

**Genere, generi e generazioni****Per una riflessione sociologica sui cambiamenti degli stili di consumo nel mondo globalizzato: scenari attuali e prospettive future**

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**The elderly collaborative user  
in platform societies****A comparative study between India and Italy***Jillet Sarah Sam*Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India  
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bgomes@iitk.ac.in**Abstract**

In this paper, we examine the figure of the elderly prosumers as they are located in the emerging platform societies of India and Italy. Recently, sociological literature has observed the growing significance given to the elderly as active consumers in consumer society. In contrast, at present we do not know much about the practices of the elderly as prosumers, particularly in urban areas. While discussions of the sharing economy envision a particular type of collaborative consumption, they are still working with the assumption that the fundamental unit is an individual with dedicated and autonomous access to platforms and devices. This assumption, however, is in stark contrast to the multiple empirical incidences where technology is used in a shared manner. Such shared use has been extensively documented in non-Western contexts, although the gerontological literature also indicates that similar practices (such as “proxy use”) have also been documented in Western countries. Shared use may be especially pertinent to older users who rely on it to either learn anew or to navigate technology due to their health or cultural preferences. Consequently, this paper proposes the concept of *collaborative use* to understand the varied manner in which devices and platforms are shared in platform economies. The paper draws on ethnographic data to understand how the elderly use platforms in one non-Western city (Kolkata, India) and one Western city (Bologna, Italy). The survey and the data are also part of the broader project *Evolution of consumer behaviour*.

**Key Words**

Platform; Digital Elder; Collaborative Use; Use on Behalf; Shared Use.

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## 1. Introduction

Discussions on platforms and shared economies rarely take the elderly prosumer into account. This stands in marked contrast to the empirical trend where the elderly are increasingly recognized as significant consumers in their own right. Indeed, consumption practices themselves are increasingly being incorporated into ideas of the correct way to age (*third age*) (Laslett 1989; Gilleard et al. 2005; Gilleard and Higgs 2000; Samanta 2018).

In this paper, we try to understand the manner in which the elderly participate in platform economies by comparing ethnographies carried out in the cities of Bologna, Italy and Kolkata, India. We look at the different factors that influenced their participation in platforms as well as the manner in which they engaged in collaborative consumption in these shared economies. We also discuss some of the early data on how the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has influenced the participation of the elderly in both cities.

This paper juxtaposes the history of what we call *collaborative use* with the existing literature on the sharing economy and collaborative consumption. *We argue that collaborative use is an aspect, if not a prequel, to the sharing economy.* We take up the case of collaborative consumption among the elderly, which is a particular segment of the population which relies on collaborative use. We compare collaborative use in two distinct platform societies – India and Italy – to see how it interacts with collaborative consumption across different contexts.

This paper comprises 6 further sections. In section 2, we review the literature on the sharing economy, and the use of ICTs by the elderly. In section 3, we outline the methods and data used in the paper. In section 4, we describe the manner in which our elderly respondents used platforms, specifically their practices of use and the resources they draw upon. In section 5, we develop a portrait of the digital elders in the two cities, highlighting their collaborative use of platforms and the impact of Covid-19. Concluding remarks are presented in Section 6.

## 2. Literature Review

The notion of Platform Society aims to understand the role of online platforms in society and seeks to understand their logics, such as privacy, security, data protection, fairness and accessibility; their mechanisms of operation and the possibility they embody to foster the common good and not only private economic interests. Platform-based companies such as the Big Five (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft) are not merely digital technologies that facilitate various activities for users, but they are ‘technological, economic, and social cultural configurations’ (Van Dijck, de Waal and Poell 2018). These platforms collect information about user behavior and preference generating an enormous amount of data, or big data, which is then processed by algorithms which in turn aid the development and creation of upgraded products and services (Dawar 2016). Application of this data is seen as a marketing tool

for customer relationship management providing platforms with a competitive advantage (Dawar 2016).

The practical realization of a new data-driven capital accumulation system is driven by the business model of platforms – multidimensional digital structures that connect individuals with each other and with producers of goods or services (Scrnicek, 2016). The connectivity they create gives digital platforms great social and commercial power. Indeed, an increasingly wide range of human activities now take place through platforms (Matsa et al., 2018). About 45% of the world's population is active on social media. In addition to engaging with friends and family through platforms such as Facebook, recent research in the United States and Europe shows that most people under the age of 50 receive their news primarily from social media, rather than from print media or television (Shearer and Grieco, 2019). In recent years, several studies have been devoted to the social consequences of the emerging platform economy (Zuboff 2018; Pasquale, 2015).

Van Dijck, Poell, and De Waal (2018) seek to develop an analytical framework through which to understand the joint effects of platformization on society as a whole. Platforms are «powered by data», «organized by algorithms», governed by «ownership relationships driven by business models», and «governed by contracts with users (2018: 9-12)». Datification, commodification, and selection represent the three mechanisms that power platformization. It is a kind of three-step process in which platforms appropriate data, translate it into economic value, and use it to select the most relevant content or services to offer, through rating and algorithmic procedures. They consider exploitation as a main aspect of the platform economy and define it as the transformation of «online and offline objects, activities, emotions, and ideas into tradable goods (2018: 37)». A central theme in the work of these three scholars can be stated as follows: «who is or should be responsible for and accountable for governing a fair and democratic platform society (2018: 6)».

### *2.1. Sharing Economy, Collaborative Consumption and Collaborative Use*

The term *sharing economy* has become ubiquitous today – the massive use of digital networks to make transactions led to the assumption that every internet-based programme working either as service provider or renting platform can be considered as a model of collaborative consumption. Thus, the thin line between online presence and the acts of sharing obscures the variety of services offered by different sharing economy practices (Habibi et al. 2017).

Collaborative consumption<sup>1</sup> can be seen as the approach focused on gran-

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1 Three elements have contributed to the ongoing success of collaborative consumption schemes. First, the 2008 financial crisis forced consumers to seek other means of gaining access to products and services without the burden of ownership, and reshaped the habits towards more frugal and economical alternatives. Second, technological development, in the form of Internet and social media, produced opportunities to make such programmes accessible and efficient for an always broader

ting consumers access to products and services through a peer-to-peer system (Botsman and Rogers 2011). Individuals take on two different roles, being peer provider or peer user. It is important to note that these roles are not fixed and static profiles, rather they can be performed by the same person. This dualistic role is made possible by the network, the core of the economic relationship, which allows the building of actual, concrete and deep bonds between single individuals who not only want to benefit from services, but also want to be involved in providing those for others. Consequently, the search for mutualisation and sharing resources changes the goals of any transaction. Collaborative platforms are not profit oriented in the traditional sense. For users, the gain is no longer in money. Rather, it comes as usage, functionality, open access to resources that these users do not own and the pooling of possessions that are not fully exhausted by the proprietors. Whether consciously or not, these consumption attitudes are increasingly being adopted by consumers since nowadays the great majority of our transactions are made through Internet platforms, where sharing programs find fertile ground.

In what it is considered the ultimate handbook on collaborative consumption, Botsman and Rogers identify the real currency of the system: reputation. The peer-to-peer sharing of products is not a new concept, but instead, recent technological advances in several areas have made it more feasible by lowering the associated search and transaction costs. These advances include the development of online marketplaces, mobile devices and platforms, electronic payments, and two-way reputation systems whereby users rate providers and providers rate users (Hu et al. 2018).

Digging deeper in the analysis of the sharing economy phenomenon, it can be argued that all the existing literature focuses mostly on the consumers side. Of course, it must be noted separating consumption and production as mutually exclusive may be wrong and outdated. The figure of the sharing economy network participant is what is called a prosumer, an individual that is no more only consumer or entirely producer, but has different roles involving both the tasks. Coined by Alvin Toffler in 1980, the initial focus of the concept was on how the individual produced value for the consumption action. The analysis of George Ritzer (2011) subsequently highlighted another dimension of the concept – the manner in which the prosumer becomes practically involved in the rationalization of production in the McDonaldisation model of society.<sup>2</sup>

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audience, removing barriers and enabling the knowledge about sharing programmes on a larger scale. Third, increasing awareness among consumers about the exploitation of natural resources resulted in environmental concerns and generated a shift from over-indulgence and proprietorship towards more ethical and ecological programmes.

2 This new dualistic role played can be exemplified by saying “putting the consumer to work” (Ritzer 2011) in order to rationalise processes under the regulatory variables of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. In this model, where fast is better than good, the agent is an integral part of the productive process and at the same time the very user of the final product. Production and consumption cease to be separated and mutually exclusive entities but become extremes of a production-consumption continuum. At the very centre of the logical continuum, where the two conditions are balanced, the subject becomes fully a prosumer.

Despite the focus on sharing economies and collaborative consumption, the literature is still oriented to the assumption that at the heart of this social action lies an individual user. In other words, although the literature visualizes social action through cyborg networks, the base component of this activity still boils down to a distinct individual who engages in pristine, autonomous use with other similarly placed distinct users. In doing so, the literature fails to engage with the specificities of use that have long been documented in developing countries. In these contexts, a collection of practices we shall call *collaborative use*, i.e. the shared, sometimes simultaneous, use of devices, platforms and other digital artifacts, is commonplace. Consider for instance, the phenomenon of the Multiple Mice (Pawar et al. 2006). The device was pioneered by researchers after they observed that when computers were first introduced in resource-deprived Indian schools, the shortage of mice and screens for each individual student inevitably led to a scramble for the control of the same mouse among many students. This problem was solved through the creation of a device that enabled collaborative use – multiple mice hooked up to a single screen allowed for multiple students to share the same desktop device. While multiple mice is an illustrative example, increasingly collaborative use in such contexts is being incorporated in digital design. For instance, in 2015, Amazon India announced the “leave with a neighbour” feature on the platform, so that customers could arrange to have deliveries received by their neighbours (Singh 2015).

This paper juxtaposes this history of collaborative use with the existing literature on the sharing economy and collaborative consumption. *We argue that collaborative use is an aspect, if not a prequel, to the sharing economy.* However, it would be shortsighted to assume that such use practices exist only in developing countries. Consequently, we take up the case of collaborative consumption among the elderly, which is a particular segment of the population which relies on collaborative use. We compare collaborative use in two distinct platform societies – India and Italy – to see how it interacts with collaborative consumption.

## *2.2. The elderly and digital technology*

Much of the literature on digital technology and the elderly trends to focus on the broad category of the “Internet”, where the primary focus is on use of email, internet based websites and social networking sites (Silver 2014; Yu et al. 2016; Anderson and Perrin 2017; Hunsaker 2018; Samanta 2019). Scholars have noted that the usage of the Internet among the elderly is positively correlated with factors such as formal education (Anderson and Perrin 2017; Hargittai et al. 2018), higher socio-economic status (Silver 2014; Yu et al. 2016; König et al. 2018), being male (Selwyn et al. 2003; Van Deursen and Helsper 2015; König et al. 2018), and familiarity with digital technology (Berkowsky et al. 2018; Hargittai et al. 2018). Here, there is a significant emphasis on use for health related issues (Choi and DiNitto 2013; Levine et al. 2017) and loneliness (Lam and Lam 2009; Heo et al. 2015), and leisure (Leach et al. 2013; Samanta 2019).

Various technology adoption models have been developed to understand the use of ICTs by the elderly (e.g., de Veer et al. 2015; Barnard, Bradley, Hodgson and Lloyd 2013; Chen and Chan 2014; Kadylak et al. 2016; Ma, Chen, Chan and Teh 2015; Niehaves and Plattfaut 2014; Renaud and Van Biljon 2008; Tsai, Rikard, Cotton and Shillair 2015), including specific Senior Technology Adoption Models (or STAM) (Renaud and Van Biljon 2008; de Veer et al 2015; Chen and Chan 2014). These technology adoption models have demonstrated that a variety of factors influence whether the elderly will adopt digital technology, exploring both age-related factors (such as health or cognition) as well as external, attitudinal factors (such as perceptions regarding usefulness and ease of use) (Francis et al. 2019). As important as they are in explaining whether or not an elderly person will adopt the technology, these models are not particularly helpful in explaining the process through which they use (and continue to use) ICTs. In other words, there is a need for studies that shed light on how an elderly person uses (not just adopts) digital technology, particularly the biographical and collective resources they may draw on to do so.

For some time now, the clear-cut distinction between users and non-users has been called into question since studies have pointed out that usually very few non-users are completely cut off from the Internet (Dolnicar et al. 2018). As a result, the concept of “proxy users” was developed to capture the manner in which specific groups among the seemingly uniform category of non-users, such as the elderly, often asked others (such as family members, colleagues and customer support staff) to use the Internet on their behalf (Dutton et al. 2005; Selwyn et al. 2005). However, Internet skills and use among the elderly also differ considerably. For instance, some elderly people are comfortable with computers but not mobile devices. As the recent review article by Hunsaker and Hargittai (2018) points out, there is a gap in what we know about how the elderly use smartphones. *This gap also exists with respect to how the elderly use other mobile devices and platforms in general.*

Unlike Web 1.0, digital technology is now designed to be more mobile. People in platform societies are usually visualized as participating actively in the production process and consuming collectively created content, but their usage of digital devices, accounts and platforms is considered to be individualized. However, this vision collides with a complex variety of empirical usage practices where the elderly in platform societies enter into use situations that are much more collaborative in nature. A concept like “proxy use” falls short in capturing the nuances of these collaborative use situations. Consequently, we propose that a more inclusive term – *collaborative use* – is required to understand the phenomenon.

In contrast to the focus on the broad category of the Internet, relatively fewer studies consider the use of digital platforms by the elderly. A primary focus is placed on their engagement with social networking platforms such as Facebook (Baecker et al. 2014; Sinclair and Grieve 2017; Jung et al. 2018), Twitter (Goh et al. 2019; Türkoğlu et al. 2020), WhatsApp (Fernández-Ardèvol and Rosales 2018), and Skype (Ahlin 2017). Typically, studies have focu-

sed on the role of digital platforms in providing access to health (Majumder et al. 2017; Sousa et al. 2018), care (Ahlin 2017), assisted living (Golant 2008; Golant 2017; Ward et al. 2017), and communication (Vitak 2014; Quinn 2018; Ghosh 2020; Fernández-Ardèvol et al. 2020). The literature has explored significant themes such as privacy (McCosker et al. 2018; Goh et al. 2019), security (McCosker et al. 2018), effect on cognitive function (Quinn 2018) and loneliness (Baecker et al. 2014; Sinclair and Grieve 2017).

The literature on digital platforms has not yet explored the elderly in the social role of active consumers, producers, or prosumers. Currently, when it does consider older users, the platform literature posits that there is a significant distinction between usage by the elderly and that by the young based on their interests and pattern of interaction (Loos 2012; Fernández-Ardèvol et al. 2020). The literature on platforms notes that the elderly typically use digital platforms usually for voice communication and text-based communication, whereas younger people use digital platforms for a wider range of activities (Fernández-Ardèvol et al. 2020). If studies approached the parameter of “use” in a broader manner, a different picture is likely to emerge. Further, in contrast to the broader literature on the elderly and ICTs, the literature on digital platforms has not so far noted that there are significant differences within the elderly population itself which shapes their use of platforms.

And finally, the gerontological literature itself makes a chronological distinction between three generations of the elderly (Garfein and Herzog 1995): “young-old” (60-69 years), “old-old” (70-79 years) and “oldest-old” (80 years and above). While the strict chronological divisions proposed by Garfein and Herzog may vary across contexts, their insight that the supposedly homogeneous category of the elderly incorporates different generations or age cohorts is still valuable. However, the platform literature tends to visualize the elderly as a monolithic category. There is very little differentiation made between the different generations of old people. In this study we will also consider whether generational differences amongst the elderly shape their use and practices on digital platforms.

RQ1: What are the usage practices of the elderly in their engagement of platforms?

RQ2: What resources do they draw on in order to engage in these practices?

RQ3: How do the elderly engage in collaborative use to negotiate platforms in India and Italy?

### 3. Data and Methods

Since we were trying to understand the manner in which the elderly participate in platform economies and their usage practices, we drew on ethnographic data from the cities of Bologna, Italy and Kolkata, India. This paper also draws on research conducted as part of a broader project: “Evolution of consumer behavior. The impact of digitalization and cryptocurrency upon consumption practices, a comparative study between Italy and India”, undertaken between the Department of Sociology and Business Law, University of

Bologna – Italy and the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur – India.

The Indian data drew on an on-going ethnographic study among Anglo-Indian<sup>3</sup> elders in the eastern city of Kolkata which had started in May 2018. Of the 75 respondents in the ethnographic study, 74 respondents used digital platforms either independently or in collaborative use situations. In this paper, we have primarily focused on those respondents who reported using digital platforms before Covid-19. We were able to conduct in-depth interviews with 19 such respondents explicitly about their use of digital platforms. Although we were unable to interview those who started using platforms after Covid-19 (5 people), we did observe an increased use of platforms among the 19 respondents we had been interviewing. Since we had been observing these 19 participants over the past 3 years, we also drew on ethnographic data regarding their digital practices in general and platform use in particular.

Since India gained independence from Britain in 1947, the Anglo-Indians have experienced considerable downward mobility and tend to be a much more economically heterogenous group today.<sup>4</sup> In the broader ethnographic study (75 respondents), 4 respondents had a high socio-economic status (SES) and 11 respondents had low SES. In the middle SES category, 12 respondents had upper middle SES and 13 respondents had lower middle SES, while the rest were in the middle (35 respondents). In the interview sample (19 respondents), 1 respondent had a high socio-economic status (SES) and 2 respondents had low SES. In the middle SES category, 4 respondents had upper middle SES and 2 respondents had lower middle SES, while the rest were in the middle (10 respondents). In their occupations, most respondents had been involved in office-based or professional jobs. The two exceptions were a respondent who operated a business and another who had worked as a delivery agent. Despite having retired, many respondents (or their spouses) worked part-time jobs or home-based economic activities to supplement their incomes. Of the 19 Indian respondents, one person had dropped out of school, 7 had graduated from high school, 9 had graduated from college with an

3 The Constitution of Independent India 1950 define Anglo-Indian as “a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only” (The Constitution of India, paragraph 366). Due to this ethnic background, all Indian respondents were fluent in English since it is their mother tongue.

4 In post-independence India, Anglo-Indians no longer had the privileged access to administrative and infrastructural jobs that they had enjoyed under the British (Andrews 2010: 175). Discussing Anglo-Indian poverty in the southern city of Madras, Lionel Caplan (1996: 320) noted that the Anglo Indian community had become “more economically heterogeneous than before”. In the context of their conditions in the eastern city of Kolkata, ethnographer Robyn Andrews (2010: 175) has observed that many of the successful Anglo-Indians of Kolkata emigrated from the country and that while some Anglo-Indians who stayed behind did have comfortable lifestyles, many others were compelled to move into poorer areas of the city.



undergraduate degree, one person had obtained a Masters' degree and one person held a PhD degree.

The Italian data drew on an on-going ethnographic study among Italians elders living in Bologna. Of the 80 respondents in the study, all respondents used digital platforms either independently or in collaborative use situations. We conducted 20 in-depth interviews. The use of the platforms has had a significant impact for the sample group due to the lockdown and the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the Italian sample, middle class retired citizens constituted  $\frac{2}{3}$  (14 people) of the sample, while the rest of the sample ( $\frac{1}{3}$ rd or 6 people) was constituted of lower middle class retired citizens with lower secondary school diploma and some vocational school diploma, just one interviewed has an university degree in economics. During the pre-retirement period, respondents were involved in professions connected with production, craftsmanship, retail and service economy. In the middle-class group, 5 respondents reported that they took up work occasionally to supplement their pension such as small household and other repairs, and cleaning, washing or ironing clothes.

#### **4. Platforms and the elderly: Practices and resources**

##### *4.1. Age based differentiation among the elderly*

Following the differentiation made by Garfein and Herzog (1995), we considered how differences in age cohorts shaped platforms. In the larger ethnographic sample from India, 38 respondents were from the young old category, 30 respondents from the old old category and 7 respondents were part of the oldest old category. The youngest respondent was 61 years old while the oldest was 94 years old. Contrary to our expectations, cohort differences are not particularly strong among Indian respondents when it comes to use of platforms. Cohort differences were less significant among Indian respondents than factors such as cultural and social capital. For instance, Renold, a 64 year "young old" respondent who had retired from delivery services, was not keen to use digital platforms. When interviewed in the pre-Covid era, Renold demonstrated a lack of interest towards digital platforms and used only social networking platforms occasionally. His digital platform use picked up only during the lockdown through significant encouragement from his daughter and a young local shopkeeper. On other hand, Blossom who at 77 years of age is an "old old" respondent, was an avid user of a variety of digital platforms. Apart from social networking platforms, she also comfortably uses other digital platforms for shopping, streaming and ride-hailing. She figured out the use of these platforms herself and relies on googling information to solve any use related problems. Blossom credits her ability to do this to the computer training she received as a secretary and her own interest in technology.

The Italian reference sample is made up of 8 young old, 11 old old and 1 oldest old respondents. The old old category is essentially divided into two equal sub-groups. One group may be defined as the curious, those who like to

experiment and somehow play with technologies and devices. Meanwhile, the second group can be defined as the ambivalent, those who are not interested in approaching the digital landscape, if not for the use of basic functions. It is interesting to observe how the division between the curious and the ambivalent is not necessarily characterized by economic or cultural variables, but rather through the gender variable. In fact, women appear more curious than men in their approach to technology and platforms and represent 70% in this cohort. The occupational variable interacted with the gender variable. Men, who had been mainly engaged in the manufacturing sector, show less inclination and curiosity in the context of digitalization than women, who had mostly been working in the service economy. On the other hand, among the young old, this gender gap appears less evident, and variations are better explained by economic and cultural capital variables. In fact, in this age cohort, the distinction between the curious and ambivalent is less relevant compared to the difference between those who have access and literacy and those who are marginalized by a cultural and economic gap. And finally, the oldest old respondents, appear to be interested only in the basic functions that technology can offer and prefer telephone communications to other connection methods.

As can be observed from this discussion, while they were important, age-based cohort differences interact with many other factors such as social networks and gender roles to shape how the elderly use platforms.

Exposure to digital technology in occupational situations provided an important resource in the use of platforms among elderly Indian respondents. For instance, in the Indian interview sample, other than one person, all respondents had been engaged in office-based work. In some of these workplaces, respondents had undergone explicit training in the use of computers. For some respondents, the nature of the job, such as managerial work or office crew for airlines, demanded that the person had to pick up computer skills on the job. Secretarial work was a common profession among the Indian interview respondents (7 respondents), and those working in well-established private companies had received some computer training. Teachers made up another large occupational group among the Indian interview respondents (7 respondents) and they noted that they had been expected to use computers as part of their teaching work. However, other than one teacher (68-year old Jane) who reported that computer training was offered in the school that employed her, all others were expected to either learn on their own or from students. Some respondents specifically referred to this training while examining their ease with platforms. For instance, Jane's younger sister, Lilly (61 year old) has recently retired from her job as a secretary for a prestigious Kolkata firm. Of the two, Lilly is far more adept with platforms and digital devices as compared to Jane. Lilly attributed her own relative proficiency on two main resources she had access to as compared Jane - Lilly was given training in computers and other digital devices (such as using a blackberry and a smartphone provided by the company for office work) at the workplace and that she relied on her network of work colleagues (other secretaries employed in the company) for any troubleshooting. While Jane also received training in her school, she did not have to engage with

this technology on a constant basis and also did not have a comparable ready network of colleagues who used this technology. Of course, previous exposure to computer technology did not in itself completely determine the inclination to use digital platforms among the Indian respondents. The type of profile within the same occupational category (for instance, teacher of a school versus the principal) also made a difference. A personal inclination towards learning new technologies combined with this kind of cultural capital to influence the use of digital platforms. For instance, Reggie, a 69-year old male, had worked as a ticket issuer in the Indian railways. As the railways became computerized over the span of his career, he had taught himself to issue computerized tickets. However, he was not personally inclined to learning new technology beyond that. So Reggie had started using digital platforms relatively recently in 2019, with help from his nephew and son.

As far as digital literacy is concerned, the Italian sample shows a fairly clear split between those who had been involved in occupations related to office jobs (8) and those in production or commerce (12). The former appears to be more digitally literate, inclined to use multiple devices and moved with greater ease within various platforms. In contrast, the latter have had a digital socialization process mediated exclusively by mobile devices. This group tended not to consider alternative connection possibilities, primarily because it appeared more complicated for them or not part of their generational culture. As 72-year old

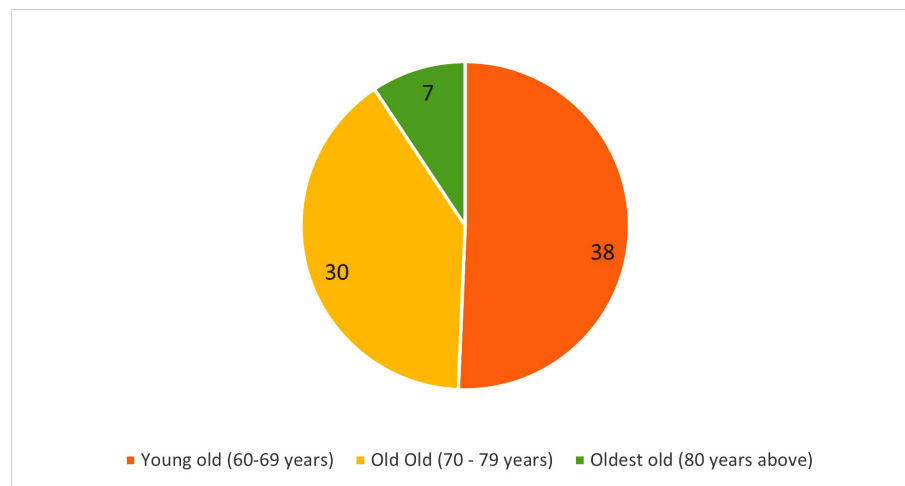


Figure 1. Age cohorts in Indian ethnographic sample.

Carlo told us, “I never used the computer when I was working, I don’t feel the need now. I can do anything I want with my smartphone. I don’t read a lot and I prefer to watch TV”. As in the Indian case, however, previous computer literacy does not automatically facilitate the current use of such devices. It often continues to be seen as a scary tool that is less friendly than mobile devices. For instance, 73-year old Emma shared that, “I worked in the office and I knew how to use the computer very well. I used to be very quick on the computer, but over time I lost my training. And now I often struggle to orient myself in

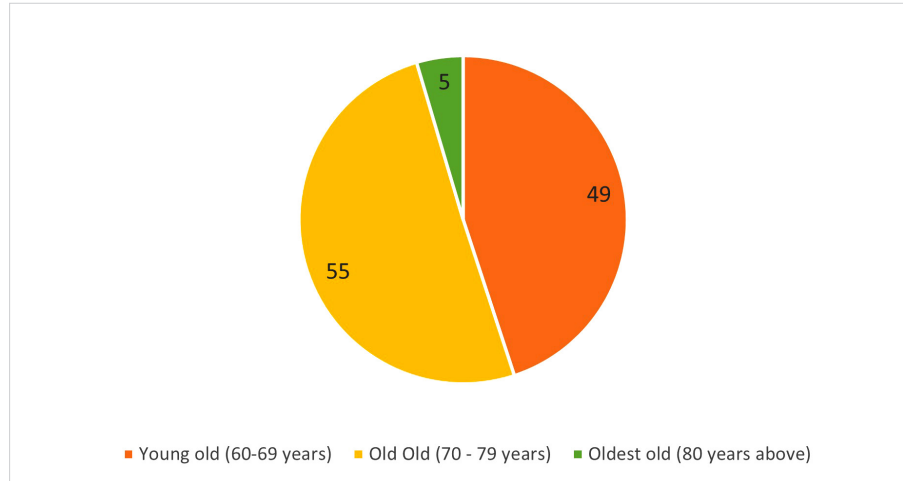


Figure 2. Age cohorts in Italian ethnographic sample.

front of a screen, I happen to feel lost. I love my tablet, however, with that I can do everything”.

Previous literature on the elderly and digital technology points out to a significant correlation between education and use (Anderson and Perrin 2017; Hargittai et al. 2018). However, in both the Indian and Italian sample, occupation emerged as a much more significant factor. We found that respondents who had equal or even less education than others were likely to be more comfortable using platforms if they had been familiarized with computers in their occupational lives. For instance, in the Indian sample, secretaries (high school education) tended to use platforms more than school teachers (bachelor’s degree) because their occupational experience oriented their approach to using digital technology. As a result, occupational experience featured prominently in the cultural capital for respondents in both cities.

#### 4.3. Social networks as a resource for elderly platform users

Indian respondents drew significantly on their social capital while engaging with digital platforms. Only three respondents – Blossom (78), Nelson (63), and Lilly (61) – claimed that they had taught themselves how to use platforms. If they encountered any problems, these respondents would first try to resolve it themselves or problem solve using online resources such as consumer communities. However, these respondents were unusual and most of the Indian respondents turned to a variety of people to learn or trouble shoot the use of digital platforms. Amongst the 19 respondents interviewed in India, 4 respondents relied on their elderly spouse to use digital platforms. Apart from other family members such as children, grandchildren, siblings and other kin (14 people), respondents also turned to neighbours (6 respondents), shopkeepers (3 respondents) old or current students (2 respondents), friends (1 respondents), old colleagues and co-workers (1 respondent) and church members (1 respondent). Family often included children (13 respon-

dents), spouses (10 respondents) and grandchildren (5 respondents) but also relations such as siblings (5 respondents) and nephews (4 respondents). For the Indian respondents, proximity mattered a great deal:<sup>5</sup> when children either lived far away in the same city or in other cities/countries, or were unavailable (non-existent or busy), they preferred to turn to others for assistance. Reflecting broader trends of the correlation between using digital technology and being male (Selwyn et al. 2003; Van Deursen and Helsper 2015; König et al. 2018), in the Indian sample men were more likely to be interested or adept at using platforms.<sup>6</sup> For instance, the interview data indicates that within households where elderly couples cohabited (9 couples), it could be observed that in 5 couples it was the male partner who was more enthusiastic and adept in platform use and provided support to the female partner in platform use. In contrast, in 4 of these households, it was the female partners who displayed greater curiosity and engagement with platforms.

The Italian sample seemed adept at the autonomous use of WhatsApp and Facebook, two of the most popular platforms within this cohort. WhatsApp has emerged as the primary means of maintaining contact with family, friends, former college mates and other kinds of solidarity networks. As for the use of other platforms, whether dedicated to entertainment (Netflix, Prime Video and others) or to the consumption and supply of products and food, the use is almost never done independently (3, respondents). In most cases, use is always assisted by family members, especially sons and daughters (14 respondents) or grandchildren (2 respondents). In rare cases, people relied on the specialized assistance that provided by resellers of computer or telephone products (just 1 respondent). Unlike the Indian case, there were no significant individual or group interactions with local religious institutions or churches. Within the household, women (14) compared to men (6) seem to have a greater propensity and curiosity in the adoption and experimentation of platforms and social media. The Italian sample also stood in marked contrast with positive correlation between being male and ICT use noted in the literature (Selwyn et al. 2003; Van Deursen and Helsper 2015; König et al. 2018). Interview data indicates that among elderly couples, often it is the woman who first develops a familiarity and ease in using platforms as part of her regular pattern of food supply and home management. So, in these couples, usually it is the woman who then goes on to socialize the man in the use of devices and platforms. For instance, 69-year old Marco notes, “I have always worked without the help of computer devices. I do not understand how they work,

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5 Unlike the pattern of intergenerational cohabitation in the broader Indian population, among the Anglo Indians adult children tend to reside separately from parents after marriage.

6 For instance, a study by the Internet and Mobile Association of India based on 2019 data notes that internet access and use in India was skewed heavily towards males. The report noted that the figure for India’s female Internet users was barely half of the figure for Indian’s male Internet users (who numbered 258 million men). <<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/info-tech/66-mn-internet-users-in-india-aged-between-5-and-11-years/article29518418.ece>>.

and I do not understand English. They are very comfortable and very useful tools. However, I prefer that my wife, who has always worked in an office, to help me when I have to do something. Together, we face less of a risk of making mistakes". It must be noted that during the first lockdown some elderly Italians articulated an awareness of being marginalized on account of their lack of digital literacy. For instance, 75-year old Teresa remarked that, "I had no smartphone or internet connection because I did not consider it necessary. But fortunately my daughter bought me Alexa and so in a simple way and without having to learn anything I can talk to my grandson. Actually, now I also like to use it because it keeps me company and I can listen to the music I like".

#### 4.4. Presence on platforms

Indian respondents were familiar with digital platforms, which they had either used themselves or with someone else. Of the Indian respondents in the larger ethnographic sample (75 people), most actively used social networking platforms such as WhatsApp (70 respondents) and Facebook (55 respondents) autonomously for communicating with family members, friends and neighbours. 74 respondents used YouTube, for purposes ranging from watching movies, music, and cooking videos to attending online broadcasts of church services (since Covid 19). Similarly, free (non-premium) versions of music streaming platforms such as Spotify and Gaana were quite popular among respondents. New video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Webex and House party became popular after the pandemic. Most of them had also had some experience with online shopping platforms. Amazon (31 respondents) and Flipkart (17 respondents) were the most popular platforms, followed by Myntra and Snapdeal. Till Covid hit India, nearly all the Indian respondents had used ride hailing platforms such as Uber, Ola and, to a lesser extent, Rapido bikes.

In the larger ethnographic sample of 75 respondents in India, 45 respondents did not use food delivery platforms. The 30 respondents who did use such platforms, relied on Swiggy and Zomato. Further, 15 respondents used the grocery platform Bigbasket. Paid online streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hotstar were used by 22 Indian respondents. Some respondents noted that while they had initially subscribed to online streaming platforms, they unsubscribed quickly because they felt they were not watching it enough to justify the subscription cost. Most of the Indian elderly respondents do not trust online payment platforms. For instance, among the 19 people interviewed in India, only 5 respondents used them on their own. Others (4 respondents) asked someone else to pay online by using payment platforms on their behalf and then re-paid in cash. Rather counterintuitively, the use of medical platforms (such as Medlife) and on-demand service platforms (such as Urban Company) was rare among this set of respondents. None of the respondents used health records platforms (such as Practo) or the government Covid tracker app (Aarogya Setu).

As far as the use of digital platforms is concerned, the Italian panorama is

almost totally dominated by Facebook (78 respondents) and WhatsApp (80 respondents). These platforms are used daily by all interviewees, both for social purposes and for communication with family and friends. Youtube also plays an important role in the use of platforms. Respondents mainly use it for entertainment – watching broadcasts typical of their generation, sports highlights and tutorials are the main activities carried out on YouTube. Interestingly, the use of these three dominant platforms seems to have remained unchanged in the Italian sample during the Covid-19 situation. Rather, for this generation of Italian elders, the major change since the pandemic has been their discovery of e-commerce and streaming entertainment.

Interestingly, the seniors in this sample largely resisted adopting FaceTime, Skype, Zoom or Google Meet, even though these video conferencing services offer the only form of connection with family members. The low technological literacy of these users emerges as a key obstacle – it has led these elderly respondents to prefer WhatsApp’s video calling services or others that are pre-installed on devices such as Facetime.

In particular, about 53 of the respondents in the Italian sample use Amazon Prime Video (included for the Italian market within Amazon Prime) and Netflix with other (cohabiting and non-cohabiting) family members. The other great novelty related to Covid-19, as far as the digital behavior of elderly people interviewed is concerned, was their discovery of e-commerce. This was driven by the service offered by the main Italian supermarket chains which offered free home delivery services for citizens over 70 during the lockdown. Young old respondents with a higher income have started to pay for reading news through platforms.

The regional health dossier was already widely used before the spread of the pandemic and its use has remained constant over time. However, in the middle of the lockdown, the dossier conducted a technical transition to SPID credentials. Many users (70% of respondents) reported that for them dealing with this shift at a very particular moment in history was both a source of stress and a complication in the use of this service.

As far as the Italian elderly people are concerned, there is still a fair distrust as far as purchases on e-commerce platforms are concerned, which are made, but through assistance or mediation of a trusted person. Payment instruments such as contactless cards (15 respondents) or digital platforms such as Satispay or Paypal (2 respondents), are not at all appreciated and very little used, both for distrust towards digital money and because of the digital divide. On the contrary, respondents show a fair propensity to use, even autonomously, home-banking platforms (28 respondents) or tools like Postepay (20 respondents). The profile of the average Italian elderly person who co uses digital platforms and services is that of someone over 70, who still lives with his spouse or partner and who is in contact either in person or at a distance with a relative on average every day. The relative is the one who manages the profiles and digital accounts on behalf of the elderly and is also the one who in most cases (56 respondents) makes payments of various types. Elderly people are autonomous in the use of the platform, as far as the choice of content is

concerned (transmissions to be seen on Netflix Amazon Prime video etc., or for content to be posted on SNS). With regard to online purchases of food products the mediation is mainly done through the delivery of a classic handwritten shopping list or in more advanced cases through WhatsApp. Almost all interviewees using entertainment platforms use them as members of the family account of a younger relative, who, as mentioned earlier, is also the manager. The few cases of those who own and pay for a digital service are directly related to the medium-high economic and cultural capital and the young old segment. The proportion of respondents who had used payment platforms – often through collaborative use – was relatively lower in the Indian ethnographic sample (19%). Yet, most of these respondents also preferred either ATM cards or internet banking to payment platforms due to a pervasive fear of financial fraud and unfamiliarity with such platforms.

Platforms Category	Percentage of Indian respondents who used this platform	Percentage of Italian respondents who used this platform
Social Networking	99	100
Video Conferencing	52	75
Streaming Platforms	35	69
News Platforms	4	66
E-Commerce (non-food)	41	20
E-Commerce (food groceries)	20	30
Food Delivery	40	15
Time management	0	2
Payment Platforms	19	20
Ride hailing Platforms	84	0

Table 1. Participation of Respondents by Platform Category (Total ethnographic sample).

#### 4.5. Ownership of devices

There were four respondents in the larger ethnographic sample who did not own any digital devices themselves: they shared a digital device used by a family member. The most common digital device used by Indian respondents is the smartphone. Yet, not everyone owns a smartphone. For instance, 5 respondents in the larger ethnographic sample did not have a smartphone. Very few of the Indian respondents owned tablets (5 respondents). Relatively older respondents such as Blossom (78) and Mathew (81) used the laptop and



computer because they found it easier to look at the larger screen and write using a physical keyboard. Elderly Indian respondents often preferred to watch streaming services on a SmartTV if they had access to it since a large screen was easier on their eyes. However, the actual pattern of use and ownership varied based on its use by other members of the household. For instance, Greta (78) has been living in her daughter’s household since the lockdown started. Although she prefers to watch Netflix on the SmartTV there (owned by her daughter and son-in-law), she often ends up watching the platform on her smartphone. A couple of factors come in here. Greta is preoccupied with the care of her two grandchildren and the SmartTV is usually used by them. Greta only gets time off from the grandchildren when they are sleeping – which makes it hard for Greta to use the SmartTV. As a result, she watches Netflix on her phone during this time.

When it comes to the use of electronic devices, elderly Italians are mainly connected through the smartphone. Each of the respondents interviewed had a smartphone. Alternatively, for use at home, they preferred the tablet (44 respondents) to the desktop or laptop, due to the fact that the operating system is the same among the devices. As 72-year old Maria pointed out, “Having a mobile device allows me to have my son configure it according to my needs, every time I meet him”. Similarly, 73-year old Antonio tells us, “The tablet has the same interface as my smartphone so I’m in the same environment all the time. I can read from the sofa and communicate with my distant family without having to learn new things”. The popularity of Smart TVs is rather average (34 respondents) because many TVs have been transformed into smart devices thanks to the purchase of cheap dongles.

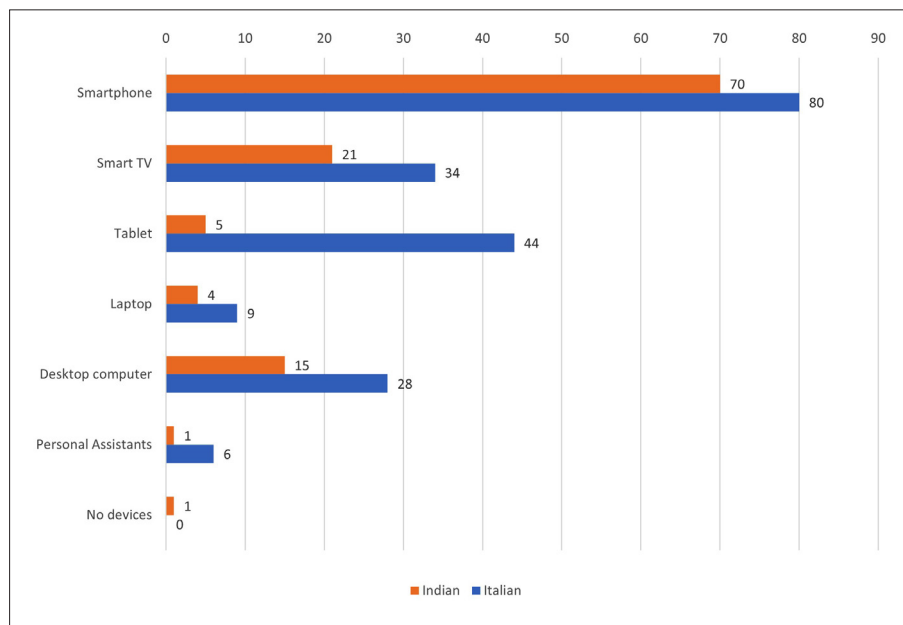


Figure 3. Digital devices used (based on the ethnographic sample).

#### 4.6. Costs of accessing platforms

All Indian respondents interviewed used mobile data for accessing the internet (4G). Additionally, 8 of these 19 respondents also had a broadband connection at home. Since Italian respondents prefer smartphones, they are mainly connected to the Internet via 4G mobile data plans (66%). A significantly lower percentage – 33% – have both 4G and Broadband connections.

The absence of a digital culture, associated with the fact that many people do not personally manage, but share, the accounts they use, leads us to conclude that in the Italian sample, there is a propensity to consider digital content as free and free of charge, unlike services such as cable TV or utilities.

Indian respondents preferred to use platforms for which they were not charged such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp and Spotify (non-premium). For instance, 61-year old Rita and her 61-year old husband Christopher primarily used their SmartTV to watch YouTube content. This couple had not used any other OTT streaming services such as Netflix because they would have to pay and felt it was too expensive to subscribe to these platforms. For instance, 78-year old Greta reported that she started to use Netflix since the past year, but only after it was included in the broader package offered by her Internet service provider (Vodafone).<sup>7</sup> Indian respondents displayed resistance to platforms in which they would have to pay to have an account such as Amazon Prime, Netflix etc. In some cases, this reluctance also motivated collaborative use of the platforms. For instance, 77-year old Blossom has now discontinued her Amazon Prime Video subscription because she saves money by sharing her son’s account. The table below shows how much the average Indian and Italian respondent in our interview samples paid for 4G and broadband connections. The table provides average cost per month in the respective currencies as well as in comparison to the per capita incomes in these countries.

Type of Access	Cost of Internet			
	Average cost to Indian respondents per month (in INR)	As a percentage of Per Capita Income in India <sup>8</sup>	Average cost to Italian respondents per month (in Euros)	As a percentage of Per Capita Income in Italy
4G	588.9	5.23%	14.9	1.87%
Broadband	701.4	6.23%	29.9	3.75%

Table 2. Internet Costs (Based on in-depth interviews).

<sup>7</sup> In India, Internet service providers such as Airtel and Vodafone (now called Vi) have recently started offering free access to OTT streaming platforms along with basic data packs: <<https://telecom.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/vodafone-offers-free-netflix-for-a-year-to-select-red-customers-/59333307>>.

<sup>8</sup> The Government of India estimates that the figure for per capita income in 2019-2020 to be Rs 11254 per month (PTI 2020). <<https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/good-news-indias-per-capita-income-rises-6-8-per-cent-to-rs-11254-a-month-in-fy20/1816070/>>.

In this segment, we highlighted the practices adopted by the elderly in the cities of Kolkata and Bologna in order to negotiate digital platforms. We also demonstrated how our elderly respondents relied on two key resources – occupational experience with digital technology and the social networks – in order to use digital platforms.

## 5. Portraits of the Digital Elder in Bologna and Kolkata

### 5.1. Collaborative use

Out of 19 interview respondents in India, 10 people were able to independently use digital platforms on their own. However, we also found varied instances where they collaborated with others for using platforms, or *collaborative use*. Collaborative use is a more inclusive category which also incorporates proxy use. Indian respondents relied on family (spouses, children, grandchildren, spouses and siblings), friends, neighbours and shopkeepers to do so.

Among elderly Italians, collaborative use is the main form of use of the platforms. All profiles other than Facebook and WhatsApp profiles – entertainment streaming platforms, ecommerce, bank accounts, digital payment systems or medical records – are managed in collaborative use or by proxy, with a very close family member (usually a child) or extended family.

In this study we found that elderly respondents used platforms through three different collaborative use scenarios: use on behalf, shared use of platforms through common accounts, and shared use of platforms through shared devices.

#### 5.1.1. Use on behalf

We did find instances of “proxy use”, where the respondents asked someone else to use the digital platform on their behalf. For instance, Mathew, an 81-year old Kolkata resident, always asks an Anglo-Indian friend to book an Uber when he needs one. The friend, who lives in a different part of the city, books a car from their own smartphone and Uber account. The friend then sends the ride details to Mathew through WhatsApp and also coordinates with the Uber driver on the phone. Once the car reaches the landmark, the friend calls Mathew to inform him.

Italian elderly profiles are often managed remotely by relatives who do not cohabit with them. When it comes to basic use, Italian elders displayed autonomous use. Apart from proxy use, respondents collaborated with others in more varied ways as well. Sometimes they shared the use of platforms through accounts and devices.

#### 5.1.2. Shared use of platforms through common accounts

Here, a common account is used for the digital platform, but the device used is individual. The elderly may either use other people’s accounts on their

own digital devices, or they may share their own account with others. For instance, Max, a 66-year old man who lives in Kolkata, shared his own Netflix account with a younger friend. Here, Max pays for the Netflix account. One of the most interesting data, in the Italian scenario, is that a very significant segment of the sample (16 respondents of the interviews) reported that the access credentials to their profiles are available to a family member, so that the latter can manage the account. This “delegation” process was particularly appreciated by those elderly respondents who did not cohabit with relatives. This way, their electronic health record, medical examinations and prescriptions could still be managed.

### 5.1.3. Shared use of platforms through shared devices

The simultaneous sharing of devices, which is very common in India, often leads to collaborative use of platforms there. Consider for example, that in the larger ethnographic sample, 4 out of 75 Indian respondents did not own a digital device. However, even among this set, 3 respondents are able to use at least one digital platform through the shared use of a digital device with a family member. The other 71 respondents owned at least one digital device on which they used at least one digital platform. However, even these 71 respondents would share the use of platforms through sharing devices with others. To take a slightly detailed case, Lilly and Jane are sisters who share an apartment in Kolkata. During the lockdown, Lilly and Jane started to participate in real-time online prayers through WhatsApp video call. Both sisters have individual smartphones. However, for these prayer sessions, the sisters would share a smartphone – it could be either Lilly’s phone or Jane’s.

In Italy it is common practice to share a platform account with family and friends who do not necessarily live in the same household. Practically all respondents who use services where sharing or multi-screen vision is possible use them in this way. However, no physical sharing of devices between people was observed. Instead a different practice was observed in the Italian sample. Often, the elderly would receive second-hand devices from relatives who had upgraded to a new version of the device (48 respondents in the broader ethnographic group reported this).

### 5.2. Pre and Post Covid-19

The Covid situation forced a change of habits on a global scale. For the elderly, this change was more complex. Primarily, they realized that they were forced to rely on digital technologies for practices that they had not previously used them for.

Table 5 describes the fluctuations in platform use among Indian and Italian respondents who were interviewed since the Covid-19 crisis started. Our respondents mostly continued to use the platforms they used earlier, but they did so with greater frequency and intensity. In contrast to this larger trend however, the use of two popular types of platforms – ride-hailing and food-delivery (cooked food) – slowed down in the Indian sample due to mobility re-

strictions and health concerns. Both Indian and Italian respondents also started to use some new types of platforms that they had not used earlier. For instance, respondents in both the Italian and Indian sample started to use e-commerce for purchasing food and groceries. Italian respondents also started adopting video conferencing and e-commerce platforms.

Platforms Category	Change in use among Indian respondents	Change in use among Italian respondents
Social Networking	Enhanced	Enhanced
Video Conferencing	Enhanced	Adopted
Streaming Platforms	Stable	Enhanced
News Platforms	Stable	Enhanced
E-Commerce (non-food)	Enhanced	Adopted
E-Commerce (food groceries)	Adopted	Adopted
Food Delivery	Reduced	Stable
Time management	Not adopted	Minimally Adopted
Ride hailing Platforms	Reduced	Non adopted
Payment Platforms	Enhanced	Enhanced

Table 3. Changes in use by platform category after Covid-19 among interview respondents.

## 6. Conclusion

Wrapping up the discussion, we can consider how the elderly in India and Italy engage in collaborative use to negotiate platforms. The use of platforms in Italy and India by the elderly, presents a series of similarities and a series of typical features specific to the local context. First of all, it should be kept in mind that the same platforms do not operate in the two geographical contexts. Consequently, methodologically, we decided to proceed by identifying categories of platforms rather than comparing individual platforms.

There are significant similarities between India and Italy. The main similarities between the two contexts are related to: family structure and rituals, digital divide, distrust of digital platforms and reluctance to digital payments.

Family ties are very important in both countries, with intimate and routine interactions observed between parents and children. Both in India and Italy, it is not uncommon for the elderly to cohabit with their adult children, or live in close proximity to them, if the children reside in the same city. Further, they tend to interact with each other at least once a day. In the Indian sample, such

intergenerational families also observe specific rituals on a weekly basis – attending Sunday Mass together – and this practice transcended to platforms during the lockdown. In the same way, in Italy, the tradition of Sunday lunch with the extended family is routinely observed, but not the collective participation in the Sunday Mass.

Even if digital divide appears to be wide in Italy, it is also significant for the Indian elderly. The digitally divided senior is a significant reality, particularly if we consider active autonomous users. However, when we consider the constant intergenerational interactions between family members, and factor in collaborative use, we may find that more of the elderly participate in platforms than such official figures account for. As part of the divide also English literacy is a common challenge to using platforms in both India and Italy. Literacy and competence in English presents a strong barrier to access in some platform content and basic functions of devices since vernacular interface options are not universally available.

Thirdly, in both countries, the elderly are using platforms despite significant factors of mistrust. For instance, they place considerable trust in social media platforms, particularly the more private platform of WhatsApp. Other platforms – particularly e-commerce, groceries and payment platforms – are viewed with deep mistrust. They usually turn to digital e-commerce or grocery platforms only if the product is unavailable offline or access to the physical market itself is severely restricted (as in the case of the pandemic). In particular, many elderly respondents noted that they prefer to touch and feel the objects before purchasing and this trust mechanism is missing in the above platforms. The balance of mistrust and necessity of payment platforms is particularly striking among the elderly in both countries. With the Covid-19 pandemic, they are slowly but fearfully exploring options of paying online. However, still there is a tendency to conduct interbank transfer or payment through debit cards, rather than payment platforms. This also generates opportunities for collaborative use: where a family member or trusted person may make a payment through an online platform which is then reimbursed in cash by the elderly person.

Another similarity between the elderly in both countries is that there is a deep reluctance to pay for the intermediary, i.e. the platform itself. This can be observed most clearly in the case of streaming platforms. In both countries, people prefer the platform where streaming is free – as a result YouTube is one the most popular platforms amongst both Indian and Italian seniors. Alternately, they also opt for versions of these music and video platforms that are non-premium, and hence free. The slow growth of such platforms among the elderly may be stymied by the recent trend of free annual subscriptions nested in Internet data plans. This reluctance also generates collaborative use, where the elderly may access streaming platforms with family and non-family collaborative users. There is a long tradition of public broadcasting in Italy and consequently, many of the elderly expect that content should be free. In contrast, despite a modest history of public broadcasting, particularly in TV, since the early 1990s private TV broadcasts have become pervasive across

most income segments and regions in India. Consequently, the elderly in India do not have the same expectation that content should be free.

The main differences between these countries pertained to types of devices, profile of the collaborative user, the various means of collaborative use, and factors influencing use of platforms among the elderly.

In both countries, the Internet revolution seems to have unfolded through mobile devices. As a result, all respondents primarily used mobile devices to use platforms. However, the type of device used varied. While the smartphone was commonly used in both India and Italy, tablets were only used in Italy but not in India. The use of other devices (desktop computers, laptops and SmartTVs) were similar in both countries. Personal assistants were used more frequently in Italy than in India. As far as the cost of accessing the Internet, both broadband and digital connections cost less in Italy than in India.

There are some significant differences between India and Italy with respect to the types of platforms used by the elderly. Some categories of platforms are simply not used in a country. For instance, while time management platforms are popular in Italy, they are not used by seniors in India. Similarly, while ride hailing platforms were used frequently by the elderly in the Indian sample, this type of platform is just taking off in Italy and so very few Italian respondents have used it so far. There were also stark differences in the use of e-commerce platforms. Both food delivery and non-food e-commerce platforms were more popular among the Indian sample as compared to the Italian sample. Payment platforms were also used much less in Italy as compared to India.

The main result of our survey, however, concerns the collaborative use of platforms. The typical profile of the person the elderly drew on for collaborative use differed between both countries. In Italy this circle was limited to friends and family. In contrast, in India, the elderly also drew on people outside their circle of family and friends to negotiate platforms, such as neighbours, shopkeepers, church members and ex-colleagues.

Although there were interesting similarities when it came to collaborative use, there were also significant differences between the two countries. The sharing of platforms through sharing an account was also common across both countries. In Italy, accounts are shared with both friends and family. However, when it comes to the management of a shared account, that role is only given to a family member but never to a friend. In India, it was common for the elderly to share accounts with family. However, in contrast to the Italian case, it was unusual for the elderly to share an account with a friend in India. In the rare instance where the elderly shared platform accounts with their friends, the sharing tended to be temporary.

## **Appendix A: Platforms used among Indian respondents**

<b>Platform name</b>	<b>Percentage of Indian respondents who used this platform</b>
WhatsApp	100
YouTube	100
Facebook	95
Uber	84
Rapido	5
Ola	30
Zoom	31
Google meet	10
Webex	5
House party	5
Swiggy	52
Zomato	52
Urban company	5
Amazon prime	16
Netflix	42
Hotstar	10
Spotify	5
Amazon	95
Flipkart	68
Jabong	0
Myntra	5
Snapdeal	5
Bigbasket	36
Paytm	32
Google Pay	10
Bhim	5
PhonePe	0
Amazon Pay	0
Medlife	5
Aarogya Setu	0

**Appendix B: Platforms used among Italian respondents**



Platform name	Percentage of Italian respondents who used this platform
WhatsApp	100
YouTube	98
Facebook	98
Instagram	45
Skype	30
Facetime	30
Zoom	0
Google meet	0
Amazon Prime	25
Amazon Prime TV	25
Netflix	55
DAZN	45
Now TV	20
Spotify	2
Just Eat	15
Deliveroo	10
Glovo	5
Satispay	5
Paypal	8
Postepay	15
Esselunga online	25
EasyCoop	20
Carrefour	5
Everli	2
Ufirst	20
Coop Coda	36
Fascicolo Sanitario ER	80

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