

Daniel Miller¹

Aging with smartphones

Well, thank you very much indeed. Thank you for your very kind invitation to present to you... It's good to meet you. Obviously, we would prefer to be face-to-face, able to go for a drink etc. But I guess if you all gonna have somebody who is presenting online, then it sort of seems maybe appropriated to have a digital anthropologist doing that.

Now, actually, also this is really quite good timing as far as I am concerned, because the project I am going be talking about today - Anthropology of Smartphones and Smart Ageing - we now know that the first three books will be launched on the 6th of May next year. And we are coming to the point where we feel we can discuss the project on its own. I think this is probably the first talk I'm giving in which I try to present to you the topics as a whole. I will mainly do this through a PowerPoint, which I shall start now and I hope that it is showing.

Okay, so, there's an English expression, which is that, "sometimes you can't see what's directly in front of your nose." And one of the things about a smartphone is that it is directly in front of your nose. And yet, how much do we actually really understand about what it is? Because it's interesting, if you compare the previous project -Why we Post:Global Social Media Impact Study where we worked on focused on social media, now, for social media, there's just like endless books about social media. There's lots of courses etcabout social media.

And yet in some ways the smartphone is obviously more than that. For one thing, the road for social media now in many countries mainly goes through the smartphone. But that is just one component of the smartphone, a smartphone does so much more. And yet in completing our books, we find that there aren't really much by way of books

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about smartphonesth or courses about smartphones. It seems to be kind of neglected and why might that be?" I'm going to suggest that possibly the clue to this lies in the very word "smart." Because the reason the word "smart" is used in things like smart homes, smart cities, smartphones, is that the developers came out with the idea of devices like smarthomes that could autonomously learn from the way that we use them. They would learn from behaviour and adapt to accommodate that behaviour, that's why they are called "smart."

But if you actually think about a smartphone, yes, it has artificial intelligence and algorithms and things within the device that have started to enable them to do that. But actually in practice, when you try to work out what a smartphone becomes, then that is really not very important. What is vastly more important is the way we, the consumers, actually transform those phones. So, when you first get your smartphone, the first thing is you may actually ignore some of the things on it, a lot of people who have, let's say, I have a Samsung Galaxy, now there's a thing called Bixby on it. It tries very hard for you to get to use it. Maybe somewhere in the world there's somebody who actually uses this stupid thing, but I didn't get to meet them, right? So, we don't necessarily do much with what is there.

We download our own apps, we mix the apps up, we change the settings. But, above all, we create content. We mix up and own a lot of what it then becomes. So, actually, the smart that matters is not the smart the developers were thinking of, but what in our project we call "Smart From Below." So, when we say smartphones and smart ageing, we always mean smart from below, it is that people makes things smart. As it happens, when I started my career, I guess sometime in the 19th century, one of my first books was a book on theory, "Material Culture and Mass Consumption". And a lot of what I was interested in was theorization which changed the dynamic between production and consumption, and started to recognize the productive nature of consumption, as becoming increasingly important. And I'm not sure when I wrote that book how much that was actually true, but by the time you get to the smartphone, it seems to be very, very evident as really all the primary processes of production that produce the smartphones, as we know them, are actually coming through their processes of consumption.

Now there's also another fact here which I think is rather important at least to us because if that is the case, then it puts anthropologists in a particularly interesting position. Because if you can't study a smartphone by picking it up in a shop, but you could only study a smartphone by seeing it in the context of what people have done with it, how they have transformed it, what they have turned it into. Then, you have to be with people in the context of their everyday life being able to observe and actually, the key to our methodology, if you like, was getting the trust where you could get people to open up their smartphones and you could go to every single app on the phone and actually discuss them. Firstly, just because they had it didn't mean they used it, if they did use it, ask how they used it, how they related to that etc.

It's so important because while there is a lot of stuff out there on the likes of Facebook and Twitter and we know in a country like Brazil really the most important social media is WhatsApp. And WhatsApp is a much more private intimate form of platform, so to actually be able to participate and observe WhatsApp really takes trust and time. And also, the final point would be... smartphones, is not just social media, they seem to do pretty much everything.

This points to the holistic nature of this research. The way that everything is the context of everything else, seems again to be particularly appropriate to the smartphone. Now, this particular project, the ASSA project, actually followed from the prior project on social media, a project called "Why We Post," that lasted five years, from 2012 to 2017. And in many ways we decided to sort of copy a lot of that because, to be honest, it was a pretty successful project.

That is to say, we made similar points, particularly around the importance of transformations, our main book was not called "How Did the Smartphone Change the World," but "How Did the World Change Social Media." We produced eleven volumes, and as we know this is a popular topic that everyone is interested in it, we really tried to focus on using our knowledge of social media for the purposes of academic dissemination, and for trying to get the results out there. We kept the focus on books; because I think for anthropologist if you want to get that breadth of context, you just have to. We released eleven volumes.

By trying to emphasize its openness, to make them free etc., we were very pleased because traditional ethnographic monographs used to sell about 600 copies and actually for this series we've now passed a million downloads, and it's very, very global. So, clearly, it is much as that as a success. And we wanted to kind of replicate that success. However, there are going to be certain differences in the new project. It's mainly different people, in different places, there's actually eleven researchers involved in this, working in ten fields in nine countries. And in each case we spent sixteen months living in the community to actually do the work. The three main changes are these that follows.

First, we already discussed, there's the change from social media to smartphones. But what is important for you today is a big change in context. And that is... this would be a project about ageing, about consumption and ageing. Now, we decided, yes, we wanted it to be about ageing, but we wanted to do this in rather a different way. Because what you find is almost all studies that say they are about age or ageing, tend to work on people who are defined by age, so that means either they're studies of the young or they're studies of the old. So, we decided, actually, for reasons I'll come to, maybe the more interesting thing is to look at people who did not see themselves as either young or old. You might think that this means we have decided to start with middle age and actually that was what we expected, but you'll find out actually it didn't work out quite like that. Now, a focus on age works very well with the topic of smartphones and one of the reasons for that is this remarkable change from the previous project. I mean, it's very hard to believe it now, but I know it was true. When I was doing that work on social media in several

countries, people said, “you know, nobody is ever, ever going to use social media or smartphones if they are over forty years old. It’s just never going to happen.” And everybody, I really promise, everybody said that. You can’t imagine it now, but it was the case, and yet, in “The Global Smartphone,” our main book of this project, we started with a 90 year-old Japanese flower arranger who like many 90 year-olds in Japan does everything now using the smartphone.

The other point of course is it shifted in terms of age and it shifted in terms of accessibility mainly because of the accessibility of cheap Chinese handsets. We also decided, you know, we know we can show the possible contribution of these projects to global education, but this time we also wanted to see if we couldn’t use this studies more directly to actually be a benefit to people’s welfare. So, we decided that, and the obvious area to work on was the area of health, because if you are dealing with older people, then, whether you like it or not, health comes increasingly into the frame. And in some sense we thought it was kind of interesting if you saw this as people hypothetically losing capacities because of issues of health and yet at the same time gaining capacities as they adopted the smartphone. So, this gave us these three topics and a lot of what we end up looking at, there are things that are sort of interesting in terms of the intersection between these three different topics.

Okay, so, concentrating now on the focus of age, because it wasn’t just that age was the context of studying smartphones, we were actually very interested in understanding transformations on the age itself. In some ways, this is going to build up on what Frank Trentmann was talking about yesterday, because we find that have been very, very significant and really interesting changes in the very experience of ageing, but that will vary from country to country. So, at one hand, you have what you might call, obviously that’s generalization, the traditional idea of ageing, which in many respects, makes it into a cultural phenomenon. Now, if we look it at our population of Palestinians and Al-Quds, this would largely be still true today.

What I mean by that, is when people get to a certain age, it could be as young as their forties, they change, they become serious, they have different kind of clothing, they have a different kind of behaviour, different kind of expectations etc. And ... so you enter a category which you can call “old”. I think Frank mentioned it yesterday, you think of The Beatles talking about “When I’m Sixty-Four”, on a rocking chair with grandchildren by the knee. I am actually over sixty-four. You know, all that, and The Who singing “I hope I die before I get old” etc. etc. So, getting old was a thing. Now, if you look across our sites, when you move to something like Italy, you can see they still have categories around ageing, so the notion of the Italian grandmother, the “Nona”, is still there, but actually she’s gone really digital, but we don’t have time to go into that. There are many changes on what’s going on. But if move still further, you’re finding in... one of the fieldsites I’ll talk about a lot today is a Brazilian fieldsite, in Sao Paulo, and it’s worked by Marilia Duque.

In some areas, her work was quite similar to my findings, in my fieldwork in Ireland. And here, you really did see logical change. And people would explain it in terms of their own experience, what they often said is, “you know, I thought when I hit sixty, my sixtieth birthday, I would get old” or “I thought when I got to seventy” or “I thought when I got... surely when I got to eighty, I’m gonna get old.” And they kept saying, “but it just didn’t happen.” They did not, they don’t change their clothing, they do not change their behaviour, they do not change their sense of the world... what they see is simply continuity. So, when we thought we were going to be starting with middle age, but if people at their eighties still do not see themselves as old, clearly it wasn’t the case, right? That was important also because, obviously, it meant... it was the first time you could study the smartphone without thinking of it as a youth technology, right? As if it wasn’t just able just to do selfies or whatever. This was something else. And actually in a way it goes even further than that, because I would say, you’re studying ageing, you expect that’s people are getting older, but I think in some respects, particularly when I think about my Irish field work, I think this is an unusual case where we are kind of studying people getting younger. Perhaps not biologically, but in other respects. Let me just give you one example of that.

So, if you think about the things that were associated with sort of active young people and also in relation to consumption. So, in the past, we’ve all started consumption with the idea, you know, consumption is heavily related to status, to status goods, to consuming goods, being expressive, competitive, etc. etc.

Now, in the Ireland fieldsite where I am working, that has gone. More or less, okay? And actually, what you have is the direct opposite of that. If you wanna be high status in this Irish town, it’s all about competitive non consumption, alright? Because the values, what the higher middle class do, is environmentalism, climate change, green and anything in that kind of area. At one level, this is supposed to be, you know, what young people should be concerned with i.e. climate change, they are going to be in it for longer, the spokesperson was a sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg, etc. But in practice, what was interesting in my field of work was that older people could be much better at this.

So, for example, older people would not actually downsizing the house, which is what is really expected. When they move, they still move to three-bedroom houses, but they went to energy efficient houses. When it came to getting rid of goods and disposing of them, they could do it. No problem at all, you know, in showing everyone how you’re getting rid of all your things. Younger people have families. If you got kids, you can’t do this. You’re only getting more things, right? Whether you like it or not. And when it came to activism, environmental activism, young people will say we should be doing it, but they don’t have the time.

These older folk, they got loads of time, they can be very conspicuous saving trees, looking after the planet, etc. etc. So, the point I’m making is the that was a whole area, in which effectively older people were better at being young than young people could be. So, in that sense, you can see this possibility of actually in

some sense sort of becoming younger. And, and, and there are other cases that go with that. I mean, it means, when you become younger, you lose things that used to be true of older people. So, they're not really seen so much now as kind of senior, you know, the idea of the wise old person is something that has rather faded away, they don't have wisdom anymore. What they have instead is more equality. That when I'm on a committee and there's a young person, an older person, they give their views and their judged according to the quality of their views and really, that doesn't matter, which age is coming from. You're not respected because you're old, you're respected if what you say makes sense.

And actually, they're in a very interesting position, these older people. Because in some ways, it's like an unprecedented experience of freedom, because they're relatively free, from family responsibility, unless they choose to do this, from work, they got enough money, they don't have to care about that, etc. etc. So, they develop many other activities, in fact I was talking a bit about this yesterday. You know, they're going on holidays all the time, you can't imagine how many yoga classes there are in this town. There's lots of wellbeing, etc. etc. And one, the subtitle of our book on Ireland is actually "When Life Becomes Craft." And we don't mean by that just that they take up a lot of crafts, though they do. But that life itself becomes craft. The thing they are mainly crafting is their lives, because they've got the freedom and capacity to actually do that. Now, having said all that, of course you do biologically get old, so the break is not a cultural break, it's not you become old as a cultural category, but actually it's when you become frail, that you become old...

Because eventually you become ill and you become potentially incapacitated and you aren't able to do the cycling necessarily, or the sports that you were doing and then you die. So, you can maybe extend the sense of being young, but you're not going to stop any of that. But it's becoming essentially a biological experience, the ageing, rather than a cultural experience of ageing, and that's a significant difference. It also means that there's an important change in the meaning of the things that do constitute a break.

One example, is retirement. But again, this varies considerably from fieldsite to fieldsite. So, if you research with retired Peruvians in Chile, these migrants they basically have no intention of retiring. We work with people in a low-income place in Kampala, in Africa. They cannot retire because they never have enough money. I said earlier, often Brazilian and the Irish material is similar. But actually in this case, it is extremely different. What is important about Marilia Duque case study, it's very much about São Paulo. And the point about that, as I understand it, is that this is a city that is so strongly associated with work.

And the people in São Paulo see so much of their identity, who they are, what they've always been, in relation to work. So, well, they may retire, but she argues they do everything they can to have continuance with that previous sense of themselves, either keeping links with the work they did or, if not, maybe even starting a new entrepreneur activity or something else, but something that says, "I am still in some sense to be known because of what I do", and that's very much a sense of São

Paulo kind of sensibility. Now I'm working in Ireland and one of the things I did, for example, was I joined something called the Men's Shed, I don't know if you have it in Brazil, but it's becoming very common globally for, you know, to ask what can men do when they retire. At the Men's Shed, they paint things around the town and do volunteer activities, etc. So, I joined them, I was with them for the whole year, and I know because I interviewed some of them, that some of them had very senior positions, they were high in the civil service, they ran companies, whatever, and some of them were manual labourers and did nothing right out at all. But I also noticed that in my whole year of being with them doing allotments and other stuff with them, I would never have known what work they did. It was, there was nothing that was ever said that would have told me their previous occupation. So this is completely different from São Paulo.

And it shows that for them, it is a total break when life becomes craft, and you create something new that you simply never had before. So, retirement is important, but it can be very different in place to place. So, into all that, now comes the smartphone. And the smartphone is interesting because in a way it has two diametrically opposed contributions to make. And the first is that there are certainly some older people who struggle when it comes to smartphones. They have difficulty with that, if you look at how well the young people help older people in mastering the smartphones, learn to use smartphones, they are actually really useless, I mean, young people are crap when it comes to helping the old people, they take the phone away, dadadadada, "Yes grandma, there it is, now you do it" kind of thing. They are very impatient, very unhelpful. And one of the things they often say is, "I don't understand why you're having a problem. A smartphone is intuitive, you know. It's easy to learn how to do it."

Now as part of our work is we often taught courses, Marilia taught WhatsApp courses I think, again, for a year. So that we could really see the issues of older people learning these things. And the one thing that comes across very clearly is, whatever the smartphone is, it surely is not intuitive. Because, the young people would say "Just, you know, download the banking app." So, a person comes along and sees an icon called download and presses it. They do not know, it's not intuitive that you're going to get a banking app from something called Google Play, alright? All that told, yeah, all you do is press. So if you know the person, you press, and you press long, and you press hard, and then it has exactly opposite consequence. Then the young person says "When I said press, I didn't mean like really press", because a long press is different from a short press. Or they are told "You know, just go on the Internet", but the different times that are told, "Yeah, yeah, no, Chrome, no, no, Google, no, Samsung Internet, no." It's like, what the hell is the Internet? The smartphone is not an intuitive device from the point of view of older people. At first, the smartphone if anything, extends a digital divide.

The sense of what used to be a division between wealthier and poor people, now also extends between intergeneration, between younger people and older people. And it actually makes things difficult for them. But actually, most of the

people we worked with, in the fifties or sixties, actually did not have much of the problem in learning to use smartphones and eventually other people that did worry about it then actually mastered them.

And when that happens, you get exactly the opposite effect. If anything, it goes back to the argument I was making before, about becoming more youthful. Because what happens is, you know, a seventy-year-old goes on Spotify and listens to the music of the seventies. Or they will go, in my fieldsite, on a dating app called Plenty of Fish. Or in São Paulo, you know that older people were starting to worry about going out at night, I mean, “can you have a drink when you go out?, Do I have to organize how I’m going to get back? Can I drive?” whatever, etc. Now, they got a smartphone and they know they can get an UBER. So, going out at night is okay, it makes it a lot easier for older people apparently in São Paulo.

Now, there are many complications to this. I mean, obviously for some people, there are smartphones designed for old people. This actually is the smartphone used by my mother-in-law, who is completely technophobic, made by Doro. When you say older people are conservative, actually, as this slide shows, there are kind of quite creative ways of being conservative, if you really want to.



Also, it brings up various issues that are specific to older people. So, for example, one of them would be the selfie issue. You can get two very different views. Some say, “The problem with posting on Facebook is that the person doesn’t actually look anything like they look in real life”. On the other hand, in China, you can get an app and you just click on one thing and it turns you from some older woman to someone young.

But the more interesting thing about it is that a lot of older people would say the lie is in their external appearance, right? It’s not the issue of the photo. The way they look is no longer who they are. You know, people routinely say, “Yes, I look, I feel, inside I’m twenty years young,” right? So, actually, there is an interesting argu-

ment as to where the real person exists, because they may feel the photo here, the photo that made them look younger is actually a more true photo of who they are.

The big exception for us in terms of the attitude of older people is China, because in England say, the classic line is older people turning on to younger people and saying, "You're spending all your time staring at the screen, you don't even talk to me anymore, and this is, you know, ridiculous, it's, you know, why can't we actually have a proper conversation anymore, these terrible young people." In China, you quite likely will get the other way around. Young people turning to older people and saying, "You spend all your time on the smartphone, I'm sitting with you, I came to take you to a restaurant, and you're spending all your time on the smartphone either than talking to me." And the reason for that lies in the history of the experience of these people and the politics of China.

These are people who grew up during the cultural revolution, they have a strong association with the aspirations of Chinese communist party, and they understand their duty as a citizen is to help China overcome other countries in terms of technological efficiency. So, they are doing their duty by being in the vanguard of smartphone use. I think this is because it shows that older people don't actually have to be left behind, they can be the ones in front, if the cultural circumstance, the politics, and the attitudes make that possible. Because we don't see it, we assume it cannot be the case.

Okay, What I want to do briefly though now, is something that relates not so much to ageing specifically, but in our work, we have tried to gain a more theoretical, rather different understanding of what having a smartphone actually is. And we have a whole series of new perspectives on this, and I'm just mentioning them very briefly. One of them, it is the idea that the smartphone is actually not simply a device we use, but you have to understand it more today as a place within which we live. And that's why we call it the *Transportal Home*. You're probably used to the phrase *the death of distance*, but actually the smartphone is more like *the death of proximity*. Because there's somebody sitting right next to you, again, possibly in the restaurant or wherever it is, and although they're sitting right next to you, it is kind of obvious, they are not there.

And the reason they are not there, is they have gone home. They have gone back to their *Transportal Home*. And in their home, they are busy, banking, talking to other people, organizing their lives or whatever it may be. The kind of things they would do in their brick and more traditional home.

And actually, it was quite interesting how often people used analogies in the various languages we work when they talk about clearing the phone or cleaning the smartphone, they almost always use the same terminology as the domestic. So, they also in a sense see it that way. Having said that, the implication for this will be different for different groups? So obviously if you are separated out from your natal community in Egypt or the Philippines or wherever you are from, as opposed to the family that you have now in Milan where you are living, it gets resolved in the *Transportal Home*. Everybody is in this home together. If you look at it from the

point of view of young people, actually, in many of the fields I see young people now have difficulty being able to afford a home for themselves. And therefore, it is particularly important that if they cannot buy their own house, at least they have a home of their own, which is constituted by the smartphone.

Older people, if they do become obviously more immobile or lose capacities, etcetera, then the smartphone becomes important to them. And actually, the smartphone really transforms. I mean, typically older people, especially older women in many countries, their life is very much around the sociality of family and friends. And one of the things that Marilia noticed in São Paulo and I also in Ireland, is that smartphones represented radical change in the history of the family. Because, up to now, we have tended to see families as moving from essentially extended families over a couple hundred years through, to the nuclear families. So typically, you only see these distant cousins maybe at Christmas or at a funeral or something, and the relationship is relatively formal. Whereas what we have seen through WhatsApp is that they are coming back much more on an everyday basis, and that also means there is much more informality. It is much more like the living together.

So, another perspective we have, we call it *Beyond Anthropomorphism*, because the smartphone is so amenable to transformation. I mean, we compare it to a robot. A robot is like a person, but in a way that is superficial, because it is about appearance. The smartphone develops a much more profound and intimate relationship where it extends the person in various ways. The degree to which a person can be caricatured by their smartphone and also therefore express the cultural values of their society

Again, using my evidence from Ireland, I can think of a woman who saw herself as a really professional woman. But in her work she never fully achieved the status that she wanted as a professional woman. But her iPhone is amazing. On her iPhone, you know, the calendar is linked to her tasks, which is linked to, you know, paying a gas bill, which is linked to a whole set of instructions, which then link up to the websites that you have to go through to do this. It is like hundreds of pages of life manual. She is the most amazing professional. But she has achieved it through her smartphone, not through her professional work.

The exact opposite would be an older guy whose family was always a fishing family and he has that kind of sort of attitude. He did skype with his daughter when she was in Australia, but now she is back, he takes skype straight off of his smartphone. So that kind of older traditional sort of masculinity, again gets expressed very clearly through his particular smartphone. Another perspective, we call it *Perpetual Opportunism*, which is the fact that the phone is always with you, it transforms your relationship to the world in a number of ways, but an obvious one would be something like photography. So, you get the developments of what you call functional photography, where essentially if you go out to a library or to see a noticeboard and you see something that you want to record, you record it as information and take the information back with you. Because you can, because it is with you. Similar would be the sense that at any time you can take an image for Instagram. In many

other sectors of life, we also find this notion of *Perpetual Opportunism* is important. A final observation, we call it *Care Transcending Distance*. If you are in São Paulo, you could care as easily for somebody through your smartphone who happens to be living in France, as somebody who happens to be living down the street.

At this point, I want to get to the third sector of our study, which is where we wanted to more directly contribute to welfare and this is this area of mHealth. And it was the obvious one to do, because it is about smartphones, and health is particularly a concern for older people. Now, mobile mHealth stands for mobile health, it is a vast and quickly expanding industry. Many commercial groups are involved in it. There are many people in medicine and technology who for every good reason want to help people. And they want to help people by creating an app that will help them with their physiotherapy exercises or diabetes or whatever the health issue might be. Hundreds of thousands of these things are being produced. When we started the work, we thought that this was what we were going to study.

But as the work proceeded, we started to realize something. And that something was that by and large, especially older people do not use these apps. They do not want them, and they will not use them. Firstly, they do not want the proliferation of apps. But actually, there was another reason. Because you might think that if I am saying that they don't use mHealth, that means that people were not using smartphones as much for health purposes as we expected. But it was the opposite. People were using smartphones even more for health than we had anticipated. But the reason for that is they were not using those mHealth apps, even if those apps paratactically were more effective and more efficient. No. What they did was they looked at the apps that they are comfortable with. That they do use them everyday and found very creative and interesting ways of using those for health purposes.

Actually, this went very well with our, what you might call our *smart-from-below approach*. We had not really realized, but when you are in your sixties and seventies, a slice of life is very often taken out, because you have parents in their nineties who are actually frail and eventually dying. And if the frailty is something like dementia, this may be for a very extended period and need a huge amount of attention. But even without that, I mean, I am sure that everybody recognizes that as soon as anybody becomes seriously old today, the first thing that tends to happen is you form a WhatsApp group to coordinate the support for that person. And what Marilia Duque did, and did really well, was she saw this, and so she looked to doctors and nurses and patients, whoever they were, and said: "let us find really creative and interesting ways people are using WhatsApp for health. Explore those, document those and then, instead of creating a different app, create a manual of how you can use WhatsApp for health."

So, she did that. "*Learning from whats App Best Practice for Health. Communication Protocols for Hospital and Medical Clinics*". It is about a hundred and fifty pages. It is in Portuguese. I think it is published by ESPM and we also translated into English, so it is also available in English on our website. So, this is smart-from-below. This is where you do not impose things on people. You learn from their

adaptions, their creativity and then spread the word to other people. And these are some of the excerpts from her manual, explaining how you can teach somebody to use WhatsApp for health purposes.

ASSA Anthropology of Smartphones and Smart Ageing UCL

Marilia Duque: Manual on how to use WhatsApp for health



THE UNIQUE BENEFITS OF WHATSAPP

- Most used messaging app in Brazil
- No need to install a new app
- Users are already familiar with the tool
- High uptake among population aged 60+
- High penetration among different social classes
- Visual and audio features allow for the inclusion of users with low literacy rates
- Availability of mobile plans with unlimited WhatsApp usage

The manual is available in Portuguese and English and can be downloaded at: <http://www.etp6-ics.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/manual-learning-from-whatsapp-best-practices-for-health-2020/>

PALESTRA

ASSA Anthropology of Smartphones and Smart Ageing UCL

Marilia Duque: Manual on how to use WhatsApp for health

Supporting nurses' work before and after consultation with doctor



In fact, each team member took on a kind of project like this, to try and see what we could contribute. So, to give a slightly different one, but again it is WhatsApp. Alfonso Otaegui is working, he is an Argentinian, in Chile with Peruvians, but actually, he works specifically with this oncology clinic in Santiago. And as we are trying to do in our study, he is not going for the obvious - the doctors or the patients. He found a really interesting group, in between, that we tend to ignore. In this case, what are called navigator nurses, who actually just went for WhatsApp because they had very complex jobs. They had to translate the doctors to the patients, organize the patients for the doctors, deal with the bureaucracy, etcetera. And they just found that WhatsApp worked for them in really enabling them to carry out their work much more effectively than before.



Now, I do not want to suggest that every example of this is kind of positive, every use of smartphones increases your capacity. So very briefly, I am going to give you an example which does not sound like that. From my own work back in Ireland. So, one of the other major are used for health is in googling. I am sure everybody does it, right? Google for health information. And it sounds like that is an democratizing process because everybody now has access to the same information.

But when I actually researched googling for health information, I found again something very different. Because one of the main effects of googling for health information is that it actually exacerbates class differentiation in that society. Now why is that? What you find is that there is half the people, they have gone to higher education, they probably have done a dissertation, they know about research. When they google for health, they would know they would look for the Mayo Clinic from the US. They would look for the NHS in the UK. They might even get back to the medical research papers that lay behind this. So, if they were reasonably well-informed, they get better-informed.

By contrast, the people who did not have that kind of educational background, when they google for health, they tend to take the things that come up near the top. Very often these are commercial. Basically, it is people trying to sell them something, or a lot of them are basically postings going out which are spreading anxiety. Basically, whatever symptom you have got, you then think that you have definitely got cancer.

So, if the better-informed got still better-informed, the people that were ill-informed got still more miss-informed, exacerbating that kind of class difference. So, it is not that everything the smartphone brings is positive. But there is much that really matters. Because when it comes to older people and health and smartphones, it is WhatsApp, it is googling, it is Youtube that is really what counts. Very briefly, obviously we followed this line of enquiry through to what has been going on with COVID. One of the findings of our research was what we called the fine line between care and surveillance. And that is because when you are looking after, let us say, your ninety old parent or whatever, on the one hand you find smartphones are great for organizing care. But then, the ninety-year-old still may care about their autonomy. They do not necessarily want this degree of surveillance. So, even before Covid, we often researched situations which showed this balance between care and surveillance. Along comes the pandemic and this small finding, becomes a very big finding. Because one interesting development over the last six months is track and trace technologies. Since it is a development of a technology, you might think the consequences would be the same wherever you have it.

But, I think the last six months in some way have been a vindication of anthropology because actually the response to the possibilities of the track and trace could not be more diverse, when you look across the world. Like, no two countries seem to do the same. And the reason for that for sure, it is a technology. But underlying it is this question between care and surveillance and that is a cultural question. That is what has become apparent in the last six months in terms of the diversity of these responses. One of the things that we did and some of you may know, is that we created this site called *anthrocovid.com*. And I am adding this to the talk because we had a very good response from Brazil. (<https://anthrocovid.com/3-2/contributions-from-brazil-camburi/>)

ASSA Anthropology of Smartphones and Smart Ageing

UCL

AnthroCovid.com - created in response to COVID-19

A place where anthropologists already embedded in fieldwork could report on local responses - E.g. 'fine line between care and surveillance' project conclusion that become central to differential response globally.

Collecting COVID-19
A crowd-sourced digital ethnography of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Anthropological Responses: Six specific research questions

- TOPIC 1: ONLINE INFORMATION
- TOPIC 2: CARE VS. SURVEILLANCE
- TOPIC 3: CROWDING AFFECTION
- TOPIC 4: ONLINE EDUCATION
- TOPIC 5: RESPONSES
- TOPIC 6: STRAGGLES AND MOBILITY

We were basically asking anthropologists to report from the field what was going on, on various questions. And there was just absolutely fascinating material coming from Brazil, documenting what was going on in different parts of Brazil with respect to the effect of the pandemic. These are some of the reports and you can see them on that website.

Again, we respect the creativity of people and what they are doing and what we can learn from that. And that is especially true of older people.

Finally we suggest that our smart-from-below approach could save a vast amount of money, which is always a good thing. If you do not spend money trying to create this amazing, bespoke, apps, and instead actually recognize that there is something that people are already doing for themselves. Then you do not have all the problems of trying to work out whether they can use your new app in practice. Instead we focus on things that they are already doing. And therefore, learning from these best practices of ordinary people, we would say is a much more effective source if we want to try and actually use these practices for benefiting the welfare of older people around the world.