UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

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"Can you help me top-up my mobile data?"

Mobility through mobile phones for social networking

among live-in migrant domestic workers in Singapore

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Abstract

In the globalised world, it is evident that mobile phones have the potential to empower migrant workers by making them feel more connected and providing access to information and services. Additionally, connecting to the Internet means not only social connection but also collective actions. Live-in migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in Singapore were selected as a case study because the nature of their work represents extremely social isolation while Singapore is an outstanding receiving country which has been reported on discrimination and abuse against MDWs. Following the fieldwork and in-depth interviews with 11 MDWs, this study aims to discuss how MDWs use mobile phones and the Internet to build and manage their community as well as to address their limited physical mobility.

The findings reveal that mobile phones and the Internet have become a source of power for MDWs to negotiate the power with their employer and agency; however, the deficiency of digital literacies limits their ability to use digital technologies as much as it can be exploited. The study also highlights the interconnectedness between physical and virtual mobility since MDWs can combine their limited physical mobility and virtual mobility in order to reach to the resources which can enhance their migration journeys. The findings also lead to the discussion on Facebook which is substituted for phone numbers and Singaporean SIM cards to build and extent their social networks. Nevertheless, Facebook is utilised as a conservative and passive space since MDWs are afraid of being gossiped and concern about their left-behind family.

Keywords: migrant domestic workers, virtual mobility, Facebook, gendered mobility, ICTs

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Kadesiree

CONTENTS

Abbreviations

EA – Employment Act

EFMA – Employment of Foreign Manpower Act

FDSS – Foreign Domestic Servant Scheme

ICTs – Information and communication technologies

ILO – International Labour Organisation

HOME – Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics

MDWs – migrant domestic workers

MOM – Ministry of Manpower

OFW – overseas Filipino workers

SAPs – Structural Adjustment Policies

SGD – Singapore Dollar

1. Introduction

> *"Of course I can use [my mobile phone] when she [the employer] is not in the house. But if she's around and I don't finish my work, I can't touch my phone. So I manage to check at my phone's screen when she is not in the house. And I don't know when she will come back so when using my phone, I listen if her car's coming back. Hahaha! ...Actually I like chatting chatting. I'm sharing my own. It's just like…of course I cannot hide myself so texting makes me a bit release my problems. Sometimes I want to be happy…it makes me a bit relieved even my friend and I don't meet each other."*

> (Nancy, 30-year-old Indonesian)

This quotation was excerpted from one of the interviews that will be explored in many paragraphs below. You may have heard about this kind of stories if you ever used mobile phones, Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media. Everyone who can access to the Internet experiences virtual mobility in their everyday life. In the globalised world, mobile phones and the Internet can be much more than communication technologies. They have the power to transform lives and empower marginalised people by making them feel safer and more connected, providing access to information and services such as job announcements, health information and mobile remittances (Rowntree 2018, 2). In addition, connecting to the Internet means not only social connection but also collective action (Postill 2012; Madianou 2014; Campbell and Ling 2009).

Due to the widely availability of communication technologies and the decrease in the mobile rates, it was found that most women around the world, including the lower class of population, own a mobile phone (Uteng 2011, 48). The challenge is to make these technologies become a part of development programmes aiming to eliminate poverty and empower women (Uteng 2011, 48). Digital access-related projects, therefore, focus on rural and poor women in developing countries to reduce digital gap between women and men. However, gender issues are not a binary concept such as the distinction between male and female. Global development on gender equality without intersectionality lens generate more global inequality gap. That is the reason why we also need to pay attention to people on the margins of the society such as female contract labour.

Previous studies on information communication technologies (ICTs) and migrant domestic workers (MDWs) revealed that mobile phones can break the isolation of MDWs since virtual mobility can bring the information and support from one place to another place without physical mobility (Frantz 2014). Human Right Watch also stated that all MDWs should acquire or own a mobile phone containing the significant phone numbers they can call if need (HRW 2004). The risk for MDWs can be reduced by access to information prior to and during their migration route. ICTs are, nonetheless, used as a means to control and surveillance them by their employer and agency (Hamel 2009, 7). Policies supporting the accessibility to mobile phones for low-income migrant workers are also deficient (ibid).

These studies led to my curiosity about the use of digital technologies among female MDWs to access online information, share experiences, as well as how they build their community and keep connect to one another. This study, thus, has an endeavour to explore the role of mobile phones and the Internet in a subaltern community. In this case, I, as a researcher, selected the communities of Filipina and Indonesian MDWs in Singapore to be the subject of this research. This is because Indonesia and the Philippines are most marked as the feminisation of Asian labour migration (HRW 2004, 9) while Singapore is known for a host country of MDWs, next below Hong Kong.

In order to narrow the study down, it was limited to the community building and information sharing among MDWs, excluding the migrant mothering and transnational families which are available in the previous researches. Following in-depth interviews, I argue that mobile phones and the Internet are a source of power for MDWs to negotiate the power with their employer and agency; however, the deficiency of digital literacies limits their ability to use digital technologies as much as it can be exploited. The study also highlights the interconnectedness between physical and virtual mobility because MDWs have the ability to merge physical mobility and virtual mobility in order to approach to the resources that can enhance their journeys.

2. Aim and the research questions

This research is, firstly, aimed to understand the role of ICTs, particularly mobile phones and the Internet, in the everyday life of MDWs working in the non-western context, particularly in Singapore. Furthermore, it is an attempt to find out the thick description of MDWs' experiences about how they combine each function of each online social media to, or not to, communicate with other fellow migrants and hide their communication from their employer.

Generally speaking, this is the study of MDWs and mobile phones and the Internet usage to facilitate them to get to know new friends, expand their social networks, and settle the subaltern communities in the foreign land.

In terms of theoretical dimension, the understanding of the interconnectedness of human culture, gender, and technologies among MDWs would lead to the improvement of polymedia and gendered mobility theory. For the practical dimension, this understanding would lead to an idea for an innovation such as mobile phone applications that could prevent MDWs from isolation and the abuse of their rights by agencies and employers.

Research questions

Considering the above-mentioned aims, the research questions below will be addressed in the following chapters:

1. A) How do live-in MDWs use ICTs, particularly mobile phones and the Internet, to build and manage their community? B) And what is the consequence of mobile phones and the Internet usage?

2. To what extent, can virtual mobility through mobile phones and the Internet address the limited physical mobility of live-in MDWs?

3. Delimitations

Although there are many female migrant workers from developing countries in Asia moving to Singapore to work as a domestic worker, this research focused on only Filipina and Indonesian MDWs. This is because both of them are the majority of MDWs in Singapore (HOME and Liberty Shared 2019). However, I concentrated on their lives and experiences during their stay in Singapore due to the limited time for this project which did not allow me to do the fieldwork in the Philippines and Indonesia.

ICTs, in this research, focused on mobile phones and the Internet because they are basic and reachable technologies among low-income migrant workers (Thompson 2009). Any traditional forms of communication such as letters and public broadcasting like radios and televisions did not include in the research.

4. Background of the case

This section will give a comprehensive overview of the situation on MDWs in Singapore that can be understood with regard to global political economy framework and feminist perspective. The following paragraphs are the discussion on the definition of domestic workers, the demand-pull from Singapore government and the supply-push from the sending countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. The last section will focus on the control over MDWs' body by the states.

4.1 Who are domestic workers?

According to International Labour Organisation (ILO), domestic workers refer to persons who work for private households. However, domestic workers can be called in other names such as servants, housekeepers, caregivers and nannies because of a wide range of their responsibilities; for example, cleaning, gardening, taking care of elderly or kids, taking children to school, and so on (International Labour Office 2013, 7). Nevertheless, Article 1 of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011, defines domestic workers as any person whose work done for a household, or any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship (ibid, 8). Domestic workers, in this research, refer to persons who are employed by and provided services for merely a private household and do not include professional workers who work in care services such as nursing homes and nurseries.

4.2 Demand-pull from Singapore

Throwing back to 1930s until 1960s, employing a live-in domestic worker was a symbol for rich locals and expatriates while all women in low- and middle-income families, particularly grandmothers or so-called "Ah-ma", took a major role to look after their children and do chores (Dodgson and Auyong 2016, 2-3). Nevertheless, the attempt of Singaporean government since the late 1960s to modernise the country through female bodies is the starting point of the change in female ways of life. When Singapore was industrialised, more Singaporean female labour have been hired in factories and companies. Additionally, the two-child policy, or "Stop at Two" campaign which prohibited low-skilled women or those with low educational levels having more than two children, was implemented (Freire 2013, 6). The policy aimed at reducing fertility and poverty, particularly in low- and middle-income families. In the meantime, the government released "the Graduated Mother's Scheme" in

1983 to encourage female labours with a university degree to get married and have children (Freire 2013, 6).

Nevertheless, the causes of importing MDWs to Singapore do not come from only the internal factor as mentioned above but also the impact of structural adjustment policies (SAPs). The Asian economic crisis in the middle of 1970s led to the feminisation of labour by Singaporean government and posed a big challenge for the government aimed to increase female participation in the labour market to support its industrialisation efforts (Freire 2013, 4). The then-Singaporean government therefore introduced the 1978 Foreign Domestic Servant Scheme (FDSS) which allowed MDWs to work in the country for a limited period of time with a special visa (ibid, 2) which also known as "guest workers" (Tan 2010, 104).

As the FDSS was announced due to purely economic factors, there is no regulation on the protection of migrant workers' rights at the first place. The law has a purpose to prevent MDWs to become a permanent resident of Singapore; by focusing on the prohibition of marriage between MDWs and Singaporeans, the ban on MDW's pregnancy, and six-monthly tests for both pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Dodgson and Auyong 2016, 5). Furthermore, the FDSS mainly aimed at increasing the employment of highly skilled female labours. Therefore, there is no minimum wage policy in order to reduce the cost of hiring MDWs by individuals and to increase the supply of local skilled-female workers (Freire 2013, 2; Dodgson and Auyong 2016, 5).

During the last decade, Singapore has rapidly become an aging society owing to the family planning policies in the previous decades. Furthermore, the country lacks of nursing facilities to take care of aging population. To address this problem, in 2014 the government declared an additional 120 SGD (about 843 SEK) monthly grant to low- and middle-income families for the employment of an MDW to look after their elderly relatives (Dodgson and Auyoung 2016, 6). This is the reason why the demand of MDWs in Singapore has never decreased since the government announced MDWs scheme (see Figure 1). Nowadays not only married Singaporean women participating in the labour market but also white-collar foreign workers with their families as well as expatriates are the cause of the high demand in MDWs.
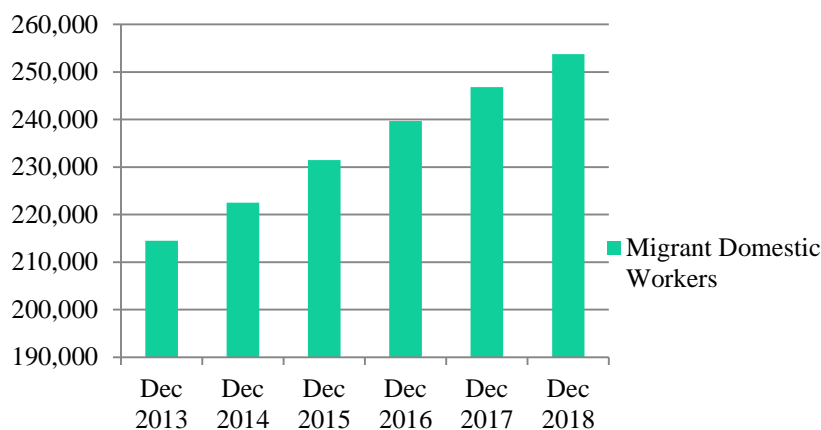
Figure 1: Numbers of MDWs who own their work permit

According to Ministry of Manpower (MOM), as of December 2018, at least 253,800 female labours were imported to work as MDWs in Singapore up from 214,500 in December 2013 (MOM 2019a). A person who is able to work as a paid domestic worker must be 23-50 year-old female from an approved source country such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand (MOM 2019b). MDWs are required an official certificate of their minimum 8-year education (ibid). The contract of MDWs could be a maximum of two years, renewable for up to eight years (ibid).

4.3 Supply-push from the sending countries

As mentioned earlier, MDWs in Singapore must come from particular countries approved by MOM. This research focuses on those from top-two sending countries namely the Philippines and Indonesia. Additionally, the feminisation of Asian labour is most marked in the Philippines and Indonesia where the majority of labour migrating abroad are women. For example, during 2014, at least 140,205 Filipina female workers were sent to work in Singapore which was in top-three receiving countries of the Philippines (POEA 2014, 25). While in Indonesia, domestic workers are 32 per cent of all Indonesian migrant workers which is the largest portion (The World Bank Office Jakarta 2017, x). The export of labour has become an increasingly significant strategy for addressing unemployment, generating foreign exchange, and fostering economic growth of sending countries (Lindio-McGovern 2004; Hakim and Fitrianto 2015, 318). Additionally, the desire from female labour themselves is the significant factor to be considered (Madianou and Miller 2012). The following paragraphs will discuss on supply-push's factors from these exporting countries.

To begin with, the labour export policy as contract migrant workers has been announced by the government of the Philippines since the oil prices in the Middle East countries increased during the mid-1970s (O'Neil 2004). Its goal was to generate foreign exchange in order to pay its foreign debt and to deal with high unemployment rate in the country (Lindio-McGovern 2004, 218). In addition, after the Asian financial crisis, the Philippines needed to follow the IMF and World Bank conditions as the developing countries. SAPs have generally suppressed the development of import-substitution industries that can generate jobs within the country (ibid, 224). The high unemployment rate and the lack of decent work in the country incentivise its citizens to work abroad and led to a rapid increase in contract migrant workers.

Similar to the Philippines, the majority of migrant workers from Indonesia are contract labours in low-skilled jobs with the 2-year duration of the contract. Since 2006, after the government employed "state-centered approach towards migrant labour market" (Hakim and Fitrianto 2015, 318), around 80 per cent of migrant workers legally leaving Indonesia have been women (Rother 2017, 962). Indonesian female migrants are mainly employed as domestic workers in the private sector, particularly in Malaysia and the Middle East (The World Bank Office Jakarta 2017). Indonesian overseas domestic workers annually contribute around 51 per cent of total remittances sent by all migrant workers (ibid, 36).

Apart from global demands in care and domestic workers and the global economic restructuring, the desire to send remittances to their family and the lack of welfare in the Philippines and Indonesia incentivise female labour to work overseas. Especially MDWs who already have children, they decide to work abroad because the educational and medical cost in their country are unaffordable (Madianou and Miller 2012 39-40; Hakim and Fitrianto 2015, 321). In addition, the remittances from these international migrant workers can improve local economies since their money strengthens purchasing power of goods and services (Hakim and Fitrianto 2015, 319). Furthermore, for young female labour who have not got married, their desire for the better life and self-improvement causes the highly supply push (Madianou and Miller 2012, 42-43).

All in all, the phenomenon of MDWs in Singapore is encouraged by the forces of supply-push and demand-pull in the global labour market. The Philippines' and Indonesia's labour export policy is able to address labour shortage in Singapore's domestic sector because of the

attempt of Singapore's government to gain more highly skilled local women participating in industries.

4.4 State, employers, and the control over domestic workers' body

As presented in the second part of this chapter, the emergence and the improvement of MDW-related laws has a goal to deal with purely economic issues. Nowadays MDWs are covered by the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA) which gives lesser protections and entitlements than Singapore's labour law, namely the Employment Act (EA) (HOME and Liberty Shared 2019, 29). Furthermore, the employer-sponsored work permit system fundamentally leads to the control over the mobility of MDWs in several aspects; for example, the denial of rest days, the strict curfews on off days, and the confiscation of MDWs' mobile phones and/or passports (ibid, 26-27). The paragraphs below will illustrate these regulations and MOM's stance on this issue.

According to MOM's regulations, every employer of an MDW, excepting the Malaysian workers, is required to provide a 5000 SGD-security bond (about 35,150 SEK) to the Singapore government in order to employ each migrant worker (MOM 2018b). This is to guarantee that the employers, instead of the state, will take a responsibility to monitor MDWs and prevent them from the breach of permit conditions (HOME and Liberty Shared 2019, 28; Dodgson and Auyong 2016, 8). One of the conditions of work permits is that the marriage between an MDW and a Singaporean or permanent resident without the permission of the Controller of Work Passes is not allowed. Secondly, if an MDW is found to be pregnant in Singapore, she must be repatriated and may also be blacklisted. The last condition is the mandatory six-monthly medical examinations of MDWs, which include a pregnancy test (MOM 2018b). These regulations effectively encourage employers to adopt control measures to restrict and police MDWs' movements, activities and communication (HOME and Liberty Shared 2019, 28).

In addition, the Singaporean law obliges MDWs to live with their employers. It means that every employer of an MDW needs to provide them a suitable sleeping area and adequate food (Dodgson and Auyong 2016). However, the live-in policy makes obstacles for MDWs to have a private life and proper working hours. As of January 2013, MOM does not regulate the minimum working hours for domestic workers but recommends at least 8 hours of continuous rest (MOM 2018a). Additionally, there is no improvement on minimum wage policy of MDWs. The salary and off days depend on the negotiation between each worker,

their employer, and agency. Furthermore, there are inadequate regulations from MOM regarding the restriction on communication and mobile phone's usage. As talked to Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME)'s casework manager, MOM suggests each MDW to negotiate with their employer in order to make mutual agreement between both of them on mobile phone's usage. The unequal power relation between employers and MDWs, nevertheless, makes workers unable to negotiate with their employer.

However, it should be noted that MDWs' social status and quality of life in the receiving country also rely on policies from the sending country and the negotiation between both governments. Normally, Indonesians have lower social status than Filipinas because they cannot be hired without paying the agency fee and lack of legal protection from their government. Migration history of Indonesian cannot be separated from the country's development since landlords and nationally influential businessmen who dominate the country have gained power in the government administration and parliament in order to make some benefits from the labour export (Rother 2017, 962-963). The migration industry closely links to official institutions as the government obliges all migrant workers to register with licensed recruitment agencies and emigrate through government-controlled channels which are supposed to be supported in the destination country by the Indonesian embassy and recruitment agencies (Rother 2017, 962; Hakim and Fitrianto 2015, 318).

Furthermore, the official protection from the Philippines' government is much better than Indonesia's (Rother 2017, 957). Indonesian MDWs widely acknowledge that their salary, particularly workers who have no working experience, is lower than the Philippines workers. In addition, the duration of salary deduction of Indonesians is longer than Filipinas. MDWs from the Philippines are also protected by POEA contract (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration) which states that salary deduction is illegal (POEA 2016).

5. Relevance to global studies

Both MDWs and the rapid development of ICTs are global phenomena. The high demand in domestic and care workers are the result of global economic restructuring and the increase in dual-income families (Platt et al. 2014, 6). Since 1980s, there have been more middle-class and educated women in advanced economy countries participating in the labour market and it has, subsequently, created a gap in care work which was traditionally taken over by women in families (Standing 1989, 1077). In the global labour market, there is a hierarchy of jobs, especially tasks related to 3D: dirty, difficult, and dangerous; which the natives do not desire

to do (Castles, Haas, and Miller 2013, 258). Consequently, the demand-pull forces for MDWs increase when migrant workers can fill the care gaps in higher economic countries. This kind of unskilled workers; however, always come with the contract labour visa circumscribing their rights or the so-called "guest-workers" (ibid). The lack of proper policies and regulations from sending and receiving countries causes migrant workers to a risk of human rights abuses.

The nature of domestic work is informal and precarious (Platt et al. 2014, 7). The scope of domestic work is limited in the private household, therefore, domestic workers are usually excluded from national laws, policies and from being able to form or join labour unions (Platt et al. 2014, 7; Smales 2011, 10). Additionally, their working conditions, particularly the live-in policy, create the blurry area between work and leisure for domestic workers and subsequently their life mostly depends on their employer (Platt et al. 2014, 7). Due to their working conditions, domestic workers have less opportunity to meet their friends and join social activities which they are able to exchange their experiences and improve their life. Generally, international human rights groups concern on the lack of off days, long working hours, the lack of privacy, and their isolation (Smales 2011; Platt et al. 2014; Frantz 2014).

Nevertheless, ICTs are able to reduce the isolation of domestic workers and the barriers of the freedom of association. This is because ICTs, particularly mobile phones and the Internet, can make a link with the world outside home (Smales 2011; Frantz 2014). Furthermore, mobile phones are considered as global mobile media which are currently owned and used by people in low-income countries (Madianou 2014, 669). Mobile phones are, hence, presenting opportunities for development and social changes. For instance, MDWs in Hong Kong and Taiwan have used mobile phones in order to create virtual solidarity and reach to MDWs who are isolated as well as collaborate with local NGOs for policy changes (Smales 2011, 33).

The understanding of mobile phone and internet usage by MDWs and its consequences is significant to the development of global political economics in the globalised world where the boundaries of states have been being gradually collapsed. Mobile phones and the Internet have become a tool which connects MDWs who are substantially isolated from their families and friends. It could help them improve their migration journeys. Additionally, mobile phones and the Internet are not only communication technologies but also a part of people's lives in this era since it creates a parallel world where people can live together although their ability to physical migration is limited (Miller et al. 2016, 100).

Paying more attention on MDWs' issues with regard to their use and access to mobile phones and the Internet has both theoretical and practical benefits. The outcome of the research would lead to the improvement on the theory of polymedia and gendered mobility as well as the implementation of advocacy campaigns to help and support MDWs.

6. Previous research

Previous studies have bought the discussion of the use of technology and transnational families into migration studies, particularly the concern about the feminisation of migrant labour and their left-behind children (Madianou and Miller 2012; Platt et al. 2016; Parrenas 2014). This research would like to focus on another aspect of female migrant workers; for instance, how mobile phones help facilitating MDWs to settle subaltern communities in the foreign lands. As mentioned earlier, this research is an attempt to find out the thick description of MDWs' experiences on mobile phones and the Internet in order to complete the previous researches. The following paragraphs will discuss on the previous researches related to this topic.

To begin with, Paragas (2009) examined how mobile phones facilitated transnational simultaneity between overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and their family and agency as well as how mobile phones were utilised to protect and promote OFWs' welfares. It was argued that migrant workers themselves create their own space of flows through their own mobile phone (Paragas 2009, 63) which is a 'deeply personal medium' (ibid, 58). The study also depicted that migrant workers adopted mobile phones more rapidly than the landline telephone because of its personal medium which is not requested to share with other people or use it in public spaces (ibid, 58). Consequently, users are more comfortable to talk and share their emotions, including their secrets, with other people. Although mobile phones are a personal medium, it can lead to an advocacy campaign or the improvement on welfare of migrant workers. For example, the conversations between OFWs and their families in the Philippines led to the campaign for an operation to aid OFWs during the Gulf war (ibid, 45). This occurred because news from traditional media was discussed at the personal level via their mobile phone and subsequently personal stories exchanged over mobile phones were contextualized in public events (ibid). For this reason, mobile phone users are both content creators and receivers.

Likewise, Campbell and Ling (2009) discussed on the personalisation of mass media content which is likely to bring about political mobilisation. It is argued that the emergence of mobile

telephony and other personal communication technologies has created new spaces in which power and counter-power is played out (Campbell and Ling 2009, 257). Since ordinary people can built their own system of mass communication such as blogs and podcasts, they bring out their own stories and discussion to the public (ibid). The personalisation of mass media, therefore, made the personal political. Furthermore, Smales (2011, 6-7) found that ICTs, especially mobile phones, have the potential to enable MDWs to collectively organise and become politically engaged as citizens of their own countries and as residents of the receiving countries. Hong Kong and Taiwan are the outstanding cases since mobile phones can allow MDWs who are mostly isolated to have virtual solidarity to organise and protect themselves while the host countries lack of labour laws to cover these MDWs (ibid, 6).

On the other side, Madianou and Miller's study (2012) was focused on the interconnectedness between human and mobile communication technologies. Madianou and Miller (2012) investigated the use of new media among Filipina MDWs in the United Kingdom with respect to mobile phones and the mediated relationship between MDWs and their left-behind family. It exhibited that each MDW selects each technology to communicate with their family due to different reasons depending on their culture and lifestyle (Madianou and Miller 2012, 125). Furthermore, the use of each technology represents the negotiation of power relation between MDWs as a mother and their children (ibid, 148). For example, some kids prefer an email because writing allows them to re-think and re-write their messages they will send to their parent; on the other hand, some MDWs prefer to use Skype since they are able to interact with their kids in the real time (ibid, 150).

Following this, the research titled by "How the world changed social media?", Miller et al. (2016) went further by examining the use of social media as a polymedia and how each community around the world mediates their relationships via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. It presented that people differently utilise and define the meaning of each social media platform hinging on their culture. For example, Chinese in rural areas think that online space introduces them to the concept of privacy since there is no privacy in offline Chinese society, particularly traditional rural Chinese families (Miller et al. 2016, 189). This is distinct from British society where people are concerned about the commercial use of their personal data on the Internet for targeted advertising and the surveillance by their government (ibid, 188).

Digital literacies among Filipina and Indonesian MDWs

When talking about the interconnection between human and digital technologies, digital literacies are one of the most important factors that should be considered in the research. Digital literacies are the ability to access resources and critically evaluate and create information through digital technology. It consists of four processes – access, analysis, evaluation and content production (Madianou and Miller 2013, 176). The digital literacies of migrant workers hinge on education, social class, their types of employment, and metropolitan centers (Madianou and Miller 2012, 27). Class and socioeconomic status are digitally reproduced since most of people, who are able to access to digital gadgets and faster Internet as well as critically read and produce content, are the urban and middle-class (ibid, 27-28). Additionally, the report from GSM Association (GSMA), the foundation of global mobile operators, argued that gender difference is one of the immense structures leading to a digital divided (Rowntree 2018, 2-3).

In case of the Philippines, the country is known as the texting capital of the world and still has the highest rates of texting globally (Madianou and Miller 2012, 26). Its citizens, particularly OFWs, use telecommunication technologies to contact each other since the state announced the labour-exported policy. Mobile internet represents an alternative for working- or lower-middle class families (Madianou and Miller 2012, 26; Paragas 2009). Texting has transformed Filipino everyday life since Filipino sociality is now conducted through texting (Madianou and Miller 2012, 26). Filipinos also exploit mobile phones in another way such as political mobilisation for political changes. The term 'smartmobs' was emerged during the mobilisation of enormous crowds in the 2001 protest against President Estrada (ibid, 26). As of March 2019, there are 62 per cent of Internet penetration and 57.4 per cent of Facebook users for a population of 106,512,074 (Internet World Stats 2019). In 2016, there was around 119 million mobile phone subscribers (Rappler 2016), up from 43 million in 2006 (Madianou and Miller 2012, 26).

Unlike the Philippines, digital literacies of Indonesian women are significantly lower than men due to the low awareness on mobile phones and the Internet (Rowntree 2018, 18-19). Thirty-four per cent of women do not know how to use mobile phones and 23 per cent, comparing to only ten percent of men, think that mobile phones are not relevant to them (ibid). The level of education is also a significant factor to consider about digital literacies since 22 per cent of women, comparing to 10 per cent of men, experience difficulties in

writing and reading the information on mobile phones (ibid). The result is related to Indonesia's patriarchal society which is an obstacle to women, particularly in rural area, to get higher education. As of March 2019, there are 53.2 per cent of Internet penetration and 48.2 per cent of Facebook users for a population of 266,794,980 (Internet World Stats, 2019).

Nevertheless, as Madianou and Miller (2012, 27) argued that digital literacies depend on their types of employment and locations, Indonesian MDWs in Hong Kong was able to initiate the campaign on Facebook in order to help their fellow Indonesian migrant, Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, who was physically abused by her employer (Allmark and Wahyudi 2016). Since the Internet in Hong Kong has stronger connection and more accessible as well as the loose control over the social media by Indonesia's and Hong Kong's government, this provided opportunities for these MDWs to create status updates and wait for responses from fellow migrants (ibid 2016).

Mobile phones and migrant workers in Singapore

Concentrated on Singaporean context, the researches on the interconnectedness between ICTs usage and migrant workers in Singapore are varied. Several researches, both qualitative and quantitative, focused on the difference in mobile phone usage between male and female low-income migrant workers who visit Singapore with 2-year contract visa (Thompson 2009; Chib Wilkin and Mei Hua 2013). Even though Singapore is a prominent country which receives many of MDWs every year, there are only a few qualitative researches paying attention to the use of ICTs for transnational families and identity building among MDWs in Singapore (Platt et al. 2016; Thomas and Lim 2010; Chib et al. 2014).

However, previous studies have already discussed about the access to ICTs, especially mobile phones, by migrant workers in Singapore. Thompson (2009) argued that the access to communication technologies in Singapore has historically been divided by social class. Since digital gadgets and mobile phone subscription were excessive for low-income migrant workers in the past, they have been kept out of the mobile phone domain (Thompson 2009, 365). Nevertheless, the mobile telephony market competition has pushed down the cost of communication technology devices and has improved pre-paid mobile phone schemes to be more affordable (ibid, 366).

Low-income migrant workers nowadays becomes potential customers for the telecommunication companies in Singapore (Thompson 2009, 366) and can afford their own

mobile phone and mobile data through pre-paid phone schemes (Platt et al. 2014, 9). The plans allow them to access both voice and Internet services which can be topped up by purchasing relatively small amount of credits (ibid). Nevertheless, it is arduous for MDWs, particularly ones who cannot hold their own work permit, to purchase a SIM card in Singapore. This is because it is required their work permit when purchasing a SIM card (ibid). Also, each work permit is allowed to buy only three SIM card; however, when the workers renew their own work permit, they can purchase another three SIM cards.

Besides the access to ICTs, several studies paid attention to how migrant workers use mobile phones to navigate their migration journeys. First and foremost, the paper that brought MDWs in Singapore into the studies of communication technologies is Thompson's research (2009) on the role of mobile phones with regard to culture and social life of both migrant construction and domestic workers in Singapore. It was argued there is a complicated set of differences and connections between both communities which founded through cultural practices (Thompson 2009, 375). The research also highlighted that migrant workers mediated their constraints, which individuals experience within both social and cultural systems, through their mobile phones (ibid, 372).

Following this, Chib, Wilkin and Mei Hua (2013) examined the differences between male and female migrant workers with regard to the workers' levels of stress, amounts of social support received, and patterns of ICT use via quantitative research method. The research shows that male and female migrant workers encounters different kinds of stress in their daily life (ibid, 21). The reason is that the features of their work and their lifestyle are distinct. Additionally, their stress is varied relying on their nationality and the level of their English skills. Comparing to male migrant construction workers, Filipina MDWs use mobile phones to alleviate stress by increasing social support rather than males (ibid 19). Emotional support can have the considerable impact on MDWs' psychological well-being (ibid, 19). The research, nonetheless, required qualitative method for further study and the survey in other sample population since the sample in the research is merely a group of Filipinas who are the majority among MDWs in Singapore.

With respect to migrant mothering and identity building by means of mobile phones, Chib et al. (2014) argued that mobile phones are a tool to regulate the relationship at a level of 'fair interchange' (ibid, 80). In other words, MDWs strategically used mobile phones in order to manage personal and public identities, redefine their relationships, push them in a desired

direction (ibid, 89). The research is also found that MDWs usually negotiate the shifting territory of their identities and relationships in a dynamic manner; therefore, female empowerment through mobile phones then acquires meaning as a process rather than as an objective (ibid).

Employed ethnographic interview method with Indian and Filipina MDWs, Thomas and Lim (2010) illustrated that they use a variety of technologies for everyday communication. Its findings are similar to Chib, Wilkin and Mei Hua (2013) which found that informal networks, such as family, relatives and friends, play a significant role in providing emotional, informational, and instrumental support to migrant workers (Thomas and Lim 2010, 22). Furthermore, mobile phones enable them to foster emotional links with their friends and family, expand their social networks, and offer them the greater autonomy in seeking better job opportunities and the management of their personal matters (ibid). ICTs can also bring the outside world in and make it possible to engage in mediated sociality and to extend their social networks despite being confined by the nature of their work (ibid, 13-14). However, it revealed the downside of ICTs usage as it can remind MDWs of the obligation to take care of their children left behind as well as the challenge on the cost of calling and the addiction to mobile phones (ibid, 16-17).

Another study with qualitative interview method examined the interconnectedness of mobile phone usage in everyday life and multiple aspects of Indonesian MDWs (Platt et al, 2016, 2208). It was argued that MDWs' access to ICTs often occurs in the context of deeply asymmetrical employment relationships (ibid, 2209). Additionally, communication with their left-behind family plays an important role in allowing for relations to be re-made as women navigate their migration journeys (ibid, 2209). It is similar to Paragas's finding (2009, 59) that mobile phones change notions of spatial and temporal distance and lead to simultaneity of migrant workers. However, Platt et al. (2016) went further to the asymmetrical power relationship between MDWs and employers as well as their temporarily abandoned family. ICTs have become a potential site for renegotiation those relationships (ibid, 2214). Access to ICTs means that negotiations are deeply embedded in social relations that shape the power geometries in which MDWs find themselves situated during their journeys (ibid, 2214). With the ICTs, power relations have shifted to allow women greater freedom in terms of their ability to communicate and maintain relationships with their family, although they can increasingly be monitored by their employer through their mobile phone (ibid, 2216).

7. Theoretical Framework

Theories in this research are to facilitate the researcher to pose interview questions, shape discussions between the researcher and research participants, and analyse the materials to contribute knowledge answering the research questions. A theory of polymedia and gendered mobility which are the main frameworks in this research will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

7.1 A Theory of Polymedia

Recently, scholars have paid attention to the intersection of ICTs and the everyday lives of various groups of people. Some media scholars employ various different kinds of research method such as discourse analysis, policy analysis, and quantitative method to understand media and social change (Goggins 2012; Campbell and Ling 2009); on the other hand, Madianou and Miller (2012) who coined the term 'polymedia' have encouraged scholars to adopt an ethnographic method to make an understanding on the interconnectedness of technologies and human culture (Madianou and Miller 2013, 184). This is opposite to Campbell and Ling's discussion (2009, 252) which focused on 'material' forms supporting for networked communication and information flow in order to develop the understanding of the intersection between human and ICTs. Nonetheless, both studies were found that people do not use only one media but exploit several medium to tackle with the problems (Campbell and Ling 2009; Madinou and Miller 2014).

Polymedia theory highlights new media as an 'integrated structure' which emphasises on how users exploit the affordances within the compound structure of media in order to manage their emotions and relationships (Madianou 2014, 671). Mobile phones and the Internet are regarded as a place that is integrated to everyday life of human beings and have also become a part of their offline life, not a separate sphere (Miller et al. 2016, 100).

Madianou and Miller (2013) delineated polymedia as "*a means to understand media environments which users navigate to fit into their communicative needs*" (170-171). They also highlighted how users utilise the different features of each media to deal with their emotions and relationships (ibid). In other words, users themselves choose a certain medium that fits to their relationship while recognizing that their relationship is always set up by those medium they select. Furthermore, it was argued that the combinatorial form of media can be appreciated by users rather than only a single form of media (Madianou and Miller 2012,

147). For example, Miller and Sinanan (2014) found that Skype was a successful communication technology for maintaining transnational family relationships because of its multi-function, consisting of text-based and voice-based communication as well as online face-to-face interaction. Through Skype, mothers and their left-behind families could negotiate their power and maintain relationship through various functions of Skype that suited their purpose.

The term 'polymedia' is similar to the term 'multimedia'; however, there is an obvious difference between multimedia and polymedia. Multimedia is typically understood as a medium combining various forms of content; for instance, text with audio and video (Madianou and Miller 2013, 172). Unlike multimedia, polymedia focuses on not only the development of ICTs but also human's behaviour as well as how both of them are intersected. Polymedia theory emphasises the aspect of power relationship between the sender and the receiver since power is revealed as a facet of relationships (Miller and Sinanan 2014, 154).

Polymedia and mediated relationship

Polymedia is also a key concept to understand the mediated relationship between people who are separated by space and time. Polymedia is not only the management of a group of different media but also the instrument for an endeavour to deal with the struggle of pure relationships as well as the management of complex emotions and the negotiation of the ambivalence (Madianou and Miller 2012, 146-147). According to Madianou and Miller's research (2012, 182) on Filipina's migration families, they observed that there are struggles over power and attempts to use personal media such as email and Skype to transform and control the way the person at one end of this communication appeared to the other. For instance, the left-behind children prefer text-based communication to voice-based one because they can prepare and re-write their answer to their mother as well as ignore some messages (Madianou and Miller 2012, 150). Polymedia allows the combination of media that best transmits one's feelings to the other one; therefore, the media are mediated by the relationship (ibid, 148). The choice of medium acquires emotional purpose as users try to manage and control their relationships through those platforms that they consider more appropriate (Madianou 2014, 672). Mobile phones and social media such as Skype, WhatsApp, and Facebook, therefore, are not just a media but it is an instrument to change the balance of power between two or more users.

Smartphones and the Internet as polymedia

Another argument regarding polymedia is that media together with the Internet allow, and crucially sustain, the ideal distance for the development of relationships and the process of migration (Miller and Sinanan 2014, 150). Polymedia also causes the discussion on the feature of the Internet. The tangibility of the Internet can objectify and constitute one's relationship and then transform the relationship (ibid). Media together with the Internet, consequently, make online world as a complement of offline world where people cannot meet each other in their real life and make mediation more nature as Miller et al. (2016, 7) argued that *"the online is just as real as the offline and it makes no sense to the online as separate"*. Additionally, online communication is regarded as a shift in cultural mediation, but not make a relationship more mediated (Miller et al. 2016, 102). Likewise, smartphones or Internet-enabled phones can also be regarded as polymedia because of their functionality of a traditional mobile phone with network connectivity, or the Internet, that supports the installation and the operation of software applications (Madianou 2015, 669). Smartphones facilitate users to connect to other users and select suitable platforms that fit to users' desires within the compound environment of communicative opportunities which is the core of polymedia theory (ibid, 676).

To sum up, personal communicative media cannot be understood in isolation since each media nowadays is connected to one another. Polymedia emphasises on the ethnographic research method to understand the relationship between new media and various groups of people as well as how both are intersected. There are three types of relationships to be considered in polymedia - the relationships between those media within a communicative environment, the relationships between human beings and technologies, and the relationships among people in media (Madianou 2015, 2). Polymedia is, therefore, helpful to approach the interconnectedness of technology, human culture, and gender.

7.2 Gendered mobility

Mobilities are embodied and enacted by women and men in different ways; hence, it reproduces the existing unequal power relations (Cresswell and Uteng 2008, 2). Mobility is a multi-faceted phenomenon and has a considerable impact on empowerment because the feminine mobility, particularly in developing countries, is set by the notion of complex hierarchies (Uteng 2011, 7). Mobility is unevenly distributed to men and women as well as their social class. Observing how people move is demonstrably gendered and continues to reproduce gendered power hierarchies (Cresswell and Uteng 2008, 2).

Gendered mobility approach is aimed to understand how mobility and gender are intersected as well as how mobility enables, disables, and changes gender practices (Cresswell and Uteng 2008, 1). Cresswell and Uteng (2008) suggested researchers to employ holistic approach and consider how genders are read in different contexts. As gender is not a binary concept, it is significant to put intersectionality lens into the mobility theory in order to examine the multi-dimensionality of human experience in order to understand human life and behaviour (Collins and Chepp 2013). Connell and Pearse (2015, 75) argued that there are four dimensions – power, production, emotional relations and symbolism - intersected within the structure of gender relations. Each dynamic always interacts with other dynamics in their social life; therefore, gender relations work in context (Connell and Pearse 2015, 86).

Mobility is also referred to capabilities or potential for undertaking movements which can deal with social injustice (Kronlid 2008, 16). It was argued that the significance of mobility for individual well-being is strengthened by their capabilities to mobility (ibid, 15). Marginalised communities experience the obstacles to move or access differently from majority people (ibid, 19). Mobility is, as a result, both empowerment and imprisonment. On one hand, mobility decreases social inequalities by increasing accessibility and availability for more people. On the other hand, those who do not have capability to move or mobilise as well as access to communication technologies or are restricted by control and surveillance are socially excluded (ibid, 19).

There are two key concepts relevant to this research - social networking and mobility. Social networking refers to the contents of mobile communication between individuals (Inkinen 2008, 216). Mobility is divided into two categories. The first one is the full mobility or physical movement which refers to the people's movement from one place to another place for various purposes such as for work, leisure, migration, and refuge (ibid, 215). Secondly, semi-mobility refers to communicative and digital dimensions such as surfing the Internet which allows users to virtual travelling (ibid). This research engages with mobility in terms of physical movement, spatial movement, and opportunities and capabilities to use technologies.

Gendered virtual mobility

Uteng (2011, 47) argued that affordability and access are the key issues in virtual mobility. To understand gendered mobility in the ICT era, it is demanded for explicitly considering relationships between activities and telecommunications as experienced by different genders

(Uteng 2011, 46). There are two aspects to be considered in order to understand gendered virtual mobility – the social realm and the individual practices (ibid.) Firstly, the social realm is a setting for everyday life with respect to national legislation, cultural conduct and societal practices (ibid). The second one is the individual practices; for instance, personal histories, visible and invisible power-relations, structural norms and personal choices, and collective arrangements and their inter- and intra-relations (ibid).

Gendered mobility is helpful to approach the research questions since domestic sector is highly feminised. In addition, male and female own differential abilities to move and access because of their difference on socio-economic backgrounds such as jobs, incomes, leisure and lifestyles. As mentioned, my research will examine two kinds of mobility. The first one is geographical mobility of Filipina and Indonesian MDWs in Singapore as well as their limited physical mobility in the host country. Another form of mobility is virtual mobility which is created by mobile phones and the Internet, and why they are, or not, able to access to virtual mobility. This research will, nevertheless, not compare the mobility between male and female as it is aimed to understand how MDWs move through mobile phones and the Internet.

8. Methodology

According to the aim of the research and the previous studies, I employed qualitative research method and adopted inductive approach. To find out about the personal experience on mobile phone usage of each MDW and to examine the intersection of technology, gender, and human culture, this research required qualitative semi-structured interviews, completed by the fieldwork to gain the deep understanding of MDWs' ways of life. The analysis of the interviews was conducted via thematic qualitative text analysis.

8.1 Fieldwork

In accordance with the previous research, comparative ethnographic approach is an appropriate means to understand the implementation of polymedia, the theoretical framework that was examined in this research, in different culture and context (Madianou and Miller 2013, 184). The ethnographic research method is the unique combination of a wide lens and a microscopic attention to details; therefore, it allows the researcher to capture not only environments and contexts of media usage but also the micro dynamics that produce them (Madianou 2015, 2).

Furthermore, as the research aims at collecting the voices of the subalterns, fieldwork as one of the ethnographic research methods is required. Ethnography takes researchers out of their own social world and places the researchers into a new social world that they want to understand (Tenzek 2017, 565). The fieldwork was employed because I am not familiar with the culture of MDWs in Singapore and the current situation regarding the restriction on communication of MDWs. It is also aimed to recruit the researched participants for the interview method. In this research, the field notes were supplemental to the semi-structured interviews as a means to enhance the understanding of the situation and to capture additional details about the content the interviewees narrated to me (Tenzek 2017, 565).

Implementation of the fieldwork

Due to the limited time for this research, I decided to do a short but intensive fieldwork from December 15th, 2018 to March 7th, 2019. My role in the fieldwork was an observer. As I had positioned my role before entered to the field, it helped me compel how the rest of the study would proceed and what to write down in the field notes (Tenzek 2017, 566). During the fieldwork, I voluntarily worked as a caseworker of Humanitarian Organization for Migrantion Economics (HOME)'s shelter. HOME is a Singaporean non-governmental organization which provides a hotline and a shelter for migrant workers who ask for both legal and non-legal assistance. As a caseworker, I had many chances to interview MDWs who ran away from their employers or agencies due to salary issues and well-being issues, including the restriction on communication which is emphasised in this research. I was also allowed to talk to employers, agencies and MOM officers in order to follow-up MDWs' cases and assist them to meet their goal. This helps me understand the tension and power relations between MDWs, their employer and agency.

Besides HOME's shelter, on Sundays, I went to public areas such as Lucky Plaza and Novena church located on Orchard road which is mostly occupied by Filipina domestic workers as well as City Plaza in Paya Lebar which is taken by Indonesian ones. I observed how MDWs spend their rest days in the public area and how they express their identity and lifestyle. Although I did not have an official interview with those whom I randomly talked in the public space, due to their time limit, the observation gave me an explicit picture of their ways of life in the foreign land and perfectly completed the interview method.

8.2 Semi-structured interview

To gain a thick description of how MDWs use their mobile phone to navigate their isolation as well as build and maintain social relationships with their friends, I conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews which focus on interviewee's point of view (Bryman 2012, 470; Ackerly and True 2010, 73). By choosing this approach, I aimed to encourage the interviewees to share detailed descriptions as a means to allow me to get into their social world. This method considers the interview as a space outside of reality where the participants express their experiences and perceptions of their social world (Parcell and Rafferty 2017, 802).

In addition, the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to develop a set of interview questions, referred to an interview guide (Parcell and Rafferty 2017, 803), and make sure to ask all the necessary questions for the research (Bryman 2012, 471). The interview questions are loose and open-ended with additional questions coming up during the interview. The interview guide is designed to shape the discussion that fits into the themes of the research but still has a space for the interviewees to raise their issues and express how they understand certain issues and events (Bryman 2012, 472). The set of interview questions had been prepared before I visited the field. I, nevertheless, added some interview questions after interviewed a few of the research participants. This is because they raised some issues that I missed or did not expect before entered to the field. Consequently, I conducted second shorter interviews with some of them to help me clarify the issues.

Selection of participants for the qualitative interviews occurred in a strategic way through purposive sampling. The selection criteria comprised of MDWs that have worked in Singapore at least three months so that they are familiar with their communities in the host country and have enough experiences to share their stories and thoughts. Secondly, the participants must be able to communicate in English. This is to eradicate the third party, an interpreter, in the interview. However, the participants were allowed to express some words in their own language in case there is no English word that could represent those words. The range of age of the interviewees was not imposed because it was aimed to see the difference in generations.

Due to the limited time, there are 11 research participants; five of them are from the Philippines and the others are Indonesian. The age of participants is varied from 24 to 45. The key informants' background on age, marriage status, level of their highest education, years of

working experiences in Singapore, and mobile phone's applications for their daily usage can be found in Appendix A.

Implementation of Interviews

The research participants were recruited at HOME's shelter through my invitation. The recruitment was made after I worked at HOME shelter for four weeks; therefore, the participants are familiar with my face and all of them know that I am a volunteer at the shelter. I, nevertheless, informed them that the research is my Master thesis with the University of Gothenburg which is not related to HOME.

The interviews were conducted individually in English at HOME's shelter. Each interview lasted about 60-80 minutes. All the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent from the interviewees and subsequently transcribed. I conducted totally 16 interviews from 11 research participants. Five of them were required the second interview since all the questions could not be done within 75 minutes and they seemed tired of the dialogue. During the interview, I did not strictly follow the interview guide but adapted the questions accordingly with the conversation and the theme of each section. The interview guide is attached in Appendix B.

8.3 Thematic analysis

The transcripts of the interviews will be analysed using thematic qualitative text analysis. Using an inductive approach, themes are built from the interview data (Hawkins 2017, 1758). The researcher identifies patterns occurring repeatedly and defines how those patterns contribute knowledge relating to the research questions (Hawkins 2017, 1757). Thematic qualitative text analysis is employed in this project because the data acquiring from interviews are typically unstructured textual materials (Bryman 2012, 569). Furthermore, thematic analysis is a flexible method as it is not bonded to any one particular theoretical framework and can be applied in various ways (Hawkins 2017, 1759). The researcher is, nonetheless, required to clearly demonstrate the systematic steps engaged in the analysis, including how the progress of analysis provides clarity to how the resulting themes were located (Hawkins 2017, 1759).

Implementation of thematic analysis

To analyse data, themes were coded manually after transcribed by myself. Since an inductive approach was employed in this research, themes emerged from the interview transcription.

Firstly, I read and identified themes from one transcription of the research participants and then located additional and similar themes in the next document reviewed. When I was searching for themes I looked for the occurrences of the topics, the metaphors, similarities and differences - exploring how interviewees discussed a topic in different ways, and theory-related materials (Bryman 2012, 586). Initially, there were various themes from all interview transcripts such as gossip, privacy, text-based communication, voice-based communication, information sharing, cost of the Internet, access to Wi-Fi, learning new applications, expanding the network, features of each social media, cross-cultural community, and language problem etc. After that I reduced the number of themes by searching for the common elements in those themes so that they can be raised to the level of 'higher-order themes' (Bryman 2012, p 586). For example, I combined the cost of the Internet, access to Wi-Fi, and how they manage income for their mobile phone's usage then named it as "accessibility". In this research, there are five themes – accessibility, digital literacies, social relationship, privacy, and information sharing for collective actions. Themes and sub-themes are in the table below.

Main themes and sub-themes coded from the interviews

Theme	Sub-theme
Accessibility	Mobile phone ownership
	The restriction on mobile phone's usage by the employer
	Ability to manage their income to pay for mobile data
Digital literacies and Empowerment	Analysis
	Evaluation
	Content production and sharing
	Language barriers
	Ability to learn and use new applications
Social relationship	Offline social relationship
	Online social relationship
	Cross-culture community
Privacy	Privacy on each choice of communication
	Privacy on each application
	Privacy on their devices
	Sharing their social media's passwords
Information Sharing for collective actions	The patterns of how they share information
	The consequences of information sharing
	If not share information, what do they do instead?

8.4 Ethical considerations

The most important principle when conducting the feminist research is reflexivity (Ackerly and True 2010; Rose 1997). Power relation in the whole research process should be transparent (Rose 1997, 306). This is because the researcher's backgrounds shape their knowledge and how they understand the world as well as how they see themself in relation to the researched participants (ibid, 308). This will lead to the bias during the research process.

To address this problem, I must be aware of power relation between me and the researched during the course of the fieldwork, the interviews and data analysis. As a researcher, I came with the research agendas which differed from the participants' agendas which their knowledge is grounded on their everyday lives. In the fieldwork, my relationship with the interviewees was sisterhood. In HOME's shelter, MDWs living there call every volunteer and staff as Sister. As a result, they perceived that there is no hierarchical or employer-employee relationship in the shelter. This made them feel comfortable to talk to me.

Furthermore, the transparency of the researcher is always emphasised when conducted the interviews. Before started the interviews, I introduced myself with a brief summary of the project. When I told the participants that I am originally Thai but visited Singapore for data collection, their manner and attitude towards me were changed. Most of them felt more comfortable to share their feelings, particularly the resentment with their Singaporean employers, and criticised the migration system. This might affect the results if interviewers were Singaporean.

In order to meet UNESCO's ethical codes of conduct for social science studies (Guchteneire n.d.), before started each interview, the research participants were informed about the whole process of the research as well as their rights during and after the interview. For example, the participants were told that they can ignore or refuse to answer the question which they feel uncomfortable to answer, the right to stop the interview at any time, and the right to ask and get more information about myself, as a researcher, and my research project.

Although the researcher can pose the questions and control the time during the interview, the researcher should not monopolise the interview and make the participants feel disempowered (Kvale 2006, 484). The interviewees have the right to ignore the researcher's questions and be evasive (ibid). Particularly when the interview is not conducted in the interviewee's mother language, they did not understand the questions and answered the other things they

want to talk about. What I did is to listen to the interviewees and adapt to my interview questions accordingly. I also used the basic English, body language, and some drawings to communicate with them and gave them more time to think and explain about their experiences and feelings.

Furthermore, I considered about the consent of recording and the anonymity of the key informants. The names of the participants which appear in the research are pseudonym. The interviews were recorded with their consent. All the records are confidential and will be deleted after I finish this research.

All the research participants and the casework manager at HOME's shelter were informed that this research will be submitted to HOME after finished my project as this place is my fieldwork where I learned the issue and recruited all the participants. In addition, since the informants might leave the shelter or Singapore after I left the fieldwork, HOME can help me contact all the participants for sharing and discussing the research results.

9. Findings and analysis

The following section shows the result from the in-depth interviews which are categorised via thematic qualitative method. The findings and analysis will be presented within five themes – accessibility, digital literacies, social relationship, privacy, and information sharing for collective actions – as mentioned in the previous section. As this is a qualitative research, the findings are the illustration of how the informants answer a particular question. Interview participants are referred to as 'the informant'.

Theme 1: Accessibility

First of all, the patterns of mobile phones restriction by the employers will be discussed since this is a significant obstacle to the access to ICTs. During the fieldwork at HOME shelter, I observed that there are several patterns of the restriction on MDW's communication. Firstly, some employers of MDWs confiscate their mobile phone since they start working and are not allowed to contact anyone through their own mobile phone. In this case, some of the employers will allow them to use the employer's mobile phone to contact only the left-behind family of each MDW. Nevertheless, the frequency of the communication with their family is very limited hanging on MDW's ability to negotiate with their employer such as once a week, bi-weekly, and once a month. Each call lasts about 10-30 minutes.

Another type of the restriction is that MDWs are permitted to use their own mobile phone at nighttime or after work. Some of the employers keep their mobile phone during daytime and return it to their employee at nighttime. In this case, MDWs have limited time to communicate with their family and friends because most of them usually finish work and get the permission from their employer to stay in their own bedroom which is MDWs' most private space after 10.00 pm. In some cases, CCTV cameras are installed in the employer's house to surveillance MDWs' behaviours including mobile phone usage. This is the cause of MDWs' fear to use their mobile phone in their employer's house, particularly in CCTV's areas.

The third pattern is the employer's surveillance on an MDW's mobile phone which makes them uncomfortable to be online or to use some functions of their mobile phone. Some of MDWs are permitted to use mobile phones since it is the only tool to communicate with their employer when MDWs go out for marketing or taking employer's children to school. Nonetheless, some applications; for example, Facebook and WhatsApp, allow user's friends to check user's online status. If employers observe that MDWs are online too often, they will be blamed, scolded, or punished. The other way to police MDW's mobile phone is to install some surveillance applications such as Qustodio, a parental control application, on MDW's mobile phone. This is, nevertheless, a rare case.

Lastly, some of MDWs are not allowed to use the employer's Wi-Fi. This might limit MDWs' communication in case they are not able to own a SIM card or top-up their mobile data. Additionally, purchasing a SIM card in Singapore is not easy for any migrant workers who cannot hold their own work permit. As highlighted in the previous research, it is required work permit of each migrant worker when purchasing a SIM card in Singapore.

Nevertheless, the results find that the informants navigate to own a SIM card in several ways. The common way is to buy their own one once they move into their employer's house and get the first off day. Some employers of the informants bought a SIM card for their employee as they need to communicate with them. However, in some cases, some of the agencies or employers of the informants confiscated their passport and/or work permit which is required when buying a SIM card. In this case, the informants had to use a mobile phone without any SIM cards for a while and addressed communication problems by using Facebook and public Wi-Fi instead.

The limited access to a Singaporean SIM card leads to the difficulty to utilise some applications on mobile phones; for example, WhatsApp requires a phone number to add their friends in their contact list. Facebook is, nevertheless, not the one that requests phone numbers before adding a new friend. Therefore, Facebook has become the most favourable communicative application when they exchange their contact and get in touch with their fellows as one of the informant state:

> *"I always use WhatsApp and Facebook. Because Facebook, most of Indonesian have an account already. If I want to find someone, I just search and find out. But WhatsApp, I need to have their phone number. [...] Facebook is better because wherever I can communicate. WhatsApp is very useful but I should have their number even they are already in the same group. I like using Facebook so much. It's very helpful as there are new things, I know from Facebook."*

> (Lily, 27-year-old Indonesian)

Additionally, all the informants explain that they have never asked for new friends' phone numbers because Facebook functions as a mobile phone even though they do not own a SIM card. Some of the informants say that they were picked up from the airport to their agency's boarding house; therefore, they were not able to buy any SIM cards at the first few days after their arrival.

Furthermore, the informants, particularly Filipinas, perceive that Facebook's Messenger is free because they use fewer mobile data when sending text messages through Messenger. In the context of Singapore's pre-paid SIM card system, users need to top-up for pick up and calling as well as mobile data; however, they can choose to top-up only one option if they want to save money. Additionally, some telecommunication companies offer the special package for migrant workers which they can get unlimited data for some social media applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and WeChat. Most of the informants top-up only mobile data which fits to their lifestyles and their demands in contacting people in their home country. Through Facebook and Messenger, the informants are able to contact to their friends and family without a SIM card. They can just connect to public Wi-Fi or the one at the employer's house as one of the informants say:

"I like Messenger because it's free. It's free to download and easy to contact to my family in the Philippines. No need to top-up, only Wi-Fi access. You can talk to your family through the Messenger."

(Celyn, 45-year-old Filipina)

To manage their income to meet a desire for using mobile data for communication and leisure, the informants usually use Facebook as Google and other browsers. A prevalent answer from the informants when asked about the applications for their daily use is Facebook because of its ease and cheap cost. It is exhibited that seven of the informants use Facebook instead of Google to search for the information they need, reasoning that they have to manage their mobile data. The informants perceive that Facebook consume less data than Google or browsing some specific information on websites. As mentioned, the unlimited data for Facebook and/or WhatsApp is included when they monthly top-up. Some of the informants illustrate that their mobile data quickly run out when they often use another Web browser application such as Google and Opera Mini[1]. Using Facebook as Google has become a means to manage their income to meet their communicative needs because their mobile data will be used for communication with their family which is their priority.

Furthermore, it is revealed that the informants have an attempt to combine their little ability to move physically and virtual mobility in order to access to the resources. For example, Lisa, asked her neighbour's maid to top-up her mobile data although she was confined in the employer's house for one year and six months. Another example is the case of Celyn who did not own a SIM card during working with her employer but she used employer's Wi-Fi when Celyn was out for cleaning other studios of her employer. Celyn saw Wi-Fi's username and password for guests so she managed her time to clean a whole room and sent some messages to her husband in the Philippines.

Theme 2: Digital literacies

With regard to the relevance between age and digital literacies, it exhibits that age is not considerably related to the ability to learn and use mobile phones and the Internet. On the other hand, the length of their relocation is the main factor to improve their capacities to use digital technologies. Two informants at the age of 42-45 who have more than 10 years of

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1. Opera Mini is a web browser application which claims that it is a fast and safe mobile web browser saving tons of users' mobile data.

working experiences as MDWs state that mobile phones and their applications are not too complicated to use. Additionally both learn new communicative applications by themselves to find the cheaper and more stable connection with their family and friends. Therefore the longer they work abroad, the more digital skills they learn. In contrast, one of the middle-aged informants who just started working for four months finds that it is too difficult to use internet-based communicative applications because she has never been separated from her family and community; moreover, she used only Facebook and Messenger when lived in her home country.

With respect to the ability to learn new applications and digital technologies, all the informants say that new internet-based communicative applications are introduced by their friends working as MDWs in other countries, especially in Gulf countries, which have intense restrictions on social media. The findings also provide that the enjoyment when using social media incentivises the informants to try new applications by themselves. Level of education may not be a significant factor for the ability to learn new application unless they are not interested in socialising. For example, Anita, a 45-year-old MDW, has learned to use a mobile phone and new communicative applications by herself as it is her interest in contacting to her family and close friends. However, she removed many of new applications she tried such as Imo[2] and Skout[3] because she is introverted and people in her social circle are not in those applications.

Nevertheless, it is revealed that digital literacies of the informants are low, particularly the ability to analyse and evaluate the data on the Internet as well as content production. Only a few informants know reliable sources and are able to evaluate the data they get from Facebook groups before adapting to their own situation. A comment from the informant mentioned about their digital literacies is that *the Internet is full of data and it difficult to find an answer. It is much better to ask and trust the agency who knows that which documents are required and how her life will be in the host country*. Only one of 11 informants says that she read the regulations of MDWs on MOM website because she has worked here for a decade.

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2. Imo is a communicative application which allows users to send free encrypted messages or encrypted video and voice call over their 3G, 4G, or Wi-Fi connection.

3. Skout is the global network for instantly meeting new people nearby users or around the world. It allow users to meet people by preferences and proximity, chat, buy and send gifts, save their favourite users, and browse profiles and pictures.

In terms of content production, producing global content requires written English skill; however, most of the informants possess only oral English skill. This makes them difficult to share their experience to other fellows from other countries. Additionally, publishing some photos and videos on their social media is a complicated activity. For example, Celyn, a 45-year-old Filipina, told me that she does not even know how to upload her photos from her phone's camera to her Facebook. Only one of the key informants shared her experiences as well as advises for the helpers in a Facebook secret group for Indonesian MDWs in Singapore because she thinks that workers are not informed everything they need to know about their job by their agency.

Theme 3: Social relationships

Social media becomes the main space in which the informants socialise as they usually encounter the restrictions on communication in their offline life. Speaking about how to find new friends, most of them say that their agencies and boarding houses are the first place where they meet other fellows. At these places, they exchange their contact to one another, particularly Facebook. However, when they are moved to their employers' house, they have hardly got any opportunities to meet their fellows, especially in the first 2-6 months which they are under salary deduction. During this period, seven of the informants state that they use Facebook to expand their social network. The reason is that, on Facebook, anyone can search and add new friends without phone numbers.

Most of the informants say they accept friends' requests from only the persons that have mutual friends and/or work in Singapore, even those ones who add her have never met her in the offline world before. The user can see the mutual friends on Facebook; therefore, they can know if the person who added them is associated with some of their friends or relatives. A close friend of each informant also suggests their friends who work in Singapore to be friends on Facebook in order to hang out together. They use Facebook as a platform to make an appointment to meet each other when get off days. Likewise, in the offline world, they create communities by inviting their friends to join their party at public parks or department stores. Facebook, therefore, substitutes their agency and offline public spaces where they can hang out during rest days.

Facebook also preforms as their imagined hometown. Prevalent answers when asked about how they use social media are that Facebook is exploited as a local news website where the informants are able to get any updates from their relatives, neighbours and classmates in their

hometown at any time they enter into Facebook. It also alleviates their homesick and sense that they are always connected to their village. The informants often get updates about their family and hometown via Facebook's news feed as one state:

> *"[...]And then if there is something happening with my mother and neighbours, I can see from Facebook. [...] My father's sister just died yesterday but I knew everything from Facebook. Sometimes there is something happening in my place, I also know. Before my mother asked or talked to me, I've already known from Facebook haha. Like my mother told me you know your father's sister died already. I said I know already from Facebook. My mother asked who told me. I said everybody talked on FB lah. I have a lot of friends on Facebook. That's why I know any updates from Facebook."*

(Lisa, 34-years-old Indonesian)

Although the informants add and accept many of people into their Facebook, its algorithm would show them only news from some friends they usually contact with and fade acquaintances away. As one of the informants says she added a few fellows from the same agency on her Facebook but she has not seen their updates on her news feed for a while. The algorithm of Facebook might help them manage their relationships on their Facebook sociality.

Considering about the relationships among people in media, there is an attempt to manage their relationships with various kinds of people on their Facebook. The results reveal that the informants perceive that their Facebook friends are not 'true' ones in sense that they are not the ones the informants want to share their troubles and experiences with them. The separation between Facebook and Messenger functions as a division between public and private space on online world and helps them manage their complicated online relationships easier. For instance, the informants accept Facebook's friend requests from any persons who have a mutual friend with them but they maintain their relationships through their Facebook's posts, not through Messenger.

With regard to build a cross-cultural community where MDWs from other countries are able to exchange and discuss their experiences, four of the informants state that they enjoy meeting new friends, particularly from other countries. They create offline communities where they usually practice English and other languages, including find an intimate

relationship. However, these communities are difficult to maintain owing to the irregularity of their off days. Some of them get rest days twice a month while their friends get off days once a month. Although there has been a little attempt to create online cross-culture communities via Messenger in order to deal with the intense restriction on their rest days, the results exhibit that online communities are not successful. The informants say Messenger groups always disturbed them during working as their friends send messages all the time. Most of them left the groups chat; nevertheless, they still meet one another on their real life, reasoning that they are introverted and it is unnecessary to talk with their friends every day.

It also presents that Facebook groups are not a popular platform for socialisation. The majority of informants have not engaged in any Facebook groups about MDWs in Singapore, particularly the public groups, because they have hardly heard about these groups. A few of them say they do not know how to add her Facebook account into the group because some of those groups are closed and require Facebook users to answer some questions before enter into the groups. Only three of them join some Facebook groups of MDWs; however, they are only a passive user in those groups as they say that they just read posts and subsequently reflect to themselves. They have never posted or commented on those posts in Facebook groups as posting and commenting means someone can see and stalk their Facebook.

Theme 4: Privacy

Privacy is the theme appeared during coding. In fact, the informants have never mentioned the word 'privacy' in the interviews; however, they always talked about their inconvenience during using their mobile phones and how the informants see an impact from mobile phones usage.

It shows that all the informants prefer text-based communication via Messenger, WhatsApp, and Imo rather than voice-based communication due to their limitation on communication and the surveillance by their employers. The nature of live-in domestic workers is circumscribed within the employer's house and by lack of privacy because they need to share the space within a house with other members in their employer's family. As a result, the informants use instant messages through communicative applications in order to connect with the world outside. All the informants reveal that they are afraid of their employer's surveillance on their conversation with their family and friends as well as their employer might know they were using their mobile phone.

Furthermore, text-based communication allows them to freely express their feeling because it is quiet and secretive. Some of the informants think that through messages, they are able to efficiently control their emotions and manage the period of communication.

> *"Me: In which ways does your mobile phone facilitate you to find social and emotional support?*
>
> *Anita: Yea nowadays I use much ..err..to chat because I have a freedom. I use longer to release my sadness to my sister and to my husband.*
>
> *Me: Why?*
>
> *Anita: Err... maybe I don't like people heard our conversation. When I talk, people know...you know. So I prefer to chat. And maybe I can express my feeling because when I talk, I cry more and cannot talk much. So when I am chatting, I am crying.*
>
> *Me: You were crying while you were still typing?*
>
> *Anita: Haha..that's why all emotions there.*
>
> *Me: So...can you control your emotion when typing?*
>
> *Anita: Yes, I can control myself."*

<div align="right">(Anita, 45-year-old Filipina)</div>

In addition, prevalent opinions from the informants exhibit that they believe that their employer and agency inspect her Facebook and/or WhatsApp regarding how long they spend time on the Internet because both applications have a function to check if a user is online or not - a green spot appears when a user is online. The informants demonstrate that the employers asked them why they were always online and also blamed them about their addiction to the mobile phone. Additionally, the employers of these informants watched closely on their emotions and behaviours on social media. Many informants disclose that their employer always looked into their own display photos and updated status on WhatsApp; for example, one of the informants changed her display picture to be a black and white photo because she felt unhappy with their job; her employer asked her why she changed the picture. Some employers of the informants also asked them to remove their display photo in which they looked too sexy.

However, the level of privacy hinges on how their relationship with their employer or agency is. The informants say it is acceptable to mention about their display photos or behaviours on their social media, in case their relationship with their employer is good. On the other hand, they sense that some of their employers try to control them through mobile phones if they have a terrible relationship with their employer. This makes them decide to block only some of members in their employer's family. For example, May, who was verbally abused by her madam but had a good relationship with the madam's son, she still communicates with the son but blocks her madam as she says:

> *"[...] My ma'am, I blocked. But her daughter-in-law and son, I still have them on my Whatsapp. Sometimes the son messaged me like where are you? Why do you not come back? [...] He asked me to video call and I said no. Then they sent a photo to me. When I asked him do you eat already? He said how to eat lah…you don't cook for me. Why do you not come back lah? Aww so sad. I don't need to talk to him even I have a good memory with them. Sometimes my ma'am kept my phone right. The son and daughter-in-law said why do you keep her phone? Auntie needs to call her family.*

(May, 34 year-old-Indonesian)

Additionally, it should be mentioned about their understanding of how to manage privacy. It presents that the informants have various ways to address the conflict between digital technologies and their privacy. The simplest way is to block agencies and employers; for example, Cara, a Filipina, felt uncomfortable with her agent who stalked her Facebook and her posts on Facebook so she blocked her agencies and created a new one using her daughter name so that her agent would not know she has another Facebook account. However, she still contacts her agent via WhatsApp. Furthermore, Lisa blocked her husband who always asked when she could come back to Indonesia even though she explained about how hard she was facing at the moment. Her husband seemed not to understand her and sent heaps of text messages which made her felt angry and annoyed so she decided to block her husband on Facebook and Messenger.

Besides blocking, one of the informants use GBWhatsApp which is another version of WhatsApp that allows her to hide the online signal on her WhatsApp account which nobody knows if she is online. Lily actually uses this application with her boyfriend as she suspected

that he stalked her WhatsApp. Later, she uses this application with her employer as she controlled her behaviour even on WhatsApp.

A prevalent explanation when asked about how the informants approached to assistance when they were abused by their employer, which is regarded as their most private issue, is that most of them seek for help through the private conversation with the only trustworthy person. Most of the informants prefer to release their stress and disclose their trouble to their husband, boyfriend, or reliable relatives. Private conversation allows them to release their emotions comfortably because they are ensured that their stories will be confidential. Furthermore when ask about how they reached HOME shelter, most of the informants say that it is spread by word of mouth. Some of the informants also say that they are pleased to help other fellows who are abused by employers or agencies when they are asked for assistance through the private chat. However, they will not initially share their experiences in the public, even on their Facebook.

Theme 5: Information sharing for collective actions

The informants were requested to illustrate their experiences regarding using the Internet for finding information related to their job before they came to work in Singapore. Most informants, particularly Indonesians, say that news about domestic workers job spreads by word of mouth such as from their neighbours, classmates, and family's members. The Internet is useful for them to merely get job interviews and contract with their agency, but not for searching for the information with regard to labour's rights and working conditions. When asked about the information they was informed by their agency, the informants say that they were informed about MOM regulations and some Singaporean laws related to their job. Nevertheless, they were not told about their rights such as their right to have enough rest at night time and their days off. Since salary is the main factor for leaving their family to work abroad, what they concern about the most is their salary and rest days. Most of them say that they have never heard about the abuse against MDWs before their departure. Although some of them have heard about it, they believe it depends on their luck.

In response to the questions about sharing their own experiences to other fellows, eight informants do not desire to share or even ask for any advices regarding their troubles and the struggles of their migration journeys. This is because they are afraid of being gossiped and the rumour about their struggles in Singapore will reach to their parents and families in their hometown which make them worry about. Particularly, three informants mentioned about the

difference between male and female community since the communities of female MDWs they met is full of gossip stories about other fellows. That is the reason why they feel more comfortable to share with the person they trust as an informant says:

> *"[...] I don't like to have lots of female friends…I don't want to tell them my story even I have a problem. You know...women are full of gossip. I'm afraid of gossip. That's why I try not to engage with other DWs."*

<div align="right">(Angie, 34-year-old Indonesian)</div>

Another reason is that their family's members and neighbours are their Facebook's friends. If they tell their stories on their own Facebook's wall or in Facebook groups, their relatives and neighbours might be aware of their troubles and overthink about their situations in Singapore. The informants explain that since their family's members do not understand the situation and MOM's process, they might concern if they release their grievance on Facebook.

It is also evident that sharing their own story on Facebook can hurt speakers back, even though they want to give guidance to other fellows. Three of the informants reveal that they told their story on their own Facebook to release their stress and wish to get some advices from their friends. However, they received negative comments and criticisms from their Facebook friends which made them traumatic. One of them has decided not to log in to her Facebook until her case with MOM will be finished and she will be repatriated because she is not able to deal with those negative feedbacks; for example, *"can Facebook help you find a solution?"*, and *"this is only a small problem lah"*. She explains that those people do not truly understand her situation and put their comments based on their experiences.

Another informant reveals that one of her close friends told the informant's trouble with other people after she disputed against her friend. This disempowers her to share her advices to other fellows even though she is enthusiastic to share useful information from her own experiences in a secret Facebook group as she mentions:

> *"[...] I don't like sharing this to other people but sometimes I need to speak up. I have to share. Last time, I shared this to my three close friends. I shared everything when we were in a good situation. But when we have an argument, they told my secret. [...] Then one of her friends called me and she knew that I'm here (HOME shelter). You know I feel so bad this week. I don't want to share my story to any of my friends. Because Indonesia is Indonesia….they are*

busy with what other people do. I don't want them to laugh at me. In Singapore, if you are here, it means nothing...friends just gave me some advices. But in Indonesia it's different, I don't want people to talk behind me...gossip me. [...]"

(Lily, 27-year-old Indonesian)

10. Discussion

This chapter will present the findings of the analysis in connection to the research questions and theoretical framework – a theory of polymedia and gendered mobility – which were discussed in chapter 7. This research is argued that mobile phones and the Internet are a source of power for MDWs to negotiate the power with their employer and agency; however, the deficiency of digital literacies limits their ability to use digital technologies as much as it can be exploited. The study also highlights the interconnectedness between physical and virtual mobility because MDWs have the ability to combine physical mobility and virtual one to access to the resources that can enhance their migration life.

10.1 A Theory of Polymedia

The results cause the discussion on Facebook as polymedia that could lead to social change since MDWs use Facebook as a mobile phone and manage their emotions and struggles in their lives. The results also raise the discussion about how Facebook could, or could not, bring the change regarding their working conditions and quality of life as MDWs.

Facebook as polymedia

Although the research's topic is about mobile phones, the discussion below will devote to MDWs' perception about Facebook. This is because the findings show that the informants perceive Facebook as mobile phones and the Internet due to its availability and affordability as mentioned in the previous chapter. However, the communicative environment on the online world is not the same as offline world (Madianou 2015). Both are required different kinds of skills to exploit each choice of communication. Digital literacies are important for their virtual mobility as it mixes of various kinds of people and structures. When travel through Facebook, MDWs have to deal with their relationships with other people and the environment within media (Madianou and Miller 2013).

The findings exhibit three kinds of relationships within Facebook as discussed in polymedia theory – the relationships between those media within a communicative environment, the relationships between human beings and technologies, and the relationships among people in media (Madianou 2015, 2). Firstly, it is evident that social media have been developed until their functions are similar; for example, users can voice-call, video-call, send messages, and produce their own contents through Facebook which has the same functions as other social media such as WhatsApp and Imo. The informants decide to keep only a few applications that their friends are on. The results are different from what Madianou and Miller (2012) and Miller and Sinanan (2014) found in the beginning of the new media era which there is only a few Internet-based interpersonal media such as Skype and Email (see the discussion in chapter 6 and 7). Functions on social media nowadays, nevertheless, may not be as important as persons on those platforms.

Secondly, regarding the relationships between human beings and technologies (Madianou 2015, 2), Facebook is the most convenient choice to maintain their relationship and expand their network. The results present that Facebook does not require the informants' phone number in order to add their friends into Facebook. It means that the informants do not need to exchange their phone number which is difficult to remember or search for.

It is of note that there is the conflict between digital technologies and users' privacy. According to the interviews, the informants themselves are aware of employers' surveillance and attempt to negotiate with their employer through mobile phones. The multifunction of social media enables MDWs to negotiate the power on communication. As mentioned, the informants prefer text-based communication because it allows them to pretend to be absent from communication while transmitting their messages. In other words, they conceal their ability to communicate with the world outside from their employer through text messages. This study agrees with Madianou and Miller's argument (2013, 170-171) that way of communication is also a message as each user exploits multifunction of each social media which is most suitable for their purpose and situation. Although the most common way to protect their private life of the informants is text-based communication for their everyday conversations, voice-based communication is a desirable choice of communication to transmit their love and regard to their family and intimate companions.

Thirdly, with respect to the relationships among people in media, there is an attempt to manage their relationships with various kinds of people on Facebook. The findings exhibit

that the informants' Facebook friends are not 'true' friends in sense that the informants do not desire to share their troubles with. Facebook friends, nevertheless, might not be different from the offline ones. They can become true friends if they can maintain and assist each other when they need. The level of intimacy depends on how their relationships are mediated. Facebook merely facilitates them talking to one another through Facebook's posts even they do not directly talk to each other. This findings is consistent with Miller et al.'s findings (2016, xvii) that *Facebook is not simply a form of friending but it is usually used to keep people in the right distance*.

Facebook and social change on MDWs in the context of Singapore

The results enable a wider perspective into the interconnectedness between polymedia and significant alternation in laws, behaviour patterns as well as cultural patterns and norms. Madianou and Miller (2013) argued that the consequences of polymedia can extend beyond the context of interpersonal communication. Especially when using polymedia together with the notion of mediatisation, it can lead to the social change (Madianou 2014, 672). Additionally, previous researches suggested that mobile phones can alleviate MDW's stress from work and the isolation condition (Hamel 2009; Smales 2011; Frantz 2014).

The results from my study demonstrate that although Facebook and Messenger can help the informants relieve their stress and approach to assistance from other fellows and human rights groups, it might be difficult to use Facebook for collective actions or campaign for the better working conditions on domestic work because of the scare of being gossiped. As mentioned, the informants are aware that sharing their troubles and experiences with other people would become a rumour and cause their trauma. When their stories become public, people might judge and criticise them in a negative way. This is the cost of social change each MDW needs to pay at her own expense.

However, being afraid of gossip does not imply only subjectivity but also reflects various aspects of social structure and culture. As presented, news and job opportunities about MDWs are spread by word of mouth within their village. Word of mouth is a major mode of communication in traditional society and rural areas since the community is not roomy and crowded. The scandal of each MDW, therefore, might widely and quickly spread to her parents by her neighbours – although some of them talk about her unlucky story because of care. The scare of gossip is also link to the lack of abilities to evaluate, analyse, produce data,

and to understand online privacy management. The problems can, nevertheless, be addressed by enhancing their digital literacies through national and international schemes.

Furthermore, Facebook, in the context of MDWs in Singapore, is best described as a conservative and passive space, not a radical one. This is because Facebook has been utilised for seeking an assistance, not to directly call for the better working conditions and quality of life. The interviews exhibit that MDWs think domestic helpers are a decent work due to the scarcity of jobs and their living conditions in their home country (Maidanou and Miller 2012; Hakim and Fitrianto 2015). The concept of traditional motherhood has been changed since neoliberal globalisation restructured local gender orders (Connell and Pearse 2015, 88). Being a breadwinner is referred as a 'good' mother who is able to make more money to raise her children. This is because SAPs have forced public sector to cut and reduce social services as well as privatise state agencies (ibid, 88). The informants wish to be a successful woman in this career through finding a generous employer and adapting themselves to their employer's family. When asked about the negotiation with the government or MOM to amend the law, all the informants immediately said 'no', reasoning that they are just unlucky to meet their heartless employer and their left behind family is waiting for their remittances.

Additionally, Facebook is passively used because MDWs help each other through private messages over their daily-use applications such as Messenger and WhatsApp. The informants also state that they will help other fellows when someone approaches them but will not initiate to share their story. The pattern of their assistance is to help one another by word of mouth. For instance, when MDWs need a help they will ask her close friend who has worked in Singapore before for advices. If their close friend cannot help them, then their friend will ask or suggest her to contact another fellow who has ever experienced the similar situation.

10.2 Gendered mobility

To shed the light on the intersection of physical mobility, virtual mobility and gender, the discussion emphasises on MDWs' ability to access as it is fundamentally a gendered phenomenon (Uteng 2011, 4). The findings reveal how gender has affected full mobility and semi-mobility as well as the content of communication in relation to the division between public and private on the online arena (Inkinen 2008, 215) which will be explored in the sections below.

The intersection of gender and physical and virtual mobility of MDWs

Relating to Uteng's argument (2011, 47) which claimed that access is a key to understand gendered mobility; MDW's practices of mobility are controlled by the state through employers of each MDW. The findings exhibit that there are the strict controls over MDWs' communication and movement; for instance, the curfew on their off days and the confiscation of their mobile phones are implemented by employers in order to secure their 5,000 SGD-security bond in case of employees' pregnancy and marriage with Singaporean guys or employee's disappearance to stay with their partner (see the discussion in Chapter 2). The limited freedom of movement is not only the problem at individual level between the employer and his/her employee but also indicate the crux at national one. This is because the state is likely to tighten up national migration restrictions owing to the fear of temporary migrants might turn into new ethnic minorities in the receiving country (Castles, Haas, and Miller 2013, 242). As pointed out in Chapter 2, the Singaporean government pushes the responsibility to police transient domestic workers to their employers and conceal the problem from the public sphere. The informants ascribe their situation as severe confinement, especially during the first 2-6 months of their contract during which they did not get the permission to go out and call their family.

With regard to virtual mobility, the findings are similar to the previous researches (see Rowntree 2018; Uteng 2011, 48; Platt et al, 2016) showing that the informants can access to mobile phones since they brought theirs from their home country. Additionally, the cost of mobile phones and mobile data might not be the influential barrier to access to the ICTs (Thompson 2009; Uteng 2011). However, when people become transnational migrants, the access to SIM cards of the host country is the main obstacle. As mentioned, purchasing a Singaporean SIM card requires the migrant worker's identity document such as a work permit and a passport. It is almost impossible for migrants to obtain their own SIM card if their right to hold identity papers is not protected by laws.

However, the results reveal that the informants can combine their little ability to move physically and virtual mobility to help them from emergency situations. For instance, some of the informants did not tell their employer about their second mobile phone while many of them borrowed a mobile phone from the neighbour's domestic helper or asked the neighbour to top-up mobile data for them. In some cases, they exploited employer's Wi-Fi as they quested for the Wi-Fi password in the house.

In accordance with Uteng's suggestion (2011, 46) which claimed that there are two aspects to make an understanding about gendered virtual mobility – social realm and individual practices. Firstly, considering about social realm or the setting in their everyday life, the findings exhibit that everyday mobility of MDWs is limited due to their employer's surveillance along with the nature of domestic work which confines them within the employer's house. Nonetheless, some informants have opportunities to travel physically since they needed to take employer's kids to school. They exploit these opportunities to share their situation with other fellows they meet on the way; for example, Celyn exchanged her Facebook contact with a Filipina fellow she always walked past on the way to another apartment of her employer. For this reason, this Filipina worker becomes her only one friend in Singapore and assisted Celyn to find a new agency.

Secondly, regarding the dimension of individual practices and personal background of each individual (Uteng 2011, 46), the findings exhibit that the informants' virtual mobility is circumscribed by their limited access to a top-up card, due to the restriction on physical mobility and the delay of their salary. The pattern of MDWs' semi-mobility is limited to Facebook which is regarded as a free application because of special monthly top-up offers from telecommunication companies. As mentioned, the informants exploit Facebook as mobile phone, Google, Internet browsers and their imagined communities.

The results also show that in their home country, mobile phones are not a considerable personal stuff of many of the informants since they have never been extremely separated from their family and community. They have less digital skills which are enlightened by their children or relatives. The findings, however, reveal that their migration journeys which are regarded as physical mobility significantly improves their digital literacies, particularly the ability to learn and exploit nascent technologies that fit to their purpose. It is of note that other dimensions of digital literacies such as the ability to evaluate, analyse, and produce data need to be improved. As mentioned, a large number of the informants state that they do not know how to search and extract data from the Internet as well as post a video or a photo on their social media. These abilities could also be enhanced at their home countries as it may be related to their level of education and mobility in their hometown. However, this issue is out of the scope of this research due to the limited timeframe.

Public and Private

In relation to the content of communication (Inkinen 2008, 215), the issue that appears over and over again in MDWs' experience on social networking is gossip. In the rural of the Philippines and Indonesia, it is a kin-oriented society where important information is spread by word of mouth (Madianou and Miller 2012, 64; Hakim and Fitrianto 2015) as the results show that the informants hear about employment opportunities and get inspired to work as an MDW from their neighbours and relatives. Nevertheless, the kin-oriented society makes MDWs uneasy to share useful information and discuss about their working conditions and quality of life as a domestic worker through social media platform. It is evident that the informants do not want to share their unsuccessful stories because Facebook is regarded as their imagined village where their family and neighbours will see the stories and tell their family about their situation.

The blurred line between public and private on digital technologies creates the complexity in balancing between their privacy and the isolation condition. The informants illustrate that they hesitate to talk about the difficult part of their life when working in the host country, except their successful stories. As a contract labour with the live-in policy, contemporarily staying in a shelter for migrant workers means that they are naughty women and unsuccessful with their job. Therefore most of the informants keep quiet on their social media when staying in the shelter. Some of them make their life as if they were still working. They continue sending their salary to their left behind family so that their family's members will not be curious about their situation in Singapore. This is because Facebook makes their personal life public and every of their Facebook friends will know if there is something wrong with them in case they are not online as usual.

However the level of privacy for each individual is various, relying on their relationships with the one each individual communicates with and how each people perceive the meaning of each social media. The content that MDWs share on their own Facebook wall will be selected, even a MDW post a photo of herself crying. For some informants, posting on their own Facebook wall means they are not willing to talk to particular people but just talking to themselves on social media as they think that Facebook is personal and they can ignore negative comments from their Facebook friends. While some of them decide to communicate with their family and 'true' friends through Messenger which is more private.

In a nutshell, virtual mobility can substitute for physical mobility; however, ones cannot achieve semi-mobility if they cannot access to full mobility at the first place. Physical and virtual mobility cannot be separated from each other and mutually shape each MDW's journey. The results exhibit that before the informants are able to approach to human right advocacy groups, they have experienced physical mobility before and engaged with some people outside their employer's house. MDW's virtual mobility is directly controlled and influenced by people on their social media platform while the receiving state which regulates the law policing their movements indirectly shapes their virtual mobility. The challenge to gendered virtual mobility of MDWs is to seriously protect their fundamental rights such as the right to hold identity documents and the right to freedom of movement by laws as well as increase their digital literacies before their migration journey starts.

11. Conclusion and further research

This research began with several reports from the human rights groups which stated that *in the information age, the risk for migrant workers can be reduced by access to information both prior to and during their migration journeys* (Hamel 2009, 19). Filipina and Indonesian MDWs in Singapore were selected to be a case study because live-in MDWs represent the extreme isolation condition while Singapore is an outstanding receiving country which has been reported on discrimination and abuse against MDWs (Varia 2015; HOME and Liberty Shared 2019). The aim of this research is to discover the thick description of MDWs' everyday mobility on their mobile phones and the Internet such as how they combine each function of each online social media to (not) communicate with other fellows and conceal their communication from their employer. This was explored through these research questions;

1. A) How do live-in MDWs use ICTs, particularly mobile phones and the Internet, to build and manage their community? B) And what is the consequence of mobile phones and the Internet usage?

2. To what extent, can virtual mobility through mobile phones and the Internet address the limited physical mobility of live-in MDWs?

Madianou and Miller's theory of polymedia and Uteng and Cresswell's theory of gendered mobility generally shaped the epistemology of this research, especially with regard to the methodology and the validity of analysis. Both theories facilitated me, as a researcher, pose

interview questions, the dialogue between the informants and me, and distract knowledge from the informants' voices. The theories shaped a means the informants and I built the knowledge together.

Following fieldwork and qualitative interviews with five Filipinas and six Indonesians, the findings were divided into five themes. Firstly, accessibility, it is evident that access to Singaporean SIM cards is a considerable challenge as it is required their work permit for procurement. However the law to protect MDW's right to hold work permit is not seriously enforced. Facebook has become a tool to address their limited access to physical mobility and mobile top-up cards. Secondly, digital literacies, the results show that MDWs generally have low digital skills; however, they have ability to learn and use digital technologies to connect to people in their social circles. The next one is social relationships which are usually mediated through online platforms as MDWs are confined in the employer's house. Facebook facilitates them find new friends and, in some case, helps them escape from their abusive employer. However, Facebook groups are unpopular communities since they still need their private lives and their leisure time is limited. Another one is privacy which its level depends on how each MDW's relationship with their employer or agency is. MDWs are likely to be aware of surveillance and attempt to prevent their social media profile from their employer and agency if their relationship is abusive. The informants also prefer text-based communication since it is affordable, secretive, and quiet in sense that no one can hear their conversation. Lastly, information sharing for collective actions, the results reveal that sharing information is not successful because of the scare of being gossiped and getting negative comments from their social media friends. Mobile phones and the Internet are also not useful for acquiring more data about their job before they start the job since they concentrate more on salary and the future of their children.

The results cause the discussion on Facebook as polymedia that could lead to social change. Since MDWs use Facebook as a mobile phone, it has become a tool to manage their emotions and struggles in their life during their journeys in Singapore. It also reveals that Facebook is a conservative and passive space because it is utilised to ask for help when each MDW has a problem but not for collectively prevent MDWs from poor working conditions and quality of life in the host country. With regard to gendered mobility, the results raise the concern about the law enforcement to protect the rights of guest-workers which can affect their virtual mobility. Additionally, the findings bring to the discussion on the vagueness between public and private sphere on social media and how gender shapes their online behaviour.

In this research, it is argued that mobile phones and the Internet are a source of power for MDWs to negotiate the power with their employer and agency; however, the deficiency of digital literacies limits their ability to use digital technologies as much as it can be exploited. The study also highlights the interconnectedness between physical and virtual mobility because MDWs have the ability to merge physical mobility and virtual mobility in order to approach to the resources that can enhance their migration journeys. The challenge to gendered virtual mobility is to earnestly protect fundamental rights of guest-workers by laws as well as increase their digital literacies before their migration journeys start.

Further research

There is a lot more in relation to this research to be expanded and discovered. Firstly, the further research should deepen into MDWs and the use of ICTs in their home countries; for example, how MDWs use their mobile phone in their hometown. The physical and virtual mobility in MDWs' hometown should be studied since it is essential to their digital literacies and ability to access to the Internet in the home country. To find out ways to improve their digital literacies, the further research should answer the questions like what are the factors in their home country that make these female migrants lack of ability to analyse and evaluate the information.

Secondly, to broaden the issue about migration and ICTs, the research questions and methodology can be adapted to explore the mobile phones' usage in other subaltern communities such as female labour in garment factories and migrant fishermen in Thailand. These researches will help ethnographers map the meaning of mobile phones and the Internet in other communities around the world.

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Interviewees' profile

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Level of Latest Education	Marriage Status	Years of Working in Singapore	Daily-used applications
Julia (Filipina)	42	-	Married and have 3 children	More than 4 years	- Facebook - Messenger - WhatsApp - Youtube
Anita (Filipina)	45	Certificates from nursing school	Married and have 1 child	More than 10 years	- Facebook - Messenger - WhatsApp
Cara (Filipina)	31	Collage	Have a life partner and have 3 children	0.4 year	- Facebook - Messenger - WhatsApp - Youtube
Celyn (Filipina)	45	High school	Married and have 2 kids	0.4 years	- Messenger - WhatsApp
Genie (Filipina)	25	Collage	Single	1.10 year	- Facebook - Messenger - WhatsApp
Angie (Indonesian)	34	High school	Single	11 years	- Facebook - WhatsApp
Lisa (Indonesian)	34	Collage	Married and have 1 son	1.6 year	- Facebook - Messenger - Whatsapp
Sara (Indonesian)	34	Collage	Married and have 2 children	1.5 year	- Facebook - Messenger - WhatsApp - Youtube
Lily (Indonesian)	27	-	Single mom, have 1 son	3 years	- Facebook - Messenger - WhatsApp - GBWhatsApp
May (Indonesian)	34	Collage	Separated but have 2 children	3.2 years	- Facebook - Messenger - WhatsApp - Imo
Nancy (Indonesian)	30	High school	Single	7 years	- Facebook - Messenger - WhatsApp - WeChat

Appendix B

Interview questions

In the interview, I will begin with the introduction of myself and the summary of my research project. I then ask the research participants about the consent of recording their voices. The interview questions are:

1) Please introduce yourself

- What is your name?/How old are you?/Where do you from? (in which part of your country?)
- Did you get married?/Do you have kids?
- How long have you worked in Singapore?

The role of ICTs prior to their migration journey

2) Why do you decide to work as a domestic worker in Singapore?

- What did you know about Singapore before came to work here?/ What kinds of information do you get?
- How do you get the information about working in Singapore?
- Did you know anyone who works in Singapore before you came here?
- Do you think you got enough information before you want to work here?/ What do you want to know more about working as a maid in Singapore?
- What do you think about your job and your life here?/ Is it different from what did you think before you come here?
- How long do you plan to work here?

The role of ICTs during their migration journey

3) How is your life in Singapore?

- Please tell me about your daily life
- What is your hobby here?/ What do you do in your freetime?
- How do you meet your friends here?
- How do you get to know new people here?/ Do you have any friends from other countries that work in the same job?
- What do you like/dislike in Singapore?
- Do you think you can integrate to this country? How hard to integrate to Singaporean culture?

- How often do you join any social events here?

Accessibility, availability, and affordability

4) Please tell me about how you use your mobile phones and access to the Internet when you are in Singapore

- Do you have your own mobile phone, tablet, computer?
- How do you manage your income to pay for your phone or internet bill?
- How often do you use it?/ When do you always use it?
- Are you allowed to use your mobile phone at your employer's home?/ If not, how do you deal with it?
- What is the difficulty to access and use the Internet?

Digital literacies

5) Are you familiar with information communication technologies?

- How do you learn to use each media/application?
- Which applications do you like/dislike to connect with your community here? Why?

6) How do you create online content? How often? When?

- In which way do you use each application? For what purpose?

ICTs and mobility

6) How do you use your ICTs to improve your life?

- What kinds of information/message do you always share with your friends/community?
- What kinds of information do you prefer to receive from your friends/community?
- In which way do you think that mobile phones and the Internet can facilitate you find social and emotional support?
- Have you ever experienced on using ICTs in order to call for the better working conditions and/or living standard here? How?
- How do ICTs facilitate you to cope with emergency or risky situation?

7) Please tell me about how do you build and manage online community

- For what purpose do you build your online community?
- Have you ever shared information and/or find emotional/social support with MDWs from other countries?

- (How) do MDWs create a cross-culture online community (between Filipina and Indonesian MDWs)?
- How often do people in the online community meet face-to-face?

The consequences of ICTs usage

8) What do you think about the importance of technologies particularly mobile phones and the Internet for your daily life when working in Singapore?

- Positive and negative effects of using ICTs prior and during your migration journey
- Do you think communication technologies prolong your work in Singapore? How?