and migration trajectories shape communication preferences and practices (Alinejad 2019; Wang and Lim 2020). The second dimension of the topical foci focuses on ICT-related outcomes (RQ3), synthesizing evidence on the emotional, social, and cultural outcomes associated with ICT-mediated family life within TNFs. Existing studies commonly examine outcomes related to care practices and emotional labour (Baldassar 2016; Belloni 2020), gender relations and power dynamics (Alinejad 2019; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023; Toumi 2023), and processes of cultural continuity and transformation (Ahn 2017; Cuban 2016; Ducu et al. 2023). Our systematic review uses the framework of media richness theory (Daft and Lengel 1986) and the related framework of media synchronicity theory (Dennis et al. 2008) to interpret how different ICT tools support specific communication practices and relational outcomes within TNFs. These theories emphasize that communication media differ in their capacity to convey rich information and enable synchronous interaction. Applying this perspective to transnational family communication helps explain why richer media are often used for emotionally complex interactions, whereas leaner media are more suited to routine updates and everyday coordination across geographical distance.

Third, we analyze the theoretical approaches employed across the reviewed studies (RQ4) and examine how these frameworks inform interpretations of ICT-mediated relationships. The literature draws on diverse theoretical clusters, including polymedia and communication ecology (Madianou 2016), material-semiotic perspectives, feminist approaches, and identity-based frameworks (Cabalquinto 2020; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023).

3 | Theoretical Background

3.1 | Emotional Outcomes of ICT Use

Digital technologies enable connected presence, allowing geographically dispersed family members to remain emotionally involved in everyday life (Licoppe 2004). Within TNFs, ICT-mediated communication shapes emotional connection, regulation, and transformation across distance. Research on doing family online demonstrates that emotional closeness is often sustained through routine, mundane interactions rather than through the exchange of substantial information (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016).

However, the emotional outcomes of ICT use are marked by ambivalence. Prior studies show that ICT-mediated communication can reinforce mixed feelings, emotional ambivalence, and pressures to maintain contact, particularly within relationships already strained by physical separation (Licoppe 2004). For example, some family members limit communication when ICT use becomes associated with expectations of return or obligations, illustrating how care and control may coexist in digitally mediated interactions (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016). To manage emotional distance, scholars identify different forms of ICT-enabled co-presence, including ritual, reinforced, and omnipresent co-presence, with the latter proving especially effective in sustaining emotional closeness through shared everyday moments (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016). Such practices prioritize doing things together over the informational content of communication and support feelings of continuity and belonging.

3.2 | Social Outcomes of ICT Use

Within TNFs, the social dimension of ICT use concerns how digital communication shapes social cohesion, caregiving practices, and intergenerational relationships across distance. The intensified reliance on ICT, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has enabled families to sustain everyday social interactions and participate in shared events despite mobility constraints (Baldassar and Wilding 2020; Végh et al. 2025). Empirical studies further indicate that pandemic-related travel restrictions increased reliance on ICT-mediated communication, allowing families to maintain routine interactions and shared activities through video-calling platforms (Popyk and Pustułka 2021). Beyond maintaining contact, ICT also contributes to identity formation and self-representation within transnational family networks, particularly among younger members (Zheng 2023). At the same time, digital communication cannot fully substitute face-to-face interaction, and inequalities in digital access and skills, especially among older generations, may constrain participation and reinforce social exclusion (de Andrade et al. 2022).

ICT plays a crucial role in enabling transnational caregiving and social support. Families increasingly rely on digital tools to provide emotional, moral, and financial support across distance, although such practices often depend on levels of digital literacy and access to technology (Joseph et al. 2022). The literature indicates that ICT-mediated social outcomes are dynamic and uneven, simultaneously strengthening social cohesion and kin maintenance while revealing inequalities shaped by generational positions, family structures, and broader socioeconomic contexts.

3.3 | Cultural Outcomes of ICT Use

The cultural dimension of ICT use refers to how digital communication shapes cultural identity formation and maintenance, cultural adaptation, and cultural synthesis within the TNF context. The literature commonly examines these outcomes through three interrelated processes: enculturation, acculturation, and cultural integration. Enculturation involves the maintenance and transmission of the culture of origin, while acculturation refers to adaptation to host societies and the negotiation of cultural norms. Cultural integration reflects the interaction of multiple cultural influences that give rise to hybrid practices and meanings.

Empirical research demonstrates that ICT play a central role in preserving cultural identity and supporting intergenerational cultural transmission. Studies highlight how family members use digital communication to transmit cultural values and practices across distance and to sustain cultural rituals in everyday life (Ahn 2017; Farshbaf Shaker 2018). At the same time, critical and feminist perspectives show that ICT-mediated communication can transform gender norms and intra-family power relations, producing both empowerment and conflict within processes of cultural adaptation (Toumi 2023; Wang and Lim 2020). Several studies indicate that ICT use facilitates cultural hybridisation, enabling the convergence of different cultural influences and the emergence of new hybrid cultural forms within transnational families (Alinejad 2019; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023). The literature conceptualizes cultural outcomes of ICT use as complex and multilayered, reflecting the interplay of cultural continuity and transformation, individual agency, family power relations, and broader socioeconomic and political contexts.

4 | Method

4.1 | Identification of Sources

This article presents a systematic review of academic studies published between 2006 and 2025 on ICT use within TNFs. We started the screening process using the Zotero bibliographic library developed by Working Group 1 of the COST Action 'Transnational Family Dynamics in Europe' for a literature review of the concept of the transnational family (Budginaitė-Mačkinė et al. 2026). The Zotero bibliographic library is a collaborative bibliographic repository developed by researchers participating in the COST Action and contains publications on transnational families collected by multiple working groups. The Zotero bibliographic library served as the starting point for identifying relevant literature and was complemented by additional searches to ensure broader coverage of the field. Our review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (see Figure 2). We adopted an open-ended search strategy without restricting the publication period, resulting in the identification of studies published between 2006 and 2025. The review included qualitative and quantitative research articles published in peer-reviewed journals, while other publication types, including book chapters, book reviews, and conference proceedings, were excluded.

The Zotero bibliographic library contained 400 items. We reviewed the abstracts one by one and excluded all items that did not refer to ICT use or related technologies and platforms (e.g., devices, smartphones, WhatsApp, Skype, etc.). To ensure the comprehensiveness of our review, we conducted an additional search using Google Scholar. This search employed the following key terms to capture a broad yet targeted range of relevant literature: Transnational Family, ICT, Cell phones, Smartphones, WhatsApp, Skype, Viber, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, X-Twitter, Online, Connectivity. We executed a retrospective reference harvesting procedure to confirm that we had not missed any relevant studies (Pigott and Polanin 2020). The titles identified through our search were added to a shared Zotero bibliographic library and subsequently compiled into an Excel spreadsheet containing full bibliographic details. Duplicate records were identified using Zotero's duplicate detection function and subsequently verified manually before the screening process. This list was then cross-checked by all authors for completeness, confirming that no critical contributions had been omitted. Initially, we had 400 items. After the first screening step using abstracts, 113 articles were deemed eligible for this study.

4.2 | Coding Procedures and Analysis

We used a shared Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to record specific information about each article, including participant profiles, research designs, countries of destination and origin, and ICT-mediated communication practices. In the first stage, we employed an open coding approach to identify meaningful concepts and patterns emerging from the reviewed

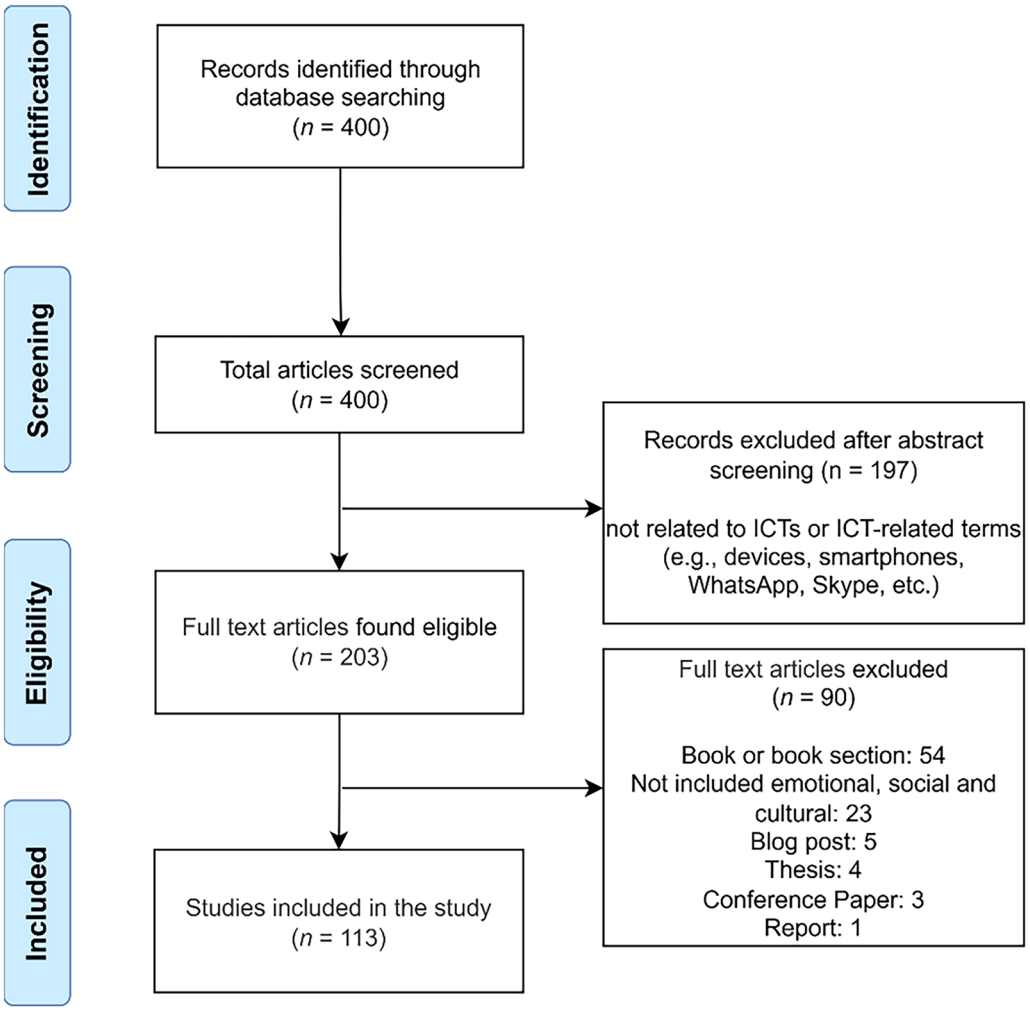

FIGURE 2 | PRISMA flow diagram of the study. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

studies. In the second stage, the codes were reviewed by a second researcher to increase the reliability of the analysis. Discrepancies in coding were discussed during several online meetings until consensus was reached. In the third stage, the codes were grouped into broader analytical categories and consolidated into overarching themes through an iterative thematic categorization process.

5 | Findings

5.1 | Methodology

5.1.1 | Participant Profiles

Based on our first research question (RQ1), Table 1 presents the key characteristics of the reviewed studies, including participant profiles, sample sizes, and the selected references illustrating each category.

The values reported as *N* indicate the number of studies coded under each category. Since several studies included multiple participant groups, codes within each category were not mutually exclusive. A single study could be coded under more than one subcategory (e.g., a study focusing on migrant mothers could also be coded under migrant women). As it is demonstrated in Table 1, the participant profiles are presented across four main dimensions: age group, participant type, gender distribution, and socioeconomic status or educational level. The studies encompass a wide range of age groups such as young adults in 12 studies and older adults (50+) in 10 studies. Participant types were coded into 17 categories, with migrant-related participant groups constituting most of the reviewed studies. Nineteen studies included women-only samples, whereas the remaining 94 studies included mixed-gender samples or did not report participants' gender in sufficient detail. Finally, only a few studies provided information on participants' socioeconomic status or educational background.

5.1.2 | Research Designs

Table 2 also shows which research designs have been utilized in the reviewed studies. The results show that the research designs across the reviewed studies can be categorized into five interrelated levels: methodological approach, research strategy, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and data analysis. Methodologically, the field is dominated by qualitative

TABLE 1 | Participant profiles across the reviewed studies.

Category and codes	*N*	Selected reference(s)
Age group	**42**	
Young adults (16–36)	12	Alinejad (2019); Deák et al. (2024)
Mixed age group (26–74)	12	Marino (2019); Share et al. (2018)
Older adults (50+)	6	Cabalquinto (2020); Toumi (2023)
Elderly people (60–96)	4	Baldassar (2016); Cabalquinto (2022)
Adults (26–49)	4	Acedera and Yeoh (2019); Waruwu (2022)
Adolescents (10–19) and teenagers (10–14)	2	Cingel et al. (2019)
Participant type	**95**	
Multigenerational TNF member	17	Chen (2022); Ducu et al. (2023)
Migrant family members: parents, children	16	Romanowski (2025); Share et al. (2018)
Migrant workers	12	Cabalquinto (2019); Peng and Wong (2013)
Migrant/Refugee women	11	Chib et al. (2014); Farshbaf Shaker (2018)
Left behind family members	8	Alinejad (2021); Brown and Grinter (2014)
Migrants	7	Baldassar (2014); Zanforlin (2015)
Migrant students	6	Badiei and Popkova (2023); Van Der Horst et al. (2019)
Migrant mothers	4	Kędra (2021); Waruwu (2022)
Refugees	3	Belloni (2020); Marlowe and Bruns (2021)
Split families (migrant/surviving spouses)	3	Acedera and Yeoh (2018); Acedera and Yeoh (2019)
Grandmothers	2	Ivan and Nimrod (2021)
Left behind children and fathers/mothers	2	Brown and Grinter (2014); Madianou (2012)
Birth tourism (women)	1	Kang (2018)
Families of immigrant children	1	Ahlin (2018)
Older parents	1	Ngan (2025)
Queer females	1	Zheng (2023)
Gender distribution	**113**	
Women only	19	Ahn (2017); Wang and Lim (2020)
Mixed gender or gender not reported	94	de Andrade et al. (2022), Cingel et al. (2019)
Economic status-Education	**6**	
Middle- and low-income	3	Ahn (2017); Toumi (2023)
Well educated	2	Nedelcu and Wyss (2016); Wang and Lim (2020)
Diverse socioeconomic status	1	Mantilla (2022)
Diverse educational level	1	Cabalquinto (2019)

Note: Bold values indicate the total frequency for each main category.

research ($n = 95$), whereas quantitative and mixed methods designs are considerably less common. This strong qualitative emphasis reflects the field's orientation toward meanings, emotions, and lived experiences. Regarding research strategies, cross-cultural, multi-sited, cross-sectional, ethnographic/digital ethnography, and case study designs were the most frequently employed approaches. The prevalence of ethnographic and case-based perspectives suggests a strong emphasis on understanding the contextual and evolving nature of experiences within TNFs and ICT-mediated communication practices. Regarding data collection methods, semi-structured or in-depth interviews were the most used techniques ($n = 77$), frequently combined with online and offline participant observation and focus groups. Sampling strategies relied predominantly on purposive sampling ($n = 77$), often in combination with snowball sampling ($n = 39$). In terms of data analysis, most studies used qualitative analytic strategies, with thematic analysis being the most prevalent.

5.1.3 | Countries of Origin and Destination

Figure 3 presents the distribution of countries of origin represented in the reviewed studies. The findings indicate that the Philippines, China, and Poland were the most frequently represented origin countries. This pattern suggests that transnational family research has particularly focused on migrant-sending contexts characterized by large-scale labour migration and diasporic mobility.

Figure 4 presents the distribution of host countries represented in the studies included in the review. The figure shows

TABLE 2 | Research designs utilized in the reviewed studies.

Category and codes	*N*	Selected reference(s)
Methodological approach	**113**	
Qualitative study	95	Cuban (2016); Farshbaf Shaker (2018)
Theoretical/Meta-synthesis/Systematic	8	Alinejad and Ponzanesi (2020); Larrinaga-Bidegain et al. (2024)
Mixed research study	7	Romanowski (2025); Chib et al. (2014)
Quantitative study	3	Barakji et al. (2019); Deák et al. (2024)
Research strategy/Structure (excluding the theoretical/ Meta-synthesis/Systematic)	**338**	
Cross-cultural study	86	Popyk and Pustułka (2021)
Multi-sited study	66	Kędra (2021)
Cross-sectional study	62	Gonzalez and Katz (2016)
Ethnographic/Digital ethnography study	38	Ahn (2017); Madianou (2016); Marlowe and Bruns (2021)
Case study	30	Hsu (2021)
Longitudinal study	19	Ryan et al. (2024)
Comparative study	15	Wilding (2006)
Multiple case study	14	Romanowski (2025)
Participatory design	5	Brown and Grinter (2014)
Grounded theory	3	Ivan and Nimrod (2021)
Data collection methods	**158**	
Semi-structured and/or in-depth interviews	77	Cuban (2016); Toumi (2023)
Online and/or offline observation	32	Madianou (2016); Wang and Lim (2020)
Focus groups	18	Bacigalupe and Bräuninger (2017); Ducu et al. (2023)
Photo and video elicitation	13	Cabalquinto (2020)
Survey	10	Barakji et al. (2019)
Life history/biographical interview	5	Baldassar (2014)
Media diary	2	Marlowe and Bruns (2021)
Archival material	1	Greschke (2021)
Sampling strategy	**128**	
Purposeful sampling	77	Belloni (2020); Kędra (2021)
Snowball sampling	39	Badiei and Popkova (2023); Cabalquinto (2020)
Convenience sampling	4	Popyk and Pustułka (2021); Rugunanan and Meyers (2022)
Theoretical sampling	4	Alinejad (2019)
Probability-based sampling	2	Deák et al. (2024)
Stratified sampling	1	Eklund and Sadowski (2023)
Stratified quota sampling	1	Eklund and Sadowski (2023)

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

Category and codes	*N*	Selected reference(s)
Data analysis	**94**	
Thematic analysis	66	Hänninen et al. (2021); Ryan et al. (2024)
Not clearly specified	11	Zanforlin (2015)
Grounded theory analysis	10	Demirsu (2022)
Photo/visual elicitation analysis	9	Cabalquinto (2019); Kędra (2021)
Descriptive statistical analysis	3	Platt et al. (2016)
Statistical modeling analysis	2	Barakji et al. (2019)
Content analysis	2	Mantilla (2022)
Social network analysis	2	Tuñón Pablos and Mena Farrera (2018)
Framework analysis	1	Share et al. (2018)
Practice based analysis	1	Alinejad (2019)
Comparative inferential statistical analysis	1	Deák et al. (2024)

Note: Bold values indicate the total frequency for each main category.

that Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom were the most frequently represented host countries, indicating that transnational family and migration research has been concentrated largely in English-speaking migrant-receiving contexts.

5.2 | Topical Foci

The topical foci were examined across two interrelated analytical dimensions: (a) ICT-mediated communication practices and the factors shaping these practices (RQ2) and (b) the emotional, social, and cultural outcomes associated with ICT use within TNFs (RQ3).

5.2.1 | ICT-Mediated Communication Practices

Table 3 presents the ICT-mediated communication practices identified in the reviewed studies. Findings show that TNFs use a wide range of digital devices and platforms to sustain cross-border communication. Regarding the devices enabling communication, mobile phones and smartphones are the most frequently referenced devices (Cabalquinto 2020; Madianou 2012), followed by computers (6 studies). Following Faulkner and Runde (2019), these devices can be conceptualized as material bearers that enable the performance of digital communication tasks. In addition to these devices, the reviewed studies highlight the widespread use of various communication platforms and applications. Video calling platforms such as Skype and Zoom are the most frequently cited tools, followed by messaging applications and SMS, Facebook, and WhatsApp, each supporting real-time or multimedia interaction across distance (Alinejad 2019; Farshbaf Shaker 2018; Share et al. 2018). These platforms play a central role in facilitating virtual co-presence and maintaining relational closeness among geographically dispersed family members (e.g., Baldassar et al. 2022). The earliest studies in our Zotero bibliographic library (2006–2011) examined communication through telephone calls, email, SMS, and early internet-based platforms such as Skype and Yahoo Messenger. They demonstrated how emerging digital communication technologies supported transnational parenting and the maintenance of family relationships across geographical distance (Madianou 2012; Wilding 2006). Studies published between 2012 and 2014 documented the expansion of ICT use through mobile phones, texting, internet calls, email (Benítez 2012; Chib et al. 2014), and webcam-based communication (Madianou 2012). In the mid-2010s, research focused on the role of social media and video-calling platforms such as Facebook, Skype, and Instagram in maintaining everyday visibility and co-presence among transnational family members (Baldassar 2014; Madianou 2016). More recent studies indicate a shift toward mobile-centred communication ecosystems, particularly messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram, which enable both synchronous and asynchronous communication including voice calls, text exchanges, and photo sharing (Badiei and Popkova 2023; Kędra 2021). Social media platforms also enable more complex digital family practices, such as online support communities, digital rituals, and ongoing ambient co-presence (Ducu et al. 2023; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023). Studies further illustrate the diversification of ICT ecosystems, including the use of smartphones, video-calling platforms (e.g., Zoom or FaceTime), and interconnected digital environments (Ngan 2025; Ryan et al. 2024). These temporal shifts indicate that transnational family communication practices are closely intertwined with broader technological developments. Communication has evolved from relatively simple phone-based interactions toward highly integrated mobile platform environments that enable continuous, multimedia, and socially embedded forms of family connectivity.

Regarding communication frequency, 18 studies reported frequent but unspecified contact (Ducu et al. 2023; Farshbaf

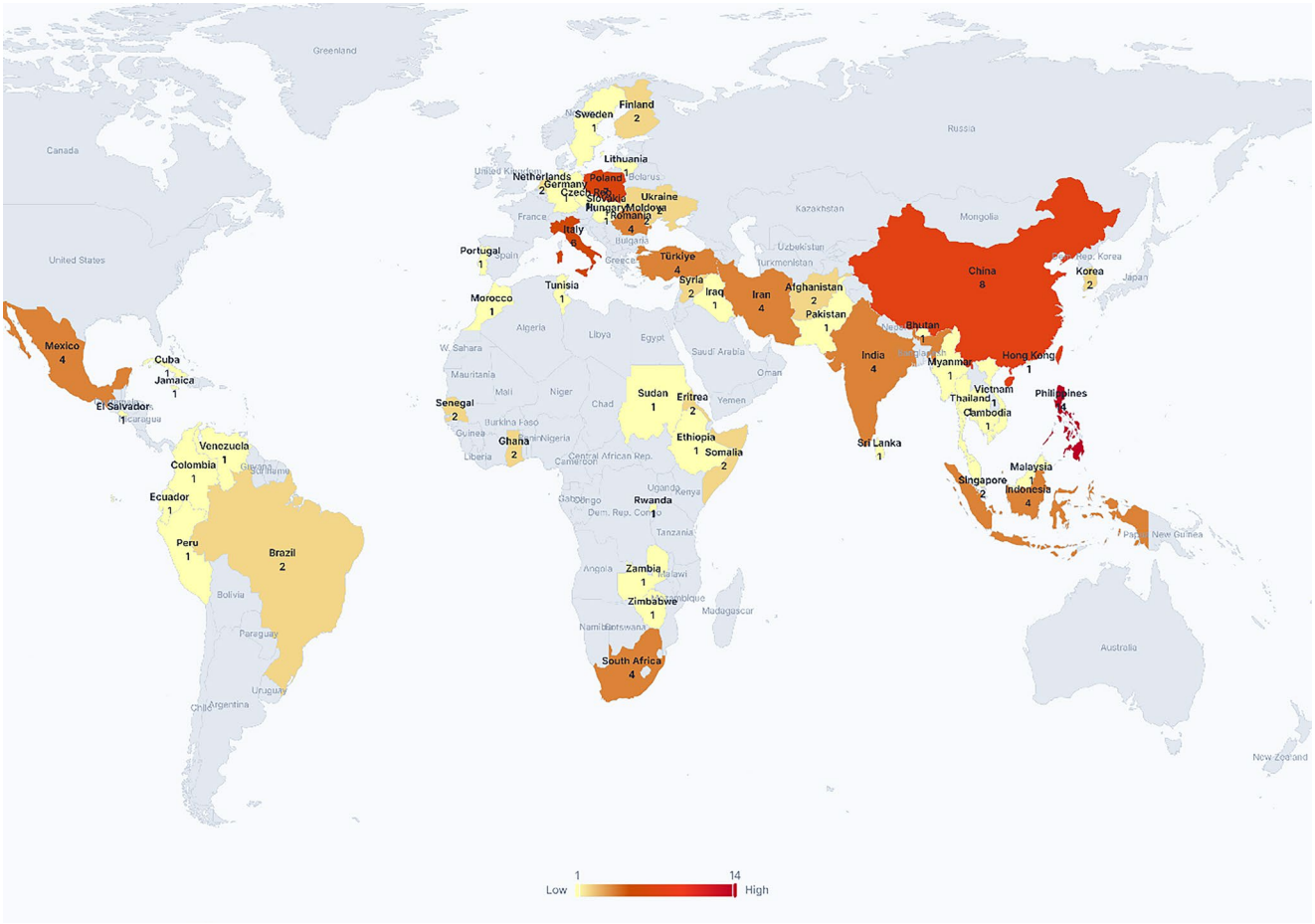

FIGURE 3 | Distribution of countries of origin represented in the reviewed studies. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Shaker 2018), while seven studies documented daily communication and three reported weekly interactions, highlighting the importance of regular communication for sustaining relational cohesion across distance (Baldassar 2016; Toumi 2023). In terms of communication modes and media choice, private communication was the most frequently reported mode (17 studies), followed by synchronous (15 studies) and asynchronous communication (14 studies). These findings indicate that TNFs use both real-time and delayed forms of interaction according to the communicative context and purpose. A smaller number of studies also examined public communication through social networking platforms.

Regarding the purposes of ICT-mediated communication, the most frequently reported aim was to maintain contact with transnational family members (16 studies). ICT also facilitates the sharing of photos, videos, audio messages, and text content, as well as parenting, virtual co-presence, participation in family rituals, emotional support, caregiving, and the maintenance of cultural and linguistic identities (e.g., Brown and Grinter 2014; Eklund and Sadowski 2023; Lexander 2021; Marino 2019). Finally, several studies highlight contextual factors shaping ICT-mediated communication practices, including digital literacy, internet quality, working hours, time-zone differences, and access to digital devices, which collectively influence the effectiveness and frequency of communication.

5.2.2 | Drivers of ICT Use

Table 4 presents the drivers of ICT use in transnational family contexts, organized into three categories: emotional and relational drivers, socio-demographic factors, and digital skills and access. Among emotional and relational drivers, the need to "be there" through co-presence emerged as the most prominent motivation (Brown and Grinter 2014; Madianou 2016; Toumi 2023), followed by emotional labour (Cabalquinto 2022; Marino 2019) and the desire for emotional closeness (Barakji et al. 2019; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023). Other drivers included maintaining family roles (Brown and Grinter 2014; Romanowski 2025), maintaining and managing family relationships (Hänninen et al. 2021; Marlowe and Bruns 2021), affirming family identity and values (Hsu 2021; Zhao 2019), and trust-building and reassurance (Brown and Grinter 2014; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023). Among socio-demographic factors, income or socioeconomic status emerged as the most frequently reported factor (Ahn 2017; Farshbaf Shaker 2018), followed by gender (Alinejad 2019; Marino 2019), migration or visa status (Cingel et al. 2019; Cuban 2016), and age (Baldassar et al. 2022; Ducu et al. 2023). Education (Cuban 2016; Hillyer 2021), working conditions (Marino 2019; Wang and Lim 2020), and urban–rural context (Farshbaf Shaker 2018) received comparatively less attention. Regarding digital skills and access, internet access and connection

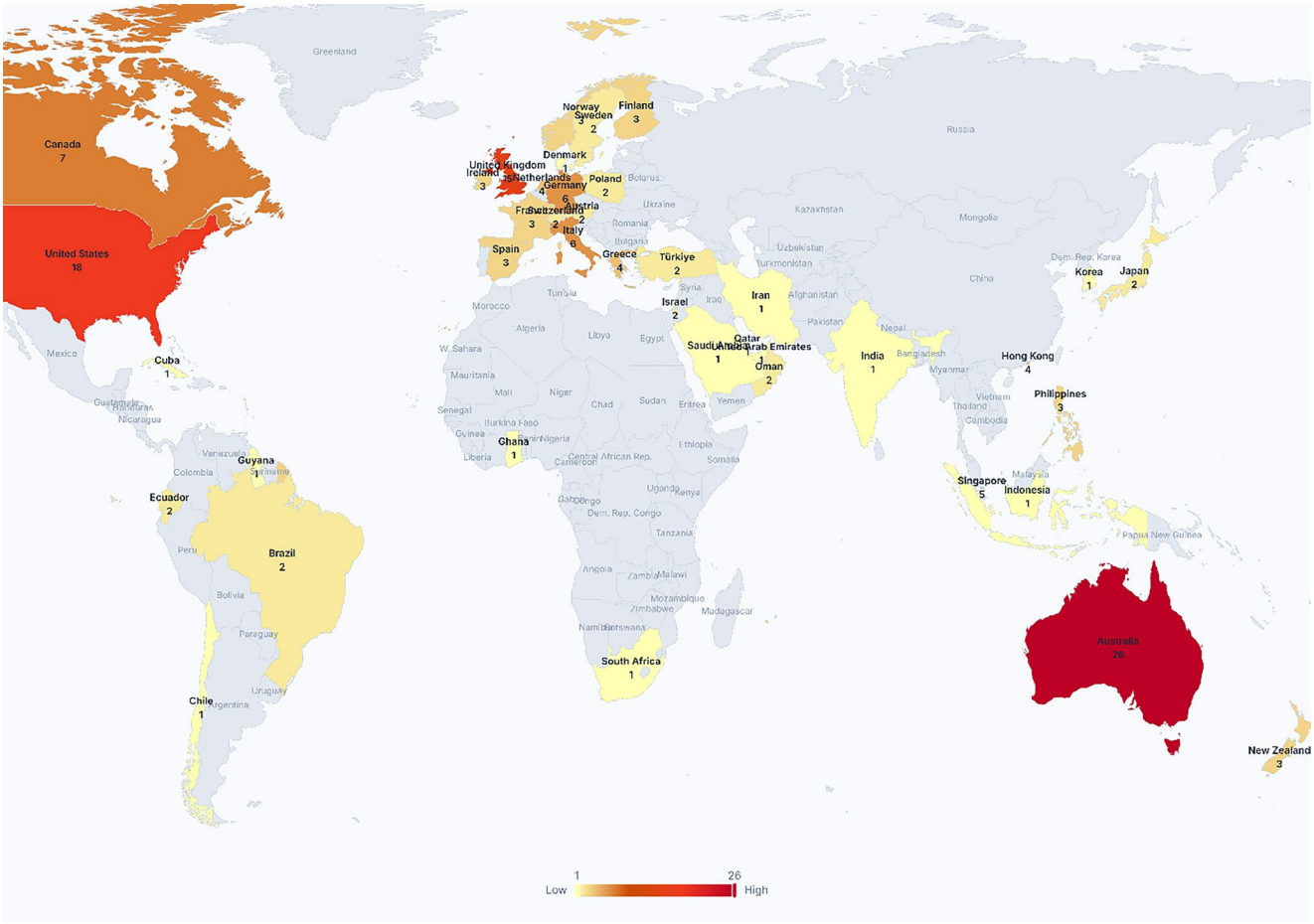

FIGURE 4 | Distribution of countries of destination represented in the reviewed studies. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

quality (Ahn 2017; Ducu et al. 2023), digital literacy and skills (Alinejad 2019; Cabalquinto 2022), and access to devices (Brown and Grinter 2014; Cabalquinto 2019) were the most frequently identified factors, while the generational digital divide (Baldassar 2016; Tuñón Pablos and Mena Farrera 2018) and access to technical support from family members or social networks (Farshbaf Shaker 2018; Ponzanesi and Leurs 2022) were less frequently addressed. These findings indicate that ICT use within TNFs is shaped by the interplay of relational motivations, socio-demographic conditions, and digital resources, suggesting that digitally mediated family interaction depends not only on the motivation to maintain family relationships across distance but also on the material and digital resources available to family members.

5.2.3 | Emotional Outcomes of ICT Use

In this step, we thematically analyzed the emotional outcomes associated with ICT use in transnational family relationships (see Table 5). The analysis of positive emotional outcomes associated with ICT use in transnational family relationships indicates that ICT plays a central role in fostering emotional closeness and intimacy (Brown and Grinter 2014; Cuban 2016; Farshbaf Shaker 2018), maintaining affective ties and connectedness (Cingel et al. 2019; Tuñón Pablos and Mena Farrera 2018), enhancing emotional well-being and happiness (Baldassar 2016; Becker 2023; Cabalquinto 2019), providing emotional comfort (Ahn 2017; Kędra 2021; Madianou 2016), and offering emotional support across distance (Bacigalupe and Bräuninger 2017; Mantilla 2022). The notion of emotional closeness, identified in 18 studies, is illustrated in Marino's (2019) study of Italian women in the UK, who maintained cultural and emotional bonds by cooking with their families via Skype. Similarly, Alinejad (2019) shows how Turkish-Dutch youth sustain ties with their parents through mindful co-presence using digital tools.

The analysis of negative emotional outcomes associated with ICT use in transnational family relationships reveals that stress (Brown and Grinter 2014; Cuban 2016) and anxiety (Cabalquinto 2019; Hillyer 2021; Mantilla 2022) are the most frequently reported challenges. Other negative emotional outcomes include frustration (Acedera and Yeoh 2019; Ryan et al. 2024), feelings of disconnection or emotional distance (Farshbaf Shaker 2018; Van Der Horst et al. 2019), and loneliness (Ivan and Nimrod 2021; Toumi 2023). The reviewed studies also identify guilt related to unmet expectations and care obligations (Cabalquinto 2020; Kędra 2021; Wilding et al. 2020), further illustrating the emotional burdens that may accompany digitally mediated transnational family relationships.

TABLE 3 | ICT-mediated communication practices identified in the reviewed studies.

Category and codes	*N*	Selected reference(s)
Devices (material bearers)	**53**	
Mobile phones/Smartphones	47	Madianou (2012); Baldassar (2014)
Computer	6	McKay (2018); Nedelcu (2017)
ICT platforms and applications	**172**	
Video calling (Skype, Zoom)	49	Farshbaf Shaker (2018); Share et al. (2018)
Messaging Apps/Messenger/Chat/SMS	31	Chib et al. (2014); Waruwu (2023)
Facebook	30	Alinejad (2019); Marino (2019)
WhatsApp	28	Alinejad (2021); Cuban (2016)
Email	11	Baldassar (2014); Greschke (2021)
Instagram	8	González & Katz (2016); Zhao (2019)
WeChat	7	Wang and Lim (2020); Zheng (2023)
Viber	6	Rugunanan and Meyers (2022); Waruwu (2022)
Twitter (X)	2	Odasso and Geoffrion (2023); Romanowski (2025)
Communication practices	**18**	
Frequent use (unspecified frequency)	8	Ducu et al. (2023); Farshbaf Shaker (2018)
Daily communication	7	Ahn (2017); Hillyer (2021)
Weekly communication	3	Baldassar (2016); Baldassar et al. (2022)
Communication modes and media choice	**53**	
Private communication	17	Cingel et al. (2019); Kang (2018)
Synchronous communication	15	Alinejad (2019); Ivan and Nimrod (2021)
Asynchronous communication	14	Ahlin (2018); Cingel et al. (2019)
Public communication	7	Bermúdez Arboleda and Toledo Leyva (2021)
Purposes of communication	**83**	
Maintaining contact with TNF members	16	Eklund and Sadowski (2023); Madianou (2016)
Photo, video, audio, text sharing	12	Bakuri and Amoabeng (2022); Eklund and Sadowski (2023)
Parenting	9	Brown and Grinter (2014); Eklund and Sadowski (2023)
Virtual co-presence	8	Ahn (2017); Ducu et al. (2023)
Festive family rituals	8	Marino (2019); Toumi (2023)
Emotional support	7	Alinejad (2019); Badiei and Popkova (2023)
Caregiving	6	Ahlin (2018); Cabalquinto (2020)
Financial remittances	5	Hannaford (2015); Seidel et al. (2022)
Social, cultural, linguistic identity	5	Bermúdez Arboleda and Toledo Leyva (2021); Lexander (2021)
ICT-mediated communication	3	Brown and Grinter (2014); Ho and Chiu (2020)
Cooking	2	Marino (2019); Toumi (2023)
Monitoring elderly relatives	2	Baldassar (2014)
Factors affecting communication practices	**7**	
Level of digital literacy	2	Cuban (2016)
Internet connection/Quality	2	Ducu et al. (2023); Farshbaf Shaker (2018)

(Continues)

TABLE 3 | (Continued)

Category and codes	*N*	Selected reference(s)
Working hours	1	Ducu et al. (2023)
Time-zone differences	1	Ducu et al. (2023)
Access skill and purpose	1	Cabalquinto (2022)

Note: Bold values indicate the total frequency for each main category.

The analysis of mixed and contextual outcomes related to ICT use in transnational family relationships reveals several forms of ambivalence. Communication filtering (Ahn 2017; Madianou 2016; Wang and Lim 2020) and feelings of obligation or additional burdens (Cabalquinto 2019; Wilding et al. 2020) are the most frequently reported experiences. Emotional ambivalence (Madianou 2012; McKay 2018) and nostalgia associated with mediated family interactions (Greschke 2021; Marino 2019) are also reported, illustrating how ICT-mediated communication may generate emotionally complex experiences rather than uniformly positive or negative outcomes.

5.2.4 | Social Outcomes of ICT Use

We thematically analyzed the social outcomes associated with ICT use in transnational family relationships (see Table 6). We identified five social outcomes of ICT use in transnational family relationships: family bonds and sustainability, networks and community bonds, new caregiving practices, power dynamics, and conflict-boundaries. The first category, family bonds and sustainability, highlights the crucial role of ICT use in maintaining family life across borders. Sixteen studies showed how family roles, such as virtual parenting, multilingual communication with children, and couplehood, are sustained digitally. The most recurrent code, maintaining family ties (34 studies), demonstrates that frequent digital contact strengthens relational stability. For example, Nedelcu and Wyss (2016) show how Romanian migrants in Switzerland use ICT to create routines that uphold family norms and obligations. Seventeen studies further indicated that ICT use fosters social relationships.

The second category, networks and community bonds, shows how ICT use expands social connections beyond the immediate family. This includes using images as communicative objects, building social networks, and maintaining community ties (Cuban 2016). Migrant women used ICT to sustain distant family relationships while also strengthening offline connections with co-ethnics and local organizations, deepening community cohesion. ICT-mediated communication can also increase the frequency and depth of family interaction.

The third category, new caregiving practices, captures shifting forms of care across distance. Ten studies documented reconfigured family roles, including remote parenting and shared caregiving, often challenging gender norms. ICT use also promotes intergenerational solidarity (13 studies). For instance, Share et al. (2018) showed how Polish families in Ireland used Skype to maintain emotional closeness and perform family roles during the perinatal period.

The fourth category, power dynamics, reflects how ICT use can reinforce or redistribute control. Eight studies described intensified inequalities through restricted access, surveillance, or hierarchical communication. Chib et al. (2014), for example, found that transnational mothers struggled to provide care while navigating societal expectations and marital tensions. ICT use can also sustain gendered expectations (five studies) while simultaneously fostering empowerment (six studies), revealing its ambivalent effects.

The fifth category, conflict and boundaries, concerns negative relational outcomes. These outcomes include weakened communication (nine studies), integration difficulties (three studies), social-digital risks (three studies), and heightened conflict (10 studies). Madianou's (2016) ethnography showed how surveillance-related tensions escalated among Filipino migrants with fragile family ties.

5.2.5 | Cultural Outcomes of ICT Use

Table 7 presents the cultural outcomes associated with ICT use in transnational family relationships. The enculturation category captures processes through which individuals learn, internalize, and sustain their heritage culture in transnational contexts. This theme includes the maintenance of cultural identity (Ahn 2017; Madianou 2016; Marino 2019) and cultural continuity across distance (Ahn 2017; Cuban 2016; Ducu et al. 2023). Studies also highlight the preservation of cultural and family rituals through digital media (Cabalquinto 2022; Farshbaf Shaker 2018) and the emergence of a digital culture of care, in which caregiving practices are culturally embedded and ICT-mediated (Chen 2022; Khvorostianov 2016). Digital communication further reinforces group belonging and collective family identity (Madianou 2016), while at the same time sustaining traditional role expectations and pressures (Ahn 2017; Hannaford 2015). Other studies point to the importance of staying up to date with family life, managing intergenerational expectations (Baldassar et al. 2022), adhering to cultural norms (Zhao 2019), and the maintenance of heritage language skills through digital interaction (Becker 2023).

The acculturation category refers to processes of adapting to a new cultural environment, renegotiating norms, and navigating cultural tensions. Within this theme, studies document experiences of cultural contradiction and tension arising from competing value systems (Francisco 2015), as well as processes

TABLE 4 | Reported drivers of ICT use in transnational family contexts.

Category and codes	*N*	Selected reference(s)
Emotional and relational drivers	**68**	
Need to "be there" (co-presence)	18	Toumi (2023), Brown and Grinter (2014), Madianou (2016)
Emotional labour	15	Cabalquinto (2022); Marino (2019)
Desire for emotional closeness	10	Barakji et al. (2019); Odasso and Geoffrion (2023)
Maintaining family roles	7	Brown and Grinter (2014); Romanowski (2025)
Maintaining and managing relations	7	Hänninen et al. (2021); Marlowe and Bruns (2021)
Affirming family identity and values	6	Hsu (2021); Zhao (2019)
Trust-building and reassurance	5	Brown and Grinter (2014); Odasso and Geoffrion (2023)
Socio-demographic factors	**62**	
Income or socioeconomic status	19	Ahn (2017); Farshbaf Shaker (2018)
Gender	13	Alinejad (2019); Marino (2019),
Migration status (Visa status)	11	Cingel et al. (2019); Cuban (2016)
Age	10	Baldassar et al. (2022); Ducu et al. (2023)
Education	5	Cuban (2016); Hillyer (2021)
Work conditions	3	Marino (2019); Wang and Lim (2020)
Urban versus Rural	1	Farshbaf Shaker (2018)
Digital skills and access	**53**	
Internet access and quality	18	Ahn (2017); Ducu et al. (2023)
Digital literacy and skills	16	Alinejad (2019); Cabalquinto (2022)
Access to devices	12	Brown and Grinter (2014); Cabalquinto (2019)
Generation and digital divide	4	Baldassar (2016); Tuñón Pablos and Mena Farrera (2018)
Tech support (e.g., from family or networks)	3	Farshbaf Shaker (2018); Ponzanesi and Leurs (2022)

Note: Bold values indicate the total frequency for each main category.

of cultural adaptation facilitated by ongoing digital communication (Zanforlin 2015). A prominent strand concerns reshaped gender norms, as digital media enable new forms of role negotiation within migrant families (Toumi 2023; Wang and Lim 2020), including instances of gender norm disruption (Romanowski 2025). Research also highlights the reconfiguration of family norms (Khvorostianov 2016; Zheng 2023), broader reshaping of cultural norms (Badiei and Popkova 2023), tensions between individualisation and collective expectations, and the role of culturally specific communication practices in managing these transitions (Hillyer 2021).

The cultural integration category represents the blending of multiple cultural frameworks, resulting in cultural mixing or synthesis. Studies show that ICT-mediated family interactions facilitate cultural hybridisation, in which elements of heritage and destination-country cultures combine to produce new forms of family life and kinship (Alinejad 2019; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023). Through digital care practices and everyday communication, traditional family roles are redefined while newly encountered cultural practices coexist with heritage-based practices within transnational family relationships.

In summary, the emotional, social, and cultural outcomes identified in our systematic review are interconnected and unfold simultaneously through digitally mediated communication. ICT-mediated communication practices shape how family members coordinate caregiving, maintain emotional closeness, negotiate responsibilities, and transmit cultural norms across geographical distance. For example, routine messaging and video calls used to sustain emotional connection may simultaneously function as mechanisms for coordinating care, monitoring family members' well-being, and reinforcing cultural expectations within family networks. In this sense, ICT-mediated communication practices reorganize the relational processes through which family life is maintained across borders.

5.3 | Theoretical Frameworks

Table 8 provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks employed in the reviewed studies to examine ICT use in transnational family contexts. The distribution of theoretical frameworks indicates a strong concentration around digital media and mediated relationality, with digital media approaches constituting the largest category (31 studies). Frameworks such as polymedia, doing family online, digital kinning, and media multiplexity highlight how transnational family life is organized through complex, platform-dependent communication ecologies rather than single technologies (Baldassar and Wilding 2020; Kang 2018; Khvorostianov 2016; Nedelcu and Wyss 2016; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023).

Closely related to this, psychological perspectives (17 studies), particularly mediated, virtual, and ambient co-presence, foreground intimacy, emotional proximity, and relational maintenance, emphasizing how ICT-mediated communication enables a sense of being together despite geographical separation (Alinejad 2019; Bacigalupe and Cámara 2012; Farshbaf

TABLE 5 | Emotional outcomes of ICT use in transnational family relationships.

Category and codes	N	Selected reference(s)
Positive outcomes	**75**	
Emotional closeness (intimacy)	18	Brown and Grinter (2014); Cuban (2016)
Maintaining affective ties/Connectedness	11	Cingel et al. (2019); Tuñón Pablos and Mena Farrera (2018)
Emotional well-being/ Happiness	10	Becker (2023); Cabalquinto (2019)
Emotional comfort	10	Ahn (2017); Kędra (2021)
Emotional support	10	Bacigalupe and Bräuninger (2017); Mantilla (2022)
Emotional bonding (sense of belonging)	9	Odasso and Geoffrion (2023); Toumi (2023)
Sense of co-presence	9	Baldassar (2016); Robertson et al. (2016)
Reducing isolation	6	Gonzalez and Katz (2016); Seidel et al. (2022)
Emotional security and safety	4	Romanowski (2025); Seidel et al. (2022)
Expression of love	3	Ivan and Nimrod (2021); Wilding et al. (2020)
Negative outcomes	**53**	
Stress	13	Brown and Grinter (2014); Cuban (2016)
Anxiety	12	Mantilla (2022); Hillyer (2021)
Frustration	7	Acedera and Yeoh (2019); Ryan et al. (2024)
Disconnection/ Emotional distance	7	Farshbaf Shaker (2018); Van Der Horst et al. (2019)
Loneliness	7	Ivan and Nimrod (2021); Toumi (2023)
Guilt	6	Wilding et al. (2020); Kędra (2021)
Social pressure	5	Nedelcu and Wyss (2016); Odasso and Geoffrion (2023)
Disappointment	4	Alinejad (2021); Wilding et al. (2020)
Increased conflicts	4	Ahn (2017); Odasso and Geoffrion (2023)
Mixed/contextual outcomes	**19**	
Communication filtering	5	Ahn (2017); Wang and Lim (2020)
Obligation (extra burdens)	6	Cabalquinto (2019); Wilding et al. (2020)
Ambivalence	4	Madianou (2012); McKay (2018)
Nostalgia	3	Greschke (2021); Marino (2019)
Autonomy-adulthood	1	Zhao (2019)

Note: Bold values indicate the total frequency for each main category.

Shaker 2018). Identity-oriented approaches within this category further examine how transnational subjects negotiate belonging and self-positioning through digital communication (Chib et al. 2014; Zheng 2023).

Sociological perspectives are also prominently represented (20 studies), with frameworks such as family practices, material-semiotic perspectives, social network theory, and migration and immobility regimes situating ICT use within everyday practices, relational infrastructures, and structurally constrained mobility contexts (Ahlin 2018; Ryan et al. 2024; Van Der Horst et al. 2019). These studies emphasize how digital connectivity is shaped by both agency and structural conditions, including legal status, network capital, and unequal access to mobility (Cabalquinto 2022; Popyk and Pustułka 2021).

Frameworks grounded in transnationalism and care (nine studies) focus more explicitly on caregiving arrangements, intergenerational solidarity, children's rights, and ambivalence within TNFs. These frameworks illustrate how ICT-mediated communication practices facilitate care while also shaping obligations and moral responsibilities across distance (Baldassar 2014; Cuban 2016; Deák et al. 2024; Ducu et al. 2023; Madianou 2012; Nedelcu 2017).

Critical perspectives (13 studies), including techno feminism, power geometry, affective and moral economies, social remittances, and governmentality, offer analytical lenses for interrogating gendered emotional labour, power asymmetries, and inequalities embedded in ICT-mediated family relations (Belloni 2020; Bermúdez Arboleda and Toledo Leyva 2021; Chen 2022; Hannaford 2015; Ho and Chiu 2020; Tuñón Pablos and Mena Farrera 2018; Wilding et al. 2020). Although numerically less dominant than media-centred approaches, these studies are critical in revealing how digital connectivity can simultaneously enable care and reproduce social hierarchies. In summary, the theoretical landscape is characterized by a strong emphasis on digital media and co-presence, complemented by sociological, care-oriented, and critical approaches. These frameworks enable a nuanced understanding

TABLE 6 | Social outcomes of ICT use in transnational family relationships.

Category and codes	*N*	Selected reference(s)
Family bonds -sustainability	**75**	
Sustaining family roles	16	Toumi (2023); Zhao (2019)
Maintaining family ties	34	Ducu et al. (2023); Marino (2019)
Empowered social relationships	17	Baldassar et al. (2022); Francisco (2015)
Maintaining kinship	4	Alinejad (2021); Ho and Chiu (2020)
Shared family events	4	Eklund and Sadowski (2023); Farshbaf Shaker (2018)
Networks and community bonds	**53**	
Social networks	12	Madianou (2016); Hillyer (2021)
Community ties	17	Cabalquinto (2022); Marino (2019)
Facilitating social support	6	Bacigalupe and Bräuninger (2017); Cabalquinto (2019)
Supports communication	8	Eklund and Sadowski (2023)
Social cohesion	7	Greschke (2021); Mantilla (2022)
Images as communicative objects	3	Sinanan et al. (2018)
New caregiving/ Practices	**35**	
Redefined family roles	10	Ahn (2017); Marino (2019)
Intergenerational solidarity	13	Ahlin (2018); Share et al. (2018)
Enhancing caregiving practices	8	Bakuri and Amoabeng (2022); Nedelcu (2017)
Sharing experiences—information	4	Bermúdez Arboleda and Toledo Leyva (2021); Cingel et al. (2019)
Power dynamics	**33**	
Social surveillance	10	Cabalquinto (2019); Odasso and Geoffrion (2023)
Reinforcement of inequality	8	Robertson et al. (2016); Wang and Lim (2020)
Agency—autonomy	6	Belloni (2020); Odasso and Geoffrion (2023)
Gendered expectations	5	Kang (2018); Wang and Lim (2020)
Pressure to remain connected	4	Rugunanan and Meyers (2022)
Conflict-boundaries	**30**	
Heightened conflict	10	Madianou (2016); Ivan and Nimrod (2021)
Weakened communication	9	Alinejad (2021); Chen (2022)
Integration difficulties	3	Brown and Grinter (2014); Bacigalupe and Cámara (2012)
Digital risks	3	Ngan (2025); Zheng (2023)
Social loss-detachment	3	de Andrade et al. (2022); Zanforlin (2015)
Challenges related to temporalities	2	Acedera and Yeoh (2019); Chib et al. (2014)

Note: Bold values indicate the total frequency for each main category.

of ICT-mediated transnational family life by capturing its relational, emotional, socio-technical, and power-laden dimensions.

6 | Discussion

6.1 | Interpretation of Findings

This systematic review reveals that the emotional, social, and cultural impacts associated with ICT use within TNFs are multifaceted, context-dependent, and often contradictory. Addressing our first research question, the reviewed studies rely predominantly on qualitative and ethnographic designs and focus mainly on migrants and left-behind family members across diverse combinations of countries of origin and destination (Cuban 2016; Ducu et al. 2023; Madianou 2016; Van Der Horst et al. 2019). While this methodological orientation enables in-depth insights into lived experiences, it also produces uneven empirical coverage across regions, generations, and socioeconomic groups. Regarding our second research question, the findings show that TNFs primarily rely on mobile messaging, social media, and video calls to sustain everyday communication, caregiving, and co-presence (Alinejad 2019; Baldassar et al. 2022; Farshbaf Shaker 2018; Madianou 2016). Media selection also appears to vary according to communication purposes. This pattern is consistent with media richness theory (Daft and Lengel 1986) and media synchronicity theory (Dennis et al. 2008), which highlight how communication

TABLE 7 | Cultural outcomes of ICT use in transnational family relationships.

Category and codes	*N*	Selected reference(s)
Enculturation	**47**	
Cultural identity	16	Ahn (2017); Madianou (2016)
Cultural continuity	14	Cuban (2016); Ducu et al. (2023)
Ritual continuity	4	Farshbaf Shaker (2018); Cabalquinto (2022)
Digital culture of care	4	Chen (2022); Khvorostianov (2016)
Group belonging	3	Madianou (2016)
Traditional role pressure	2	Ahn (2017); Hannaford (2015)
Stay up to date	1	Baldassar et al. (2022)
Intergenerational expectations	1	Baldassar et al. (2022)
Obedience to cultural norms	1	Zhao (2019)
Language skills	1	Becker (2023)
Acculturation	**18**	
Cultural contradiction and tension	5	Baldassar and Wilding (2020); Francisco (2015)
Reshaped gender norms	4	Toumi (2023); Wang and Lim (2020)
Cultural adaptation	3	Baldassar et al. (2022); Zanforlin (2015)
Reshaped family norms	2	Khvorostianov (2016); Zheng (2023)
Gender norm disruption	1	Romanowski (2025)
Reshaped cultural norms	1	Badiei and Popkova (2023)
Individualisation versus collective norms	1	Eklund and Sadowski (2023)
Specific cultural communication	1	Hillyer (2021)
Cultural integration	**4**	
Cultural hybridisation	4	Alinejad (2019); Odasso and Geoffrion (2023)

Note: Bold values indicate the total frequency for each main category.

media vary in their capacity to convey information-rich cues and enable synchronous interaction. Richer and more synchronous media, such as video calls, tend to support emotionally significant interactions by enabling visual co-presence and stronger affective connection. Messaging applications and other asynchronous tools, by contrast, facilitate frequent but lightweight exchanges that help maintain everyday family coordination and continuity across distance. Social networking platforms further expand these practices by enabling the public display of family life and the maintenance of broader transnational social ties.

Regarding our third research question, the findings suggest that ICT plays a central role in shaping the emotional, social, and cultural dynamics of transnational family life. Across the reviewed studies, digital communication tools such as messaging applications, social media, and video-calling platforms enable family members to maintain emotional closeness and a sense of togetherness despite geographical distance. Although emotional support, care obligations, and the maintenance of kinship ties across distance long predate digital technologies (Baldassar 2007), ICT has transformed how these relationships are enacted and negotiated (Wilding 2006). Through practices such as sharing everyday moments, participating in family routines, and maintaining regular contact, ICT facilitates forms of connected presence that sustain relational continuity across borders (Baldassar 2016; Licoppe 2004). These patterns support theoretical perspectives that conceptualize family relationships as actively performed through digital interaction, as reflected in the doing family online framework (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023). Our findings are consistent with family practices theory, which conceptualizes family relationships as ongoing processes produced through everyday practices such as communication, caregiving, and emotional support (Morgan 2011). The reviewed evidence further demonstrates that these relational dynamics are enacted within TNFs through ICT-mediated communication practices. Messaging applications, video calls, and social media platforms enable family members to perform everyday acts of doing family across geographical distance, including sharing daily experiences, participating in family rituals, coordinating care responsibilities, and maintaining emotional closeness.

Regarding social dynamics, our findings indicate that ICT-mediated communication practices both sustain and restructure family relationships across borders. Digital communication supports remote parenting, virtual caregiving, and intergenerational solidarity by enabling continuous interaction among geographically dispersed family members (Baldassar 2016; Share et al. 2018). These same technologies can reproduce existing power relations and generate new forms of digital surveillance and control within family networks (Alinejad 2021; Zhao 2019). For instance, ICT-mediated communication enables continuous monitoring and subtle forms of digital surveillance within families, such as checking online status, availability, or daily activities (Alinejad 2021; Zhao 2019; Wang and Lim 2020). Family practices theory (Morgan 2011) suggests that family relationships are actively constructed through routine practices embedded in everyday life. Our findings extend this perspective by showing that ICT-mediated communication practices create a new form of family relationality in which roles and responsibilities become spatially dispersed and temporally flexible, allowing care and authority to be deferred, redistributed, and reactivated across distance rather than enacted through continuous face-to-face interaction.

TABLE 8 | Theoretical frameworks applied in the reviewed studies.

Category and codes	*N*	Selected reference(s)
Transnationalism and care	**9**	
Transnational family theory	5	Baldassar (2014); Cuban (2016)
Intergenerational solidarity theory	2	Deák et al. (2024); Nedelcu (2017)
Children's rights	1	Ducu et al. (2023)
Accentuated ambivalence	1	Madianou (2012)
Psychological perspectives	**17**	
Mediated co-presence (incl. virtual/ambient)	11	Alinejad (2019); Farshbaf Shaker (2018)
Relational and affective perspectives	4	Bacigalupe and Cámara (2012); Gonzalez and Katz (2016)
Identity theories	2	Chib et al. (2014); Zheng (2023)
Digital media	**31**	
Polymedia	15	Hsu (2021); Odasso and Geoffrion (2023)
Doing family online	6	Bakuri and Amoabeng (2022); Nedelcu and Wyss (2016)
Digital kinning/homing	4	Baldassar et al. (2022); Baldassar and Wilding (2020)
Media multiplexity/media richness theory	2	Barakji et al. (2019); Kang (2018)
Domestication theory	2	Ivan and Nimrod (2021); Khvorostianov (2016)
Mediated mobilities	1	Cabalquinto (2019)
Disconnective practice	1	Zhao (2019)
Critical perspectives	**13**	
Technofeminism/feminist affect	5	Chen (2022)
Power geometry	3	Hannaford (2015); Chen (2022)
Social remittances	2	Tuñón Pablos and Mena Farrera (2018)
Affective economies/Moral economy	2	Belloni (2020); Wilding et al. (2020)
Governmentality	1	Ho and Chiu (2020)
Sociological perspectives	**20**	
Family practices	5	Marchetti-Mercer et al. (2020); Ponzanesi and Leurs (2022)
Material-semiotic perspective	4	Ahlin (2018); Van Der Horst et al. (2019)
Migration theory/immobility regimes	3	Ryan et al. (2024)
Social network theory	3	Bermúdez Arboleda and Toledo Leyva (2021); Zanforlin (2015)
Family language policy	1	Romanowski (2025)
(im)mobile intimacy	1	Cabalquinto (2022)
Assimilation theory	1	Hillyer (2021)
Communicative interdependence perspective	1	Popyk and Pustułka (2021)
Theory of positionality	1	Wang and Lim (2020)

Note: Bold values indicate the total frequency for each main category.

Regarding cultural dynamics, ICT-mediated communication practices function as mechanisms through which TNFs reproduce elements of their cultural heritage and sustain intergenerational cultural transmission (Ahn 2017; Madianou 2016). Continuous exposure to the cultural norms of host societies through digital environments may reshape family practices, including gender roles, family authority structures, and broader cultural expectations (Toumi 2023; Wang and Lim 2020). The reviewed studies indicate that such changes may generate tensions or contradictions as individuals navigate between traditional cultural expectations and new social norms encountered in host contexts. These findings suggest that digital communication environments can act as spaces where cultural norms are questioned, negotiated, and reinterpreted. TNFs may develop

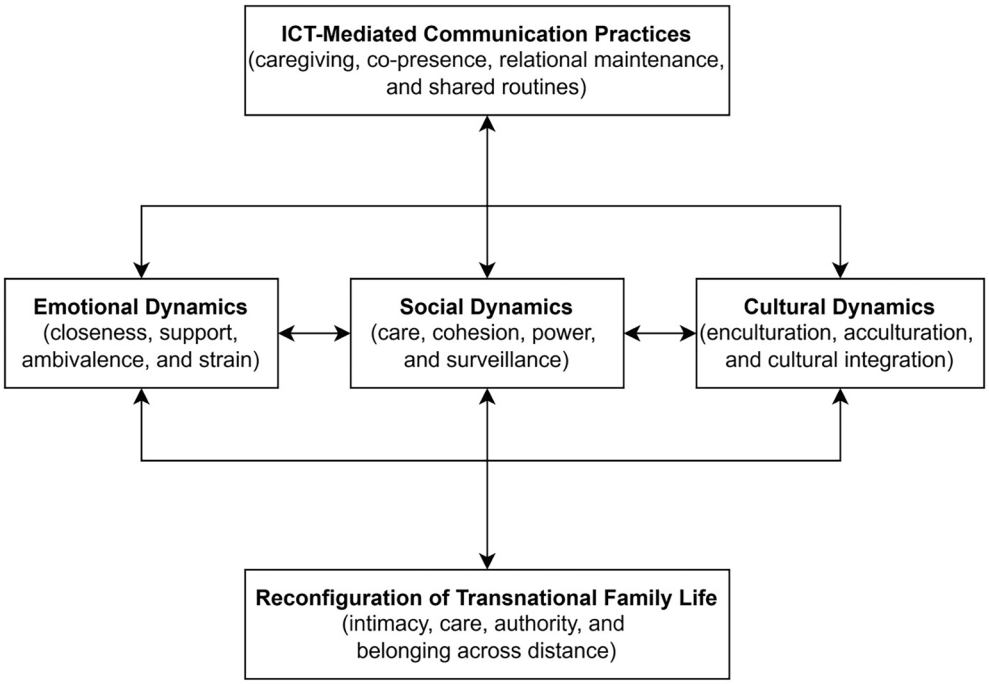

FIGURE 5 | Reciprocal relationships among ICT-mediated communication practices, family dynamics, and the reconfiguration of transnational family life.

hybrid cultural forms that combine elements of heritage and destination-country cultures (Alinejad 2019; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023).

Finally, addressing our last research question, the review shows that *theoretical approaches* are interpreted predominantly through digital media–centred frameworks, such as polymedia, mediated co-presence, and doing family online (Madianou 2016; Nedelcu and Wyss 2016; Odasso and Geoffrion 2023). These are complemented by sociological, care-oriented, and critical perspectives that foreground everyday practices, emotional labour, power relations, and inequality (Baldassar 2014; Belloni 2020; Chen 2022; Van Der Horst et al. 2019). These approaches demonstrate that ICT do not merely connect TNFs but actively reconfigure emotional experiences, social relations, and cultural processes in context-dependent and often contradictory ways. Digital communication enables forms of distributed caregiving and ongoing relational maintenance across distance (Baldassar 2014; Nedelcu and Wyss 2016), while also intensifying expectations of emotional availability and responsiveness. In this sense, members of TNFs continuously renegotiate roles and responsibilities within ICT-mediated family systems (Marlowe and Bruns 2021). Our findings suggest that ICT-mediated communication practices and emotional, social, and cultural dynamics are mutually constitutive. ICT-mediated communication practices, including caregiving, co-presence, relational maintenance, and participation in shared routines, shape emotional experiences, social relationships, and cultural negotiations within TNFs. At the same time, existing emotional bonds, social relations, and cultural expectations influence how family members select, use, and interpret digital communication technologies. These reciprocal relationships contribute to, and are themselves transformed by, the ongoing reconfiguration of intimacy, care, authority, and belonging in transnational family life. Figure 5 presents this conceptual synthesis.

6.2 | Implications

At the theoretical level, the findings highlight the need for family theory to account more explicitly for digital mediation in explaining how family relationships are enacted across distance. In particular, the reciprocal relationship between ICT-mediated communication practices and family dynamics suggests that technological conditions should be considered alongside relational and contextual processes in theorizing contemporary family life.

Our findings have several practical and policy implications. Given the capacity of ICT-mediated communication practices to create emotional and social burdens, digital emotional labour should be recognized as an important concern for social workers, psychologists, and policymakers working with migrant families. Digital communication can intensify feelings of responsibility, guilt, and emotional strain, particularly among parents who maintain caregiving relationships across distance (Cabalquinto 2020; Madianou 2016). These digital burdens are often gendered, as mothers and female kin frequently bear a disproportionate share of the kin-work required to sustain family cohesion and provide emotional support remotely. Strengthening psychosocial support mechanisms for TNFs, especially for remote parents and female caregivers, therefore represents an important policy priority. Our review also highlights how inequalities in ICT access and digital literacy can deepen intrafamily power relations. Digital inclusion policies should therefore move beyond individual access and consider family-level digital competencies, particularly in contexts in

which older family members may experience digital exclusion (Chen 2022; Cuban 2016). Limited access to digital communication technologies can weaken intergenerational relationships and restrict participation in everyday family life. From a broader cultural perspective, ICT-mediated communication practices facilitate cultural transmission while also contributing to cultural hybridisation and identity negotiation within TNFs. Digital communication enables migrants and their relatives to maintain cultural practices and heritage languages while simultaneously engaging with new cultural norms in destination societies (Alinejad 2019; Toumi 2023). Migration and family policies should therefore conceptualize cultural adaptation not as a unidirectional process of assimilation but as an ongoing process of mutual transformation shaped by digital communication environments. Future research should build on these insights by employing quantitative and longitudinal research designs to examine how ICT-mediated communication practices reshape family processes over time. Studies could also investigate mediation and moderation mechanisms, intrafamily power relations, and the role of digital inequalities in shaping emotional, social, and cultural outcomes in transnational family contexts.

6.3 | Limitations

This review has three main limitations. First, the review initially relied on the Zotero bibliographic library and was subsequently supplemented by additional searches to broaden coverage; nevertheless, some relevant publications may still have been missed. Second, we included only English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles, which likely underrepresents evidence published in other languages and formats (e.g., reports, theses, book chapters). Third, the included studies vary widely in designs, contexts, and measures and are predominantly qualitative, which limits causal claims and reduces the comparability and generalisability of findings across settings.

7 | Conclusion

Understanding how transnational family relationships are maintained across geographical distance has become increasingly important in migration and family research. The review shows that TNFs actively sustain and reconfigure family life through digital communication practices. Drawing on family practices theory (Morgan 2011) and the doing family online perspective (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016), our findings extend family practices theory by demonstrating that everyday family life can be enacted across geographical distance through digitally mediated practices and that family practices and digital communication continuously shape one another. Kinship relationships can be maintained through continuous ICT-mediated interactions despite limited physical proximity. By navigating the affordances of different media, as conceptualized by media richness theory (Daft and Lengel 1986) and media synchronicity theory (Dennis et al. 2008), family members manage emotional support and coordinate everyday care across distance. ICT-mediated communication practices thus constitute an important sociotechnical infrastructure through which intimacy, authority, care, and belonging are continuously negotiated in transnational family life.

Our findings indicate that ICT-mediated communication practices shape transnational family life in three interrelated ways. First, these practices enable the everyday enactment of family life across distance by facilitating routine interaction, caregiving coordination, and emotional connection among geographically dispersed family members. Second, continuous digital connectivity can intensify relational expectations and emotional obligations, generating new forms of emotional labour, surveillance, and pressure to remain available within family networks. Third, ICT-mediated communication practices facilitate hybrid cultural spaces in which family norms, gender roles, and caregiving practices are negotiated across heritage and destination-country contexts. These relationships are reciprocal: existing emotional bonds, social relations, and cultural expectations also shape how family members select, use, and interpret digital communication technologies. These dynamics show that digital technologies do more than sustain transnational family ties. They contribute to the ongoing reconfiguration of how intimacy, care, authority, and cultural belonging are negotiated across geographical distance. From a family theory perspective, these findings suggest that digital mediation should be conceptualized not merely as a means of facilitating family interaction but as a constitutive dimension of contemporary family practices. Incorporating digital mediation more explicitly into family theory can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how intimacy, care, authority, and belonging are enacted and renegotiated in families whose relationships extend across geographical distance.

Author Contributions

Esen Altunay: writing – review and editing, writing – original draft, visualization, supervision, project administration, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, data curation. **Nedim Özdemir:** writing – review and editing, writing – original draft, visualization, supervision, project administration, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, data curation. **Lina Omran:** writing – review and editing, writing – original draft, visualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, data curation. **Olga Nenonen:** writing – review and editing, writing – original draft, visualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, data curation. **Sviatlana Karpava:** writing – review and editing, writing – original draft, visualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, data curation. **Isabelle Albert:** writing – review and editing, writing – original draft, visualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, data curation. **Áron Telegdi-Csetri:** writing – review and editing, writing – original draft, visualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, data curation. **Natalia Ringblom:** writing – review and editing, writing – original draft, visualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, data curation.

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Ethics Statement

In this research, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed. The research was concluded by acting within the

framework of the principles of research ethics on how to ensure the security of the data and how to evaluate the data.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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