

## FEMALE AGING AND MOBILE PHONES: SHARING SUBJECTIVITIES AND COLLECTIVITIES IN MOBILITY PROCESSES



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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes aging women in their connections with digital technologies in urban mobility contexts. It studies women from the lower classes, aged sixty or over, who still work and travel in the city of Rio de Janeiro by subway and BRT with their cell phones. Dialoguing with digital anthropology and the agency between humans and non-humans, the study invests in an ethnographic approach to map the experiences of these women in the use of their cell phones, the consequences of these uses, and the relationships with broader sociocultural contexts. The research indicates that aging women navigate their cell phones during the trips of home-work routines with multiple connections: engaging in sociability along the way, with affective dialogues with people close to them, but also investing in subjective processes, activating memory with online games or following pages of spiritual guidance or connections with musicalities. Therefore, commuting time with mobile phones is designed as multifaceted: plural, challenging, with risks but also with creative opportunities.

**Keywords:** Female aging. Mobile phones. Digital anthropology. Psychosociology. Mobilities.

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## INTRODUCTION

"I don't know how to *download* apps on my cell phone. Young people don't have the patience to explain, so when I ask my grandson for help, he takes the phone out of my hand and does what he should teach me: step by step. We never had classes to learn how to use cell phones. For my generation, learning is informal, in trial and error... But at the same time, how to be in the world today without staying connected? Impossible.. There is a lot of desire from people my age to know more about technology to be in the world in a more integrated way. I think there is a lot of curiosity to know more about the digital world, despite our difficulties." This was one of the first testimonies I heard from one of the participants in a workshop I organized at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro on female aging and digital literacies in the second half of 2023<sup>2</sup>. Miriam, 67, makes clear this ambivalence that evokes double feelings of inclusion and exclusion from the digital world.

The article examines an ethnographic experiment with aging women who practice new modes of interpersonal relationships and other ways of life in the social uses of technology in contexts of mobility, in home-work-home routines, in the subway and BRT, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The research is based on the field of digital anthropology and works with the understanding of the social uses of digital technologies and their consequences through participant observation and collaborations of the interlocutors in sharing their *online* and *offline experiences* (MILLER *et al*, 2022; WANG, 2022; MACHADO, MARQUES, 2021).

The emergence of studies on aging in the world and in Brazil has a clear justification when we observe the demographic data and their projections for the coming years. According to United Nations statements, approximately 3.1 billion elderly people will have approximately 3.1 billion elderly people in the world by 2100. This represents 29.8% of the world's population. In Brazil, the number of people over 60 is growing and in 2022 elderly people represented a total of 14.6% of the national population. In absolute terms, according to United Nations projections, there will be 73.3 million elderly people in the country in 2100, representing 39.7% of the local population. These data reveal the

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importance of developing public policies and care practices for aging populations, valuing their strengths and discussing sociocultural and psychosocial processes of inclusion.

In terms of smartphone uses, Brazil is the fifth country in the world with the highest number of active mobile phone users, behind Indonesia, the United States, India and China. It is interesting to note that there are 1.2 smartphones per inhabitant in the country, adding up to a total of 258 million devices in use. This data was collected in 2024 in the 35th edition of the IT user survey of Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV). In contrast, the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) states that the Brazilian population is 203 million people.<sup>3</sup> According to data from PNAD (National Household Sample Survey), the use of smartphones among older people grew from 73% to 76.1% in 2024.

In this sense, the focus of the work is to understand how women, over 60 years of age, with a family income of up to three minimum wages, who still work, conduct their home-work-home journeys, by subway or BRT, with their cell phones. We observe, therefore, the social uses of the technologies that circulate and how the collective assemblages of enunciation (Deleuze; Guattari, 1980) are produced in socio-technical networks. The questions that guide the article are outlined as follows: how do social imaginaries permeate these women's experiences with their smartphones in their daily routines, on the way home to work? How are actor-network relations processed (LATOUR, 2012) in the investigated paths?

The analyses and final thoughts discuss the ethnographic findings, evidencing the thesis of how smartphones can be seen as "*smart from below*" (MILLER *et al*, 2022), also discussing the concept of mobility (URRY, 2007) and agency (DELEUZE, GUATARRI, 1980) in the sense of analyzing mobility from multiple perspectives. We also invited Latour (2012) and Haraway (2022) to analyze the interfaces of humans and non-humans in the processes of women who age with their smartphones.

<sup>3</sup> This distortion is due to the fact that it is very common in Brazil for the same person to have more than one cell phone: one for professional matters and another for personal matters. Data from IT research. Available at: <https://portal.fgv.br/noticias/pesquisa-revela-brasil-tem-480-milhoes-dispositivos-digitais-uso-sendo-22-habitante> Accessed on: 24 mar. 2025. The data on the national population are from the IBGE News Agency. Available at: <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-noticias/2012-agencia-de-noticias/noticias/41111-populacao-estimada-do-pais-chega-a-212-6-milhoes-de-habitantes-em-2024>. Accessed on: 10 mar. 2025. And the data from the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) are from Agência Brasil. Available at: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2024-08/uso-de-internet-no-pais-cresce-mais-entre-idosos-mostra-ibge>. Accessed on: 10 mar. 2025

## METHODOLOGY

In the second half of 2023 I organized a digital literacy workshop at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. The practice lasted fifteen meetings with women with a family income of up to three minimum wages, aged 60 or over, who still work outside the home. The experiences involved sharing ideas and mutual learning about aging and digital cultures. All participants had cell phones, but complained of poor knowledge about apps and platforms. The approach involved actively listening to their doubts, learning desires and curiosities about digital culture and we tried to share experiences based on the demands evoked. The workshop received eighteen women from different neighborhoods of the city of Rio de Janeiro. During the meetings, we ensured a space for multiple learnings: we asked them what they would like to learn about technologies and navigated together through the different applications and social networks on their smartphones. They were asked to show us their cell phones and how they used them creatively.

As the meetings progressed, the degree of trust between us increased and during the first half of 2024 I was able to ask permission to accompany them on their home-work-home routes on urban transport - subway and BRT - to observe how they used their mobile phones on trips. With the expanded empathy between us, I was able to share the daily journeys of ten interlocutors and this article describes my interactions with four of them: Mirian, Antonia, Rebeca and Sueli. Their names are fictitious to protect their identities, as is tradition in anthropological studies. We spend, on average, two hours a day on commuting between the subway and the BRT during three trips with each of them. For the four interlocutors presented here, the time of the home-work-home journey is almost entirely dedicated to sharing experiences on their smartphones. This is an intriguing phenomenon of the contemporary scene because it involves two different modes in the experiences of mobility: the time of commuting home-work-home and the shared online time of multiple sociabilities.

In the participant observation, it was possible to follow how they used their phones and the notes in the field diary contributed a lot to the understanding of the ways in which our interlocutors get involved with digital platforms, how they navigate, what and why they publish messages on social networks and what their favorite media content is and when they use it. We then compared some of the results of our local ethnographies with the *Anthropology of Smartphone and Smart Ageing project* at the Institute of Anthropology at *University College London*.

In "A theory of a theory of the smartphone", Miller (2021) argues that the theoretical construction must emerge from comparative ethnography. In other words, the author suggests that the theory is a result of the revisited cases given that the analysis of the human phenomenon mediated by technology in specific issues with smartphones emerges from the experience of the field.

Our investment mapped processes along the lines of Latour (2012) when he suggests that, in order to unveil the ANT (Actor-Network Theory), the social experience must be oriented towards the construction of maps of associations based on the traces, marks and clues left by the actors. And in the configuration of the network to be investigated, non-humans are also endowed with agency. Latour's perspective is closely linked to Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) idea of rhizome. For these authors, rhizomatic logic is configured as a map with multiple inputs and outputs with segmentarity lines and vanishing lines, always as heterogeneous processes.

### **SOME NUANCES OF FEMALE AGING IN DIALOGUES WITH THE INTERLOCUTORS**

During the fieldwork, the theme of female aging emerges with different nuances. Rebeca told me that at 63, she doesn't think about retirement. This thinking is motivated by the precarious working conditions in which it is involved and the analysis of its vulnerabilities. She argues that if she quits her job now, she would only receive a minimum wage for retirement and would have to give up the health insurance that the company where she works pays for her. This is how she describes the situation: "Currently in the company where I work, I receive two minimum wages and I have health insurance paid for by them. If I retire, my income is reduced to a minimum wage and I depend on the Public Health System, which for some things is very good, but it is also very full, especially in big cities like Rio de Janeiro. So, afraid of this condition and for these economic reasons, I will work until God wants and I have physical strength." Antonia, at 65, presents similar arguments saying that she will lose the right to private health insurance if she retires.

Sueli is the head of the family, has no husband or partner and supports four children and two grandchildren, all living in her house. She is the highest paid person in the family and, therefore, cannot quit her job. For Mirian, 69, these rational explanations about the financial conditions of work are added to the difficulty of thinking about having nothing to do in their free time. From his point of view, work is a guarantee of movement, of a living process.

For Rebeca, it is not the idea of resisting old age to stay young, physically or mentally, that is in focus. It is about understanding aging as a natural process of life cycles, but trying to find the physical and mental conditions to remain in the world of work. Miriam, in turn, says that she observes many good things in maturity, such as the wisdom acquired, the life stories that have been going on for several decades, and the learning that better modulates affections. The question for her is how to balance this positive experience of aging with the decline of the body and the maintenance of the workforce. In his own words: "When I think I'm over sixty, I don't worry at all about aesthetic issues, my fear is that I won't have the strength to work, because my work routine requires physical effort and that's why I'm afraid I won't be able to handle it. My problem is really the fear of the decline of the powerful body for work".

In all these cases, the idea of ageing is associated with a concrete risk of exclusion from the labour market. They all tell me that they are afraid of aging, of being dependent on others, of no longer having the strength to work, of having their health weakened. However, what is interesting is that his impressions of aging do not involve the processes of subjectivation of the cult of joviality that are dominant in our contemporary Western society. (DELEUZE, GUATARRI, 1980). The discourses of consumer societies and their advertising scenarios overvalue anti-aging products, sell formulas that promise eternal youth, and when they refer to the elderly in their campaigns, they usually refer to them as "young at heart", "young old". In this sense, in advertising, the experience of old age is evidenced by the hegemonic discourse of youthful virtuosity (MACHADO, 2011, CASTRO, 2016).

In *Old Age*, Beauvoir (1970) pointed out that the elderly are described as powerful, magicians, holders of divine knowledge, healers. The goddess Nerwik is an old woman who lives at the bottom of the waters with the spirits of the dead. According to legend, the deity refuses to protect seal hunters until a shaman comes to comb his hair. The author also observes that in traditional cultures, due to the strength of the culture of orality, old age is marked by the legacy of oral memory, where accumulated knowledge designates powers, magic, legacy. On the other hand, in the dominant Western cultures, Beauvoir (1970) points out that old age contradicts the virile ideal, insofar as societies tend to exalt the vigor and fecundity associated with youth and fear wear and tear and infertility.

The reports of the research participants pointed to the notion of paradoxical aging: they embrace the idea of welcoming and accepting maturity and its multiple conditions, such as wisdom, accumulated knowledge and even menopause, low libido and the decline



of the beauty traits of youth. The aesthetic dimensions do not seem very relevant in his discourses. However, the physical and mental strength of a younger condition, which allows them to remain integrated into the world of work, are virtues they do not want to give up.

In part, this desire not to age in the discourses of the interlocutors points to the scene of vulnerabilities, reveals the precariousness of protection for elderly people in Brazil, which even contradicts the protection provisions in the Statute of Elderly People in the country. In a world dominated by the logic of capital and the rhetoric of productivity, not having the right to a dignified and full retirement is a precarious condition. In this sense, Debert's (2004) contributions to thinking about the relationship between gender and aging are valuable. The author focuses in particular on the aging of women and examines the processes of social vulnerability and stigmatization that affect this group in the Western world. The author points out that social processes such as the social roles played by women as caregivers, their formal spaces in the home as wives and jobs with lower pay due to triple shifts help to shape this reality. And the successive social security reforms in the country that take little account of these singularities.

### **NAVIGATING WITH SMARTHONES: CREATING THREADS OF LIFE IN MOBILITY.**

It is interesting to note that, despite all the paradoxical view of female aging, the interlocutors studied manifest a lot of curiosity and desire for new learning. It is in this spirit that they dive into the digital field. The reports mentioned here reveal the ambiguities between pleasurable experiences with technologies, but often the risks and fears with little knowledge of digital languages appear as limiting factors in the social uses of applications and social networks.

During the time we spend on the subway/BRT, I observe Miriam and the first thing she does is check the messages she received on WhatsApp throughout the day and didn't have time to respond. In general, they are audio messages from the youngest daughter or husband telling news about what happened at home during the day. At work she didn't have time to update, so she uses her time for that in the first instance. In a second moment, the time is dedicated to the game Tetrix. She asked me if I would like to play and said that she likes this game because, in addition to being a way to rest the mind, it has the challenge of stimulating memory. Mirian associates gambling with a form of online therapy, a way to relax after an exhausting day at work.

Antonia, on the other hand, prefers to browse *Instagram*, scrolling through her friends' posts on her network. She is also a fan of *Tik Tok* and enjoys following influencers who share fashion, hair, and makeup tips. She also follows influencers who discuss everyday topics for women over 60: age prejudices, relationships with children and grandchildren, life projects, post-retirement life, as well as tips on social networks for older people.

On *Instagram*, Sueli likes to follow cooking recipes and fashion and makeup influencers. When it comes to cooking tips, she likes to follow the @panelaterapia page of Tatiana Romano, a psychologist who decided to become an influencer of recipe tips. Sueli says she likes to follow the page because it has easy recipes with accessible ingredients. Another recipe page she follows is @receitasdeminuto, which is collaborative and has tips for beginners with recipes that anyone can make.

Rebecca enjoys taking the subway and watching YouTube videos of the church she attends. She also takes time to listen to music, always related to the service she attends. She follows Pastor Deive Leonardo. She explains to me how she follows Pastor Deive on YouTube: 'I watch him preach the gospel and I really like the videos that give guidance on how to overcome life's challenges. He is very charismatic. The topics she most likes to see discussed online by pastors are: preaching about God, family, health and work.

**Figure 01** - Traveling with smartphones



Photo: own authorship with *blur* effect to protect the identities of the participants.

The interlocutors report that, in the past, they were bored on the bus, subway or BRT and, if they traveled seated, they often fell asleep or, if they were standing, they were bothered by the long waiting time. This scenario has changed completely: partly due to the consequences of using the smartphone while traveling. Antonia tells me that since she started using her *smartphone* on the BRT she forgets the time and that sometimes she misses the point where she should get off because she is absorbed interacting with her family, watching a video or looking for information on the device. As she notes, "It's funny



that I used to think that using public transportation was a sacrifice, boring, time that wasn't spent in endless traffic. Now I have my smartphone as a very loyal companion, and I use this time to relax, catch up, see interesting things that I would like to research. So it's the best time to relax."

Thus, the experience of commuting for these women has taken on a double meaning of mobility: the physical displacement of the distance from home to work and the cognitive-emotional displacement of the digital experiences that accompany them via cell phone.

### COMMUTING TIME: SOCIALIZING, RELAXING, OR WORKING ONLINE?

All of the women who participated in this survey agreed that their lives are very tumultuous, with triple workdays: work, housekeeping, and family relationships. Sueli, for example, when she gets home on the weekend she has to cook, clean the house and organize the chores for her granddaughter, who spends the weekend with her. So there is very little time left to relax. That's why the two-hour commute is dedicated to entertainment, as she says, "It's time to see things I like, like cooking recipes, makeup tips, different nail tips. I flip through the pages of *Tik Tok* without any commitment. It's my own time."

Antonia's experience is very interesting. She follows some digital influencers over 60 on *TikTok* and adds them as friends. She loves watching videos with tips on health problems, how to deal with children and grandchildren, and suggestions for social activities. And they all have a great sense of humor when sharing their experiences at this stage of life. One such influencer is @coracyarantes, who shares many comedy, dance, and lip-sync music videos. She also writes about fashion, beauty, and makeup. The influencer was once a professional hairdresser and that's why she has many videos with hair tips.

Rebeca, as already mentioned, spends a good part of her journey listening to Pastor Deive Leonardo on YouTube. She showed me the pastor's messages on YouTube. In her opinion, these videos help her to think about the power of faith, prayer to end discouragement, motivate belief in miracles and work on the idea of overcoming earthly problems. Rebeca feels recharged to face her triple workday. For her, the moment of religious connection is a moment of reflection, more intimate and individual.

Mirian has fun during her time on the BRT with the funny audio messages her daughter sends her during the day. The girl knows that her mother can't hear them when

she's at work, but she sends them anyway, hoping to be able to hear them on the bus before she gets home. Mirian describes this time of day as very good, as she comes home updated on her daughter's daily routine and responds along the way when there is a request for feedback from her.

Thus, the idea of online relaxation can be seen as more common among participants in their experiences with smartphones on longer commutes. The experience can be related to socialization and affective exchange, such as between Mirian and her daughter, or in a relationship of mediated friendship, such as between Antônia and the digital influencers she accompanies. It can also be a more fluid browsing experience, like Sueli's, who navigates through a variety of content that she finds enjoyable, such as cooking, fashion, and makeup tips. Or many introspective moments, commitments to faith and peace as Rebeca describes.

#### DIGITAL LITERACIES IN FRAGMENTS: INFORMAL LEARNING

The idea of informality is very present in the way these women interact with their smartphones. Some women are using smartphones for the first time in their lives. Rebeca didn't know how to post Instagram stories or photos to her feed. For a long time, she just created her own account on the app to see what others were posting. Her teenage niece is the one who, as she says: "[...]She had the patience to explain it to me, I wrote it step by step and now I post it myself. In fact, I still feel quite insecure, afraid of having done something wrong, but I keep trying, experimenting." Rebeca also showed me that her *Android* smartphone came with several apps that she has no idea what they are for: health apps, calendars, *Pinterest*, *Twitter*, *Netflix*, *Snapchat*. She only uses *YouTube*, *Instagram* and *WhatsApp*.

Sueli still has a more restricted use of her cell phone, she told me that she only uses it for calls or exchanging audio messages on *WhatsApp*, which she affectionately calls Zap. However, she has a lot of *WhatsApp* groups, a very interesting one called 'Wake Up, Guys!'), which basically brings together her friends who wake up at 4 a.m. and share their experiences of taking a van to the subway to work. Another group is with friends from the church, where they share many messages of support, solidarity and cultivation of spiritual life. The third is the family group, since many members of your family live in other states of the country. Sueli has difficulty writing text messages, so she shares audios and many

visual images, such as photos, audios, *prints*, stickers and *emojis*, wishing people a good morning or a good week, or religious vows or supporting friends in difficulty.

**Figure 02.** Prints of visual content circulating on your networks



**Source:** Prints sent by the interlocutors to the author.

Antonia shows me that she learned to search on her smartphone for health tips. She shares with me some posts from pages she follows on *Facebook* that give tips on how to find free psychological counseling and how far to donate blood. She is part of the Viva Vida Program and receives daily messages of support via *WhatsApp*. This health project created an avatar named Benedita who talks to her every day. Antônia considers Benedita a friend and feels that the project is creating a support network. As she mentions: 'Benedita is a figure, but I consider her a close friend, my advisor. She talks to me every day. I went through very difficult periods of depression. We think we are strong and let life take us, but there are times when we need help. So these *WhatsApp messages* are very useful.

**Figure 03.** Prints with references to the theme of health.



**Source:** Screenshots of messages that my interlocutors receive and sent me.

Miriam asked me what an algorithm meant, she didn't understand how the content hierarchy works on *Instagram* and *TikTok*. I explained that companies describe that, in the case of *Instagram*, the algorithm is organized according to your network of friends. What's relevant to your friends is what appears most often in their *feeds and reels*. *Tik Tok*, on the other hand, rearranges content according to the user's own movements: the content you liked or shared appears more. She said she understood, but thinks she should have courses and workshops to explain to the population how the platforms work. As she

mentions: "We hear about algorithms, that artificial intelligence will control us, but I feel that I have not yet mastered even the first moment of the internet. Everything I learned was from my own experience, looking at my phone or watching younger people. So, I don't really understand how to deal with these issues, but I'm trying to adapt. I even compare this with formal school, I only studied until the end of elementary school, the rest was intuitive learning. For me it's the same thing now."

Among the main difficulties they face when using a smartphone, the participants mention the fact that they prefer to use apps for entertainment and leisure activities, however, they note that a kind of digital citizenship is increasingly underway. And in this sense, they complain much more about the lack of formal learning for digital inclusion. The next session will focus on this question.

## E-CITIZEN? EMERGING CONFLICTS

Miriam complained a lot about how many issues in her life now depend on online apps. For example, the City Hall of the city where she lives suggested that she download the Unified Health System (SUS) app on her smartphone to schedule medical appointments and treatments. She warns: "How can I take care of my health and well-being if the government tells me to do everything through an app and I don't even know how to download it, let alone how to use it? I get stressed immediately and that's not good for my health." Rebeca also had a problem with the property tax and was advised to download the 1746 application, from the call center of the City of Rio de Janeiro to schedule an appointment. She says: "This is ridiculous, I don't know how to download an app on my phone and the City Hall has no other way to provide services than online, through an app. I have to wait for the goodwill of a younger member of my family or I won't be able to solve my problem." Sueli is a federal civil servant and was advised to download the Sou Gov application to receive a document proving her income for tax purposes. She seemed very upset that she couldn't solve the problem on her own and had to go to her workplace to ask the team for help. She mentions: "What they are doing to us is very bad because they are forcing us to exercise a kind of digital citizenship that we were not prepared for and no one tells us how to do it. It really bothers me."

Observing Mirian's irritation at having to ask her son for help to access a medical appointment, she complains that young people do not have the patience to explain how to download the app and clear up doubts. She says: "They just take the phone out of our

hands and quickly do it their way, but they don't explain how they did it. I feel like an anti-citizen at those times and I could barely understand the first phase of the internet with blogs, websites and social networks, imagine now with artificial intelligence? That's where I'm going to be left out!

**Figure 04** Prints of utility applications.



Source: Screenshots of the service applications that the interlocutors sent me.

## ONLINE INSECURITIES VS. INTIMACY: THE AMBIVALENCE OF SMARTPHONES

Sometimes, when we talk about smartphones, participants mention many concerns about the risks of using their devices. In many cases, they say that they hear all the time in the media about the risks of digital culture. It also corroborates a certain perception of an insecure environment in the public space of the city of Rio de Janeiro, where they live, and the uncertainties about security guarantees with regard to data theft or protection processes. One of the topics that comes up most in our conversations is cybersecurity issues, the threat and consequences of data theft, password theft schemes, and bank transfers by *hackers*. And in some cases, these are experiences reported by friends or family members. As Mirian told me: "My husband has already been the victim of a fraud with a banking app on his smartphone. He downloaded the bank's app, put my date of birth as a password and the *hackers* managed to find out and take the money he had in the account. It was very difficult for the bank to return the money. That's why I don't even want to know about downloading bank apps, I'd rather go to my branch and solve the matter myself. I think it's because I don't master the technology, so I'm easy prey for these *hackers*." Or a case reported by Antonia: "God forbid I can make financial transactions on my cell phone, I know of several cases of friends and relatives who were deceived, lost money in the bank and many were unable to recover. Therefore, in my opinion, cell phones should only be used to facilitate communication and for entertainment. I'm not crazy enough to put my whole life at the disposal of *hackers* or thieves."

These perceptions in the stories of Mirian and Antônia are supported by official data in Brazil. For example, the Brazilian Federation of Banks (Febraban) reported that 3 out of



10 Brazilians have already been victims of bank scams or fraud attempts (2022), highlighting the need for ongoing awareness and education campaigns to protect society as a whole. Sueli cites another case in which her sister-in-law clicked on a fake link and implanted a virus in her phone that allowed *hackers* to break into her private data. She says: "These issues scare me a lot because we don't have much knowledge about how apps work, we are an easy target for low technology knowledge, so I prefer not to take too many risks and only use the apps I know, I don't venture into new uses."

The interlocutors also mention the number of cases of theft of physical devices, such as the theft of laptops or smartphones that gives the thief access to the network and permission to access private data. As Mirian observes: "I have friends who have two cell phones: one to use on the street where they only have data from social networks and another with banking applications that they keep at home so that thieves do not take it. Well, I wouldn't have the money to buy two smartphones, so I don't even risk having financial transactions on mine."

All of these experiences seem to influence how they venture to exploit their smartphones in relation to financial transactions or online purchases. Mirian, for example, said that she bought her smartphone with many apps already installed, but that she doesn't know how to access almost any of them and that she really likes the socialization function of *WhatsApp*, *Tik Tok* and the playful dimension of online games. *She also comments that she is not interested in any other application, especially those that have to do with money. Antonia, in turn, says that she is so curious to explore her apps that she often ends up accepting cookies without even reading what they are about. And as already said, she browses Tik Tok exploring her emotional connection with digital influencers of her own generation and feels in an intimate environment, sharing concerns about children and grandchildren, health conditions, absorbing cooking and fashion tips. She often shows me how she interacts with the videos of the influencers she follows.*

Sueli prefers to concentrate all her texting activities on *WhatsApp*. She has several groups of family and friends and prefers to take advantage of the time she is on the transport to exchange messages with her relatives who live in Bahia. Thus, she showed me many photos that she sends and receives so that all family members can follow the growth of the children, their birthdays and important events, even from a distance. She also showed me the *memes*, *stickers* and *gifs* that they exchange as a form of affection and a



dose of humor in their relationships. This relational dimension of smartphones for socializing is very intense in the way the applications are used.

## **ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSES COMPARED – AGING WITH SMARTPHONES**

The presence of smartphones in the context of urban mobility has an important symbolic meaning for the participants: their devices are affective companions in home-work-home commutes. In particular, the notion of waiting time for transport is put into perspective in relation to the productive time to socialise or to engage in subjective processes, such as relaxation and leisure activities, such as playing games, listening to music or watching films.

The study *The Global Smartphone Beyond the Youth* Miller *et al* (2022) at University College London, had eleven ethnographers, who spent sixteen months living in communities in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. One piece of evidence from the survey was to observe the creative uses that people make of apps on their devices. In the fieldwork, they discovered that the smartphone device is just the beginning of several transformation processes that result in the unique uses that each participant makes of their device. The authors observe, listen, and learn from how each person adopts a unique style of exploring the capabilities of their devices. One of the findings in the study was to observe how relational smartphones are. For example, in Shanghai, older people share their smartphones with their partners and have many friends in the groups *We Chat* (Wang, 2022). Also in our fieldwork with women in Rio de Janeiro suggests that, in the context of urban mobility, the links to sociability are very strong: exchanges of messages with people close to us via *WhatsApp* in particular. But it is also possible to notice that Antonia's relationship with digital influencers of her same age group extends the bonds of friendship to this context, since she sees them as friends and, therefore, as an affective-relational investment.

The research in England also points out that another recurring observation was to perceive the uses of smartphones to expand the notion of perpetual opportunism. In other words, the ethnographies identified that many users describe that they routinely capture instant moments on their smartphones, either through photographs or videos or by the possibility of researching an interesting topic in real time. In our ethnography, this dimension is also evident. This is the case of Sueli, with her various family groups in the *WhatsApp*, who frequently exchange photos and videos of their private daily lives on a

daily basis, recording singular moments of their routines, expanding the sense of co-presence, even living in different parts of the country.

Another finding of the group's research in London is the idea of associating the smartphone with the notion of a transportable home. The analogy with the home appears as a space where the news of the world arrives, where it is possible to connect with friends and family or manage daily routines such as agendas and calendars, as well as the cleaning of the contents of the applications as a metaphor for home organization. The smartphone, the researchers suggest, has become less of a media platform and more of a portal for coordinating daily life. In our ethnography, we diverge somewhat from this perception of cell phones as a "transportable home." We observed in the reports of our participants that the house, as a territory of intimacy, is also seen as a space of security, privacy and welcoming, which is not the typical feeling of our interlocutors when they show me their smartphones and the use of applications. Perhaps because of the highly publicized discourse in Brazil about the risks of connecting online, participants relate to their mobile phones as devices between the private and public spheres. For example, they often don't want to risk using their smartphones for more personal tasks, such as online shopping or banking. And they seem very uncomfortable when they are asked to exercise their citizenship online, making an appointment with the SUS, paying bills such as property tax or income tax. They also do not mention experiences with agendas, schedules or search for journalistic information, nor routines for organizing or cleaning content. The most typical uses are for affection and sociability: whether exchanging messages with family and friends on *WhatsApp* or following influencers they identify with or observing and sharing routines with friends and partners.

The experience of the '*smart from below*' on the subject beyond the anthropomorphic machine is also observed in our study. Understanding that smartphones are programmed to influence humans with algorithms and artificial intelligence, but that humans are creative in their uses of technology, we can notice a double-meaning influence. The unique way in which Antônio describes her relationship with the avatar Bedita, from the Viva a Saúde project, is an example of this movement. Antonia suffers from depression and the daily exchange of messages with the AI-programmed avatar shows how creative the relationship can be: while Antonia reacts to the pre-programmed content, the avatar responds creatively to the teasing, creating an exchange of affections that is an important space of well-being for Antonia and helps her in her search for an active and healthy life.

If at the conclusion of *The Global Smartphone* The authors suggest that it was through the observation of the social uses of smartphones in comparative ethnographies that the balance between surveillance and care was perceived, among the women participating in the study we observed an ambivalence between insecurity and intimacy. As we have seen, the threats posed by the world of cybersecurity, namely episodes such as the theft of passwords and data and the device itself with the user's private data are very present in the imagination of our participants. On the other hand, online trust networks multiply in interactions on social networks - groups of *WhatsApp* in particular - but also in the *Instagram*, *Tik Tok* and *Youtube*.

Our participants' report on the informality of digital learning is an important conclusion to understand the extent to which the social use of smartphones is creative. The cognitive basis is that of experimentation, with little formalization of knowledge of the process. The four interlocutors in this article only attended elementary school and had to build their work and performance spaces with a lot of intuitive learning. They use the same spirit to navigate their smartphones and also to deal with aging and to circumvent the challenges in their journeys in their professional and personal lives.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS: MOBILITIES IN MULTIPLE TIMES**

In 2007, Urry wrote *Mobilities*, proposing the study of mobility issues between people, information and ideas. At that time, the author already understood the concept of mobility as a central category for thinking about social relations in the contemporary world: the emergence of mobile technologies, migratory processes in population displacement, more advanced means of transport, and paths for future mobility.

Inspired by Urry, I propose the notion of *multi-time mobility with smartphones* as a way to share travel in contemporary times. The time of mobility for the aging women in this study signals that the rhythm of the home-work-home routine is interrupted to perhaps trigger a different logic of pleasure and affection with media interaction on networks on their smartphones. It's the time for digital socialization: connecting with family or friends or watching series, movies, or videos on *YouTube*. It can also be a more personal, less collective and reflective moment, to listen to music or spiritual references, or even to disconnect from everyday life, resorting to playful experiences such as digital games or other forms of entertainment. All these pleasurable experiences are shared together with

the perceptions of risks, vulnerabilities and fragmented digital literacy that older people face.

The time of commuting with smartphones is the multi-time of mobility, since it is rhizomatic, acting in multiple directions, following plural flows, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1980): it can be a time of introspection to connect with activities, as in the case of Antonia, who hears messages of support for her depression, a more intense time of introspection with her conversation with Benedita, the avatar. Or Rebeca with her connections with spiritual issues during her home-work journey. Or a collective experience like Mirian's exercise with the sense of co-presence with her partner and her daughter.

The notion of agency of materialities is also important here, because when we imagine the exchanges between humans and non-humans, we observe the flows of processes that are multiple, flowing in various directions, as Latour (2012) suggests. Donna Haraway in *Stay With the Trouble* (2016) proposes to think about contemporary life with the metaphor of the spider and in an imaginative scenario, where the inhabitants of the world, human and non-human, are travelers, intertwined lines, in an environment where we must think-with and in the tangle of multispecies. It is in this sense that we propose to think about the multiple times of mobility: people who think with technology, moving in a tangle of flows and agendas. It is also interesting to highlight how Strathern (2014) defines anthropology: it is thinking about relationships with relationships. This is how we can imagine the multiple times of women's connections with their smartphones in their multifaceted universes. Universes that can be relational, as in the case of Sueli, who takes advantage of the time spent traveling to strengthen family ties, and at the same time subjective, when she triggers experiences with memory through playful games.

The opposition between the human and technology is here, in fact, a much more dialectical, dynamic process, revealed in the light of the practices of the daily life of ordinary elderly people. One of the important findings of the research is the balance between relational and subjective connections: as in the case of Mirian, who uses the time in transport to strengthen affective bonds with her daughter in mediated co-presence. Or the time of travel with experiences of subjectivation, as preferred by Rebeca, who chooses to navigate with religious connections, or Antonia, who finds affective welcome in the relationship with Benedita, an avatar. And all of them revealing their afflictions, fears with cybersecurity, with the demands of digital citizenship and demanding more training spaces for the digital inclusion of elderly people.

Finally, what we observed was women reinventing aging with smartphones while traveling on subways and BRTs. Our findings show that older women found new and creative ways to learn how to use their smartphones for their commuting on urban transport. They are transforming what they once described as uninteresting and long-waiting time in the home-work-home routine into a creative and "*smart from below*" time, with multiple meaningful connections to their lives.

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