Constant and instant notifications
Youth experiences of online security, relations and information in La Paz/El Alto

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Abstract

Several studies explore new technology and social media usage, especially in the global North. This study set out to investigate what kind of experiences and opinions youth in La Paz and El Alto, Bolivia, had of their internet and communication technology usage, through semi-structural interviews, at the same time comparing the possible differences in this between LGBT and non-LGBT youth. That way I am trying to add a perspective and voice in the new media discourse, as well as adding to the knowledge of my partner organization, Svalorna Latinamerika.

I decided to focus on three main online activities; security issues, relationship building and information management, and the nine informants were encouraged to share their thoughts and experiences as well as information about their general ICT usage.

The results showed that the youth’s internet usage was depending more on their interest in the different media and platforms, rather than on their sexual orientation or gender. The LGBT informants however had more experiences of discrimination and threat online. Also, all of the informant’s seemed to create new relations not only to other users online, but also to the platforms and media itself, this depending on how much they were using the platforms.

Finally I could see that the informants could satisfy many different needs with their ICT and social media use, depending on their interests, resources and time spent online.

Keywords: Social media, youth, La Paz/El Alto, LGBT, online experience, security, information management, relations online.
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1 Introduction

In this chapter I present a short background of the research subject, being LGBT and non-LGBT youth, online activities and experiences in La Paz/El Alto. Thereafter I will also present this study’s purpose as well as a description of the research questions and the outline of the study.

1.1 Brief summary of the study

This thesis will examine the use of social media and ICT amongst youth in La Paz/El Alto, Bolivia, setting out to explore how the informants perceive their online relations, online security and information management today, and if, and then how, there is a difference in LGBT youth and non-LGBT youths experiences. Is it that LGBT youth in La Paz/El Alto find it easier to socialize and create new contacts online than other youth? Do youth feel safe hanging out in online, and is it so that internet is an arena of less or more risks and discrimination for youth? How do they inform themselves, and what kind of information will they search for online? Are LGBT youth more aware of risks connected with social media use than others, or are they using social media in the same way, equally aware of risks and discrimination? I will conduct in depth interviews with both LGBT and non-LGBT youth, listening to their experiences and thoughts around these matters. Other studies have been carried out regarding youth’s experience on new media, however few studies have been made in developing countries. Regarding the case of Bolivia, and La Paz/El Alto in particular, there have been studies carried out by Svalorna Latinamerika and their partner organizations focused on youth and online participation as well as youth’s perception of sexual rights, discrimination and general knowledge of sexuality and safety. Thus I chose to cooperate with them for the opportunity to go deeper into their previous research as well as complement their quantitative studies with my qualitative one, with a bit different focus.

1.2 Youth and everyday ICT

While the digital and non-digital worlds are coming together, where we can access almost the whole world and all our friends instantly from our pockets, and anyone can say something to

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1 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. The acronym has been used since the 90’s, more trying to include a diversity of sexualities than the formerly used “gay community” that only referred to homosexual people. This terminology is commonly used to describe people with another sexual orientation than heterosexuality. (See more: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT)
almost anyone, a lot of studies are carried out to investigate how this affects us, the users. Not long ago, we would use the term “IT”, or information technology, when talking about computers and internet, but today we have come to use the term “ICT” more and more, adding “communication” to the concept. This is because the ways we use this technology have indeed changed radically during the last fifteen to twenty years. From being a source of information for students or researchers, or a way to handle information in industries and companies, the technology is today a way for people to meet, discuss, engage, have fun, publish their own content and engage in different causes. The main purpose for most Swedish youth going online is no longer to search for information, but to connect with and communicate with other people (Gäredal and Nathorst-Böös 2009:11). Information search come only on a fifth place when Swedish youth between 12-16 years themselves rate what they are doing the most online, after more interactive activities like playing games, chatting, reading or writing blog posts or hanging out on social communities. Digital media and technology is thus more of an important social device and connector today, and as real for its users as the offline reality. Being integrated in youth’s everyday life with cell phones, laptops and tablets, this gives that we also will want to study how different groups of youth are using and experiencing this new media. A study from Harris Interactive (2010), a market survey company, shows that US American LGBT individuals are more active on social media and also engage more in blogs than non-LGBT people, and that this group also engages in new media content that is tailored for their group. This group also spends more time in general reading about politics, pop culture and news than other groups. A similar study from the similar company eMarketer (2013) presents numbers that show the same tendency, and we can also find studies that show how US American LGBT youth faces higher rates of bullying and harassment online (GLSEN 2013). Internet and ICT use can come with many risks for all users in terms of digital viruses, the risk of having personal content exploited or being tricked by fake emails and profiles to share sensitive information. However, these risks are higher especially for those who already break norms in society and openly take an active part in advocacy work online, since it becomes another arena of facing people's prejudice, discrimination and violence. At the same time it also gives these people the possibility of anonymity and a way to connect with peers and communities where they can share their experience with others who share it, something that might not have be possible in their physical world. This of course also signify that people can lie about who they are, connect with other on false grounds or spread false information, and online safety and security strategies are debated both online, academically and in schools today.
1.3 Youth and online risks

The internet and new technology that keeps us online is changing how we interact with each other, and it has also let any person, old or young, become a content producer rather than receiver. We talk, we publish and we communicate, and just as in our offline reality, this is connected with certain risks. Many adults have been worried about online risks like sexual explicit material that will harm their youth, or that sexual contact will be made by adult towards minors, while a report from Online Safety and Technology Working Group (2010) stress that the highest threat youth are facing today is bullying and discrimination by other peers, both online and offline. They stress that we cannot talk about an online and an offline reality anymore, since the internet, online tools and communities have been integrated into youth’s every aspect of life. Online and offline risks will be closely connected, and unlike what most parents would like, there will be no quick-fix to guarantee youth safety online. People online are still people, even though anonymity and, for example, the safety of being behind a computer screen, might make it somewhat easier to say things that one would not say in reality (Zhuo 2010). However, for minority groups that already break norms, there seem to be a higher risk of being discriminated against online too. A Canadian article (Mediasmart.com) states that the most common hate speeches given online are of a religious character, homophobic or racist. Another study from the Unites States (Anderson et.al. 2012) support this, writing that youth with their roots in minority groups were more likely to perceive threats in their life compared to youth not belonging to these groups. This affected them negatively and they showed increased levels of stress. So, there are a lot of risks for youth online, and even more for those belonging to minority groups or who in other ways are breaking social norms, as there is in real life. However, the risks might be affecting us in other ways and take a different form.
2 Purpose and objective

There are reports on how youth experience their online presence. However, few studies have been carried out in developing countries and in Bolivia studies have focused on which ICT and LGBT and non-LGBT youth are using, not how they feel about it or think about how it connected to online relations, safety and information. The purpose of this study is to investigate and analyze youth's online experiences, regarding online security, information and relations. I set out with the objective to broaden the insight on what youth experiences online are, regarding previously mentioned themes, in La Paz/El Alto. This can also serve as a base for other organizations work with new media and youth engagement.

2.1 Problem definition:

I focused my research on trying to answer the following questions, and in all trying to see if there is a difference in LGBT and non-LGBT youth behavior and experience:

- How are young people in La Paz/El Alto using the internet to search for, and spread, information?
- Do young people in La Paz/El Alto have specific goals with their ICT/social media use?
- Are the youth aware of risks and security issues online, and what are their opinions about it?
- Do the youth have experience of discrimination and violence online?
- Do youth in La Paz/El Alto use new technology to search for, and develop, new relations?
- Which platforms are most common among young people in La Paz/El Alto and how do they experience them?
3  Context of the study

3.1  Stakeholders

_Svalorna Latinamerika_ is a Swedish development organization that has been working in Latin America since 1959 with different development projects. Their main area of interest is to work with empowering women, children and youth and supporting these groups to get more influence over the society they live in, and by that come to better life quality. They cooperate with local organizations in Nicaragua, Peru and Bolivia with enhancing human rights, with a special focus on participatory democracy, economical rights, education and sexual rights. In 2014 they just launched their new development program in Bolivia, Suma Thaki II, with the goal to diminish sexual and gender based violence and increase youth knowledge and engagement about discrimination and sexual rights. In Sweden the organization works with spreading information and raise awareness about development issues, and also take part in the Swedish development politics. In Bolivia they have one country coordinator, a program coordinator, an accountant and usually several interns taking part in the everyday tasks at the office.

_Capasitación y Derechos Ciudadanos (CDC)_ is a national organization of students and lawyers that are working with raising awareness about and the respect for human and citizen rights. The organization has since the beginning had a focus on vulnerable groups and has strategic alliances with all LGBT organizations in the country. Today their biggest focus is on LGBT and sexual rights, and they publish reports, run advocacy campaigns and participate in projects like Suma Thaki II and implement their own ones too.

_Red Ada_ is a women’s organization focused on communication and women’s rights from an intercultural perspective. Their goal is increased equality in media, politics and education. Through different development and communication projects as participatory radio production and the production and spreading of information material, they want to increase all women’s value, independent of class or ethnicity. They have been active since 1994 and besides taking part in the program Suma Thaki II they have several other development projects and activities carried out in La Paz/El Alto with surrounding villages and communities.
3.2 Svalorna Latinamerika and Suma Thaki II

This study was carried out in collaboration with Svalorna Latinamerika and their partner organizations CDC and Red Ada, and contribute with knowledge and insight for their new program Suma Thaki II, targeting youth in El Alto/La Paz. The program focuses on sexual rights and gender based violence, wanting to challenge existing and discriminating norms and power structures that prevent youth from deciding over their lives and practicing their rights. While working to strengthen youth organization and encourage political engagement, this program sets out to stimulate long term structural changes in the society of La Paz/El Alto. This will be done by peer education, empowerment and information spread, done by and for youth in three different stages. Finally, after four years, the youth movement should be independent and strong enough to continue the advocacy and information work themselves.

To reach out with information they will use different ways of communication such as theater, radio and also social media. Since most studies made on LGBT and non-LGBT youth and their social media presence and safety are North American, we cannot know what experiences the target group of this local program have of their online presence. A quantitative base line study has been carried out, showing that the knowledge of sexual rights is low among the young population. This is the first year of the program and thus the activities have not yet started (May 2014).

3.3 Youth in La Paz/El Alto

The cities of La Paz/El Alto have since long received migration from the rural areas of Bolivia and this have led to a quite big population of young and poor people. Studies show that in 2001 over half of the population was under 25 years old, and many of these young people live in a culture of Andean roots. Both cities are growing fast, and according to INE, the national bureau of statistics, over half of the population lives in poverty (Prosalus 2007:4). Discrimination based on gender, age and sexual identity is widespread, and often followed by violence. Gender based violence is common in both cities, and during the first three months of 2011, reported cases of domestic violence in El Alto were 1281, while in La Paz 3066, and the majority had female victims – however, most cases are not reported and thus we cannot know exactly how widespread the gender based violence really is (Svalorna Latinamerika 2012). A new law, passed in March 2013 (Infoleyes.com) has as a goal to eliminate violence against women, and discrimination of sexual rights is also mentioned as a type of violence. However, the law does not include sexual discrimination against, for example, transgender people, even
though this violence too is considered to come from the machismo\textsuperscript{2} cultures’ problematic that affects women. A study made by CDC from 2010 shows that more than every fifth person with an LGBT identity has been cut off from the family when their sexual identity was known (CDC 2010). A lot more bear witness of physical or mental abuse, including from the police, and many say that they have been arrested without motivation (CDC 2010).

3.4 Machismo and social structures

According to the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE), machismo is a set of practices, behaviors and language that reproduce the attitude and belief of the prepotency of men in relationship to women. This social construction limits men and women alike to practice their human rights, as well as discriminates the LGBT population and any man who is considered to have any characteristic connected with femininity (RAE). Today the constitution of Bolivia states that nobody should be discriminated because of their sexual identity, but in reality it happens a lot. In social organizations such as unions and neighborhood movements LGBT people feel the most discriminated, and over 80% have experienced homophobia from leaders in organizations and political parties (CDC 2010). The concept of machismo is spread and known all over South America.

The machismo will have some different effects on young people’s sexuality, youth pregnancies, use of contraceptives, increase of STDs and lack of education, especially for young girls. Speaking about these subjects is quite taboo in Bolivia, and knowledge is also quite low as a consequence, since neither schools, state institutions or families talk about these issues with their youth (Svalorna Latinamerika 2013). However, the concept of machismo is very well-known in Bolivia.

\textsuperscript{2} See definition in "Machismo and social structures".
4 Previous research

4.1 Digital youth

The study *Living and learning with new media* (Horst et al. 2008), published from the MacArthur Foundation, set out to examine youth and their participation within the new media environment during a three year period in USA. Their goal was to understand how new media was integrated into youth agendas, and also how this new media and practices that comes along with it will affect the dynamics of youth-adult relationships regarding learning authority. They found that their informants use the internet for mainly two different reasons: to connect with friends, anytime and anywhere, and they learn, from each other and by just messing around. Their learning online can, according to this study, be divided into three categories: hanging out, messing around and geeking out, going from easy and relaxed surfing to narrowly focused surfing. Adults do not always seem to recognize these behaviors as learning, but the study shows that youth are informally learning things like social codes, information searching and writing/reading skills (Horst et al. 2008), and that internet not only is for leisure but also enhances personal development for US American youth.

The internet is integrated in the daily lives of youth today, and it can be a source of information as well as a place to play games and create new relationships. Another study, carried out in Sweden by Daneback and Månsson (2009) set out to investigate youth online, their habits and motivation. They write that regarding sexual orientation, youth search information about different issues, such as how their own body works, how to have sex and STDs (Daneback and Månsson 2009:19). They found that among youths in Sweden there were some differences in how young women and men would use the internet; the young women would to a greater extent use the internet as a source of information, whereas young men would be more inclined to watch erotic material and for arousalment. However, young women do also watch pornography, today more than compared with ten years ago (ibid). Also the informants of the study would use internet with the purpose of meeting a partner or just flirting. While engaging in searching for new relations online, the traditional risks that especially women often have to face in sexual meetings seemed to diminish, compared with for example flirting in a bar. While flirting online, both parties can negotiate the terms of the union in the safety of their own home, and maybe speak more freely about ones desires and thoughts (Daneback and Månsson 2009:20). Thus, for Swedish young people engaging in sexually oriented activities online, the internet can be both a medium for safe creation of
relationships but also a source of information and pleasure. However, online platforms are also actively selecting the information for each individual user, based on the users previous search history and online actions. It is known that Google, Twitter and Facebook do this, and different people with different search history and online engagement will get different results while searching for the same thing (Weber 2010). Facebook will base the selections of persons showed in ones feed based on what a user normally will like, or share, and how popular other users or posts are. This leads to a situation where the information that will reach the users will be according to their own interests and opinions, to keep them active and engaged in the platform.

4.2 LGBT youth online

One of the bigger studies on youth and online experiences available is the Out Online (GLSEN 2013) conducted by an LGBT education network in USA also investigates the differences in LGBT and non-LGBT youths experiences and motivations for online presence. They found that LGBT youth were more likely to experience bullying or harassment online than non-LGBT youth, and likewise with text messages. This could also be linked to school performance and depression:

Online victimization contributed to negative self-esteem and higher depression. Youth who experienced bullying and harassment both in person as well as online or via text message reported lower grade point averages, lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression than youth who were bullied only in person, only online or via text message, or not at all. (glsen.org 2013)

However, there were not only negative aspects of the LGBT youth online experiences, but also positive ones. New technology would also offer LGBT youth tools to deal with negative experiences with, for example, connecting with, understanding, and accepting peers and finding health information that they otherwise would not have found. Informants also said that the internet gave them safety to express who they are more freely than in most of their offline contexts (ibid). LGBT youth were also more likely to engage in information search and online civic engagement, and a majority claimed to have taken part in promoting a cause online or written comments on a blog or even blogged themselves about an issue they took concern in. In all, LGBT youth would spend more time online than non-LGBT youth.

Swedish LGBT youth tell in a study made by Gäredal and Nathorst-Bööö (2009) about how they use the internet to get in contact with other young LGBT people, but also for finding
information about LGBT issues and learning about sex and what kind of sex they would like to practice, since they feel that the LGBT perspective is often missing in the sexual education in school (Gäredal and Nathorst-Böös 2009:22). The internet can also be a place where the hetero norm is not as strong and they can choose to visit platforms and online communities where they will not have to be alone about their specific issues, relate to erotic material and flirt without risking homophobia and discrimination. To do this, the LGBT youth in the study talk about strategies that they have come to develop, to be able to avoid negative attention and make sure that the people and sites they are in contact with and visit are indeed what the claim to be. These kinds of security measurements were more common among LGBT youth than non-LGBT youth in the study (ibid). Another study, also from Sweden, discusses that the risks of problematic meetings outside internet are bigger for LGBT youth than non LGBT youth, among those who frequently use internet for sexually oriented purposes. Six percent of the informants with an LGBT identity, compared to only two percent amongst those with a non-LGBT identity, said that they sometimes had been forced to have sex with the person that they met offline after meeting and flirting online (Gäredal and Nathorst-Böös 2009:18).
5 Theory

In this chapter I present the theoretical approach that I have used during this study. With the Uses and Gratification Theory I want to see if the informants in this study are using certain social media platforms and online tools to meet their needs, and what these can be. With the social penetration theory I discuss how the informants’ relationships are forming on social media, and if they deepen when more information is shared.

5.1 Uses and Gratification theory

As one theoretical approach I use the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), which usually has been used to explain why people will choose and be appealed by certain media content. The idea is that audiences will utilize media that can be used to meet their needs, which could be applied on social media as well, and it is interesting to see if and how the youth in this study fit into this theory or if their social media use, especially regarding security and information search, is based on something else. According to McQuail (1983) the question is; why do people use (social) media and what for? This implies that social media users play an active role in choosing and using their media, rather than to just be on the receiving end as older theories of mass communication suggest. This also implies that users would have certain goals connected to their media usage, and that they will choose the media platform that best can fulfill this goal. According to Matei (2010) trying to explain UGT, there is not only one way that people uses media; he stress that there are as many reasons for using a media as there are media users. According to the UGT, media consumers will from their own free will decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them, and this would then be applicable on social media as well. Other articles, like Understanding Internet Usage: A Social-Cognitive Approach to Uses and Gratifications (LaRose et.al. 2001) explain that UGT studies usually “start with descriptions of common media uses, obtain ratings of the frequency or importance of those uses, and factor analyze the results to obtain gratifications factors that are then correlated with media use” (ibid.). In this study I didn’t go into quantitative correlations, but listened to what the informants say about their own social media and ICT usage, their goals and their choices. Some examples of gratifications can be escapism, information control, to socialize, keeping yourself informed, diversion, communication with friends, increased personal knowledge, relationship maintenance or prestige.
5.2 Social Penetration theory

For the relationship aspects I test Altman and Taylor’s theory, which suggests that relationships become more intimate over a period of time when more personal information is revealed; this can be applicable on Twitter relationships, for example. Several friendships have formed from “tweet-ups” or a friend request, since built-in systems will promote other profiles with the same interests and hash-tags as oneself uses. A person may start following someone, but constant and direct interaction will lead to more intimate friendships that can develop to go beyond the computer or cell phone. According to SPT, maintaining relationships also relies on intimate exchanges by both parties, and disclosure is essential for the development of relationships. There are four stages of relationship development (Smith 2002). The first being the ‘orientation of interaction’, where the individuals take the first steps of interaction, like greeting each other on a party, followed by ‘exploratory affective exchange’ where people start to get an understanding of the other person and interact, exploring what common grounds they have, and less attention is put in caution in this stage than the latter. The third stage is called ‘affective exchange’ and is when the persons deepen the disclosure and the individuals can start to know the others reactions, experiences and feelings. The final stage is the ‘stable exchange’ and this is a stage we have with partners, close family or friends. Not all relations can get to this stage, but the relations that stay on the first and second stage still serves a purpose, letting us connect to another part of the world that we may not be aware of.

3 Social Penetration theory - SPT
6 Method

In this part I present the methodological approach used in this study, discuss the selection, credibility and possible effects as well as personal bias and limitations.

6.1 Semi-structured interviews

My primary method to extract information for this study was to conduct semi-structured interviews with nine young people from La Paz/El Alto in March 2014. This with the aim of trying to understand their reality regarding social media, online experience and information management, which will add to the information already collected in the base line survey conducted within the program Suma Thaki II. According to Rabionet (2009) the semi-structured interviews give the researcher a structure that allows the interview to focus on the research topic or question at the same time as it is not limiting the subjects of the interview in their answers. This method also allows us to let the informants describe their own reality and to easily follow up answers and thoughts. In addition, it allows the informants to have more power over the interview situation, since they have a say in what is going to be discussed. The focus was on informal settings of every day engagement, studying the ways the youth themselves understand and reflect upon their social media presence and usage in relation to relations, security and information. The informants are two LGBT men and four women, and then one non-LGBT man and two women.

6.2 Analysis of the interviews

The interviews were all recorded and transcribed in Spanish, however I have translated the quotes when adding them into this paper. All the interviews were transcribed the same day or the following day after the interview, and before the next interview. The analysis will be thematic in its order, dividing the results into four main categories that answer to the study’s three main research topics, adding a general usage background category. The analysis has been conducted in several steps, inspired by Graneheim and Lundman (2004):

1. Transcription and control of transcription in direct connection with the interviews, adding observations from the interview in a separate document for support.

2. Reading through the material, marking the parts of special interest.
3. Extracting the marked parts into a new document, dividing them into the four main categories of the study.

4. Repeating step 2 in order to make sure nothing was being left behind.

5. Working with the extracts, dividing them into different sub-categories and trying to make sure that each category was homogenous in its content.

6. Creating, in some cases, sub-categories to the sub-categories for a more accurate analysis.

7. Going back to step 2 and 3, before writing the result chapter of the study.

During this process I have used a separate document for observations, questions and possible correlations or patterns that I have noted, that has later been revised and used in the discussion.

6.3 Validity and credibility

6.3.1 Representation

One aspect that I have kept in mind is how my relationship with the organizations would affect the informants. Thus, I have kept my involvement in the organizations to a minimum, and even though they will benefit from the study they have not taken part in forming the interview questions\(^4\) or in other ways affected the material. My contact person and I had one meeting at Svalorna Latinamerika’s office, her giving me an introduction to the program. I also had one introductory meeting with Red Ada and CDC, talking about the study and taking in their perspective and thoughts. Further on, they helped me to get in contact with the target group and I have tried to make it clear for both myself, the organizations and the informants that my purpose is an academic one, and that I am not representing the organizations in any way.

6.3.2 Personal bias and power

Also, me identifying as LGBT could possibly have affected the way I have written the questions and conducted the study, but I have tried to stay professional in my approach, not sharing my personal opinion or experiences with the informants, nor my sexual orientation. Since my relationship with the informants has been punctual, and they should not have any

\(^4\) The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.
reasons trying to impress me, lie to me or hide information. Using semi-structured interviews, the informants could also partly decide what we were going to focus the interviews on, even though I had some aspects of their internet usage that I told them that I wanted to discuss. The informants were also given the choice of individual interviews or group interviews, and thus I ended up having three individual interviews, one interview with two people and one interview with four people, according to the informants’ requests. Doing this, I tried to create a situation where the informants felt at ease and in power over the situation, being able to affect the interview situation as well as what was being said.

6.3.3 Language
It is hard to know if I asked the right questions during the interviews, and a slight problem was the language barrier. Spanish is not my first language and even though I hold a Bachelor degree in the language I had to repeat my questions every now and then, or ask the informants to repeat their answers in order to fully understand the meaning of their answers. This didn’t happen often, but I don’t know what kind of influence the language problem may have had on the result or translations, even though I believe it to be small, not affecting the results.

6.3.4 Selection
The participants were selected in cooperation with my two partner organizations for this study; Red Ada and CDC. All informants come from La Paz/El Alto, are or have been university students and are between 18-30 years old. We have strived to get an equal division of the level of education, age and sex in the two groups, LGBT and non-LGBT youth. The informants can be said to belong to the middle class, and they should not be seen as representative of Bolivian youth in general, nor representing a “developing country” as such.

Overview of the informants:
- Karlos, 21 years old student and LGBT activist, La Paz and Gary, 28 years old student and LGBT activists, La Paz. Did the interview together, are partners and work together at CDC.
- Vanja, 24 year old nurse student and non-LGBT, from El Alto, interviewed alone.
- Katerina, 19 years old music and art student and non-LGBT, La Paz, interviewed alone.
- Miguel; 23 year old math student and non-LGBT from La Paz, interviewed alone.
• Sandra, 28 years old sociology student and LGBT from La Paz, Andrea, 21 years old technology student and LGBT El Alto, Indra, 21 years old sociology student, LGBT from La Paz and Gema, 20 years old sociology student and LGBT, El Alto. Interviewed together and knows each other from lesbian organizations and events.

6.3.5 Critique of selection
Due to time restraints this study has few informants, but generated enough material for me to able to discuss upon and to draw some possible conclusions from. Regarding the numbers of informants, I have more LGBT than non-LGBT informants, a lot due to the fact that more LGBT persons announced their interest in participating in the study. I haven’t managed to offset the gender bias, having more female than male informants. I have, however, succeeded in finding informants from both La Paz and El Alto, and all the informants but one have an academic background, representing different fields of study. With a little bit more time I’m sure I could have engaged more non-LGBT informants, but that has to be for the next study. None of the informants come from any minority group, but all fall within the middle class.

6.4 Ethical guidelines
The informants were given information of the purpose of the study, and the choice of if they wished to appear in this thesis with their real name, or remain anonymous with a made-up one. They were informed on how the interviews would be recorded and stored, but never published in its entirety. All the respondents were also offered to read through the study before it was sent in for examination, and were sent the citations in Spanish too. In any moment, the respondents had the possibility to end the interviews, or refuse to answer a specific question. As written by the ASA, researchers have a responsibility towards both informants and stakeholders of the study, and it is important that every participant of a study is aware of its purpose and their own rights and can look at it as a positive experience afterwards. In a study touching upon sensitive issues like sexuality and youth I have seen it as very important to make sure that the informants suffer no harm during or after the study, that is caused by the study.

6.5 Effects of the study
It is important to consider how this study could have affected the informant’s situation. Most of the interviews took about one hour and with the students they were held outside of school
schedule so that their studies were not to be affected. The interview with Karlos and Gary took a little more time but counted as part of their work and was held in one of the organizations conference rooms, and the group interview was held during almost two hours in one of UMSA’s\textsuperscript{5} class rooms. All the informants were asked to give their opinion on the place and time of the interviews so that it would cause them as little trouble, and make them feel as comfortable, as possible. The informants were offered anonymity that limits the risk that they would be able to be identified and exposed to any danger because of their participation in this study. A possible effect the interviews could have triggered is a discussion and reflection among the informants in their use of social media, and possibly some change in behavior.

6.6 Limitations

I had no space in my study to research or discuss the youth’s experiences of creating relationships in schools, how the schools are working with LGBT issues and sexual rights or how youth experience their security specifically in schools, on the streets or at home. Reflections about this may have come up in the interviews, as a contrast to how they experience their online presence, but this is not presented here since it’s not a focus of this study.

\textsuperscript{5} Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, one of the biggest universities in Bolivia.
7 Results
In this part of the study I share the results of my interviews conducted in La Paz/El Alto, outlining the experiences and opinions of my informants regarding their online habits and usage. All of the informants that I interviewed were actively using ICT and social media at least once every week outside their work or school, and below I have gathered their thoughts. First I will give an overview on how they perceive their internet and social media habits, outlining what, who and when internet and social media is used as well as the purposes. Then I will present how the informants are using ICT and social media in regard of relations, how they think about online security and risks. I will finish with their perspective on sexuality online, before moving on to the discussion of the results.

7.1 General usage
In this part of the study the informant’s general thoughts and about ICT and their internet usage will be presented, giving a background to the more specific results. Who use internet, when do they use it, where does it happen, how and what are the main reasons?

7.1.1 Who uses the internet, and when?
All of the informants use internet but the extent to which they use internet varies. Three of the girls, Sandra, Clara and Vanja, say that there are days when they don’t communicate at all online, while the other informants all agree that they are connected more or less all the time on their cellphones and enter platforms and pages whenever a notification or a message reach them. They also express some worries about being connected “too much”, as do Gary who also says that he is not so addicted to new communication technology in comparison to his partner:

For example, I am very accustomed to live without mobile phone and a lot of technology, for me it’s easy to skip the computer, internet and phone. For Karlos, it’s different.

Karlos continues:

Yes, I feel like I was disconnected from everything, it’s now part of my life….

Gary and Karlos also says that they both use internet most at their workplace, because it is faster and they need it for their work tasks. Miguel also says that “The two weeks I was without internet I felt empty. I cannot be without internet, television yes, but not internet”. Karlos and Gary both agree on that they think that their different approach to the new
technology depends on their age difference and also how they have grown up with different access to technology. Gary thinks that it is possible to be connected too much, and that it can start to take over your life. Miguel is connected 24/7 but he doesn’t mention that kind of worries at all:

I don’t know, maybe in reality I am connected the whole day on the phone, or my tablet, and then when some information reach me and I see if it interests me I enter. It can be two hours per day or four hours per day.

For him, internet is with him all the time as for Karlos, while both Vanja and Clara say that they enter, if they have a reason for it, a goal with the connection. Clara says:

It’s like, it depends, there are days when I don’t enter, the majority, but normally I connect two hours, three hours…. No, two hours… I don’t have a computer in my home, so I go to internet [in the street] and pay there.

For her, internet seems to be something she choose to engage with, when she has a reason and time for it. Those who have internet on their workplace also say that they use internet there, both for private and professional purposes, since the internet at work usually is a bit faster than in their mobile phones. Vanja explains that she connects at work because they have Wi-Fi, and when anything reach her by notifications, she will minimize it to do her tasks, but when there are not so many tasks or the supervisors are not present, she will read and also respond. However, she is never connected during the weekends since she doesn’t have internet at home, and she has no desire to change that, she enjoys her disconnected time as well. Andrea on the other hand says:

I am almost connected all the time, every day, the majority of the day. I have my computer in my home, and I also have internet. All the time connected. I have lost my phone, but before that I was connected there too.

She doesn’t express any stress about being connected constantly and she as she later mentions, she brings the connection with her almost everywhere she goes. One of her friends though, Indra, says that she doesn’t have internet in her phone since she thinks that it would distract her.

7.1.2 Why use internet and what platforms?

Here we will thematically present the informants general reasons for why they use new communication technology and connect to online platforms. All of the presented reasons were mentioned in all interviews, however the informants gave the different reasons more or less importance.
Effective communication

The informants use common platforms and applications such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube mostly, saying that in general it is a fast and cheap way to communicate with friends and family. Sending text messages from the mobile phone cost quite a lot but with the application called “WhatsApp” it is free to send short text messages to individuals or groups and it is fast even though it runs on the slow internet of Bolivia. Miguel explains:

I mostly use WhatsApp. Because it is fast, and it doesn’t cost almost no internet, it’s practical [...] because here in La Paz, internet is not good and if you want to enter a page, Facebook for example, from your mobile phone, it takes at least 10-15 minutes, it’s molesting, and thus [WhatsApp] is faster and more useful.

Internet in homes is still not too common in La Paz and while about half of the informants have internet in their homes, all but one claim that the internet in their home is too slow for them to be able to do everything they want.

Being social

All of the informants have accounts on social platforms, Facebook being the most common one. They say that they chat with friends, play games and see the others photos or what they are doing. How much the informants share on Facebook depends; some of them, like Vanja, Katerina or Gary almost share nothing, while like Karlos, Andrea and Sandra, use it more frequently to get in touch with people and share what they are doing, both professionally and on their free time. “If it is a good conversation, it can last for many hours” Miguel says, talking about chatting online, or with WhatsApp. Vanja, who has some friends that are living abroad say that it is her only way to connect with them and to be able to have conversation, especially through Facebook, and that is her main reason for having an account there, and she enters rarely. However, most of the informants don’t comment or give feedback in other way on the open content that they get shared with them on social media. Miguel says:

No, never. [Youtube] is like my TV and when you watch a program on the TV you are not going to write a letter or something neither… Well, I have never done it.

However, he also says that he enjoy a lot to discuss with people, and that he often participate in discussions or leave comments on content that he strongly agrees or disagrees with, but mostly on Facebook. Vanja on the other hand, never comment on anything. Some of the other informants share this behavior, not giving comments or clicking “like” on videos, photos or updates. They might, as Vanja says, if a close friend upload something, but she prefers not to. Katerina explains:
It’s because of this, to give a picture… Because you can’t be 100% accurate, with what you are. And well, maybe it’s also for security, about personal information, for example are there people that always post what they do. I don’t because I don’t know how to do it, and I don’t trust so much in people.

What Katerina says with her first reason is that people can interpret her posts or likes and create a picture of her that is not true, and she gives an example that if she likes for example something political, people might think that she is “this” kind of person and she doesn’t want that, she doesn’t want people to think about her in a way that might not be “true”.

Learn new things

All of the informants talk about how they also find and search information online, this is one of their main activities. Miguel and Gary both mention how they search for new knowledge online through blogs and videos, Vanja is looking for information both for her studies but also to deepen her knowledge about her future profession and dance, her main interest. The informants all use internet and social media for professional reasons; those who study look for information regarding school work and those who work use it to spread information about their projects or to deepen their knowledge about work related issues.

Stay informed and inform

By talking to people online, updating themselves on public calendars and receiving invites on Facebook the informants could also plan their offline activities while being online. Several of them talked about how they stayed informed about new events, local happenings and could know about friend’s initiatives easily from their online activities. Gary and Karlos both work with creating and spreading information about events regarding human rights and LGBT happenings, and they both stress that internet has made it easier for them.

Yes, its works [like that]. It would be a lot more difficult without internet. When I was in high school I didn’t have a cell phone and it cost a lot more to see each other. Who is coming, when, where, for sure? Now it’s a lot simpler, you can be in your home texting people, by mobile phone or internet, and it makes it easier. (Gary)

Also Sandra mentions that she use internet both for spreading information about events she is going to online, but also for getting invitations from friends about events and activities. She use internet to inform herself about LGBT issues globally, and for sharing articles with friends on Facebook.
Diversion and entertainment

Some of the informants also mention diversion as a reason to go online, and also just spending time. Miguel says:

Well, I have internet to divert myself, above all.

This diversion can be many things though; clicking on interesting pages or articles, playing games, watching videos or just chatting with other people. Miguel continues:

Yes, diversion. I use Youtube to get me out of any doubts, like google. I have learned, well, anything from bone a chicken to… there are many things… Now I don’t have TV in my room, so Youtube is my television now. Or well, I see like… monologs, a lot of people, practice English… It’s my TV really.

Passing time and relaxing is also something Gary mentions, saying that he enjoys watching shows about history or geography on his computer, as well as reading blogs about subjects that interest him.

7.2 Search, find and use information

In this part I will go further into the informant’s ways of handling information online, since this was one of their main activities but also what I wanted to study and thus something that we focused on during the interviews. What are the informant’s experiences and thoughts about information search and what are they searching for?

7.2.1 Easy access

One of the main reasons that the informants mentioned for their use of social media and new communication technology was that it gave them easy access to a number of things that they did not have otherwise. For example when it comes to information search, Miguel prefers to use his phone rather than going to a library or search in a book.

Well, when I have internet in my phone it’s easier to search for information there than look in a book, even though I’d have it in my home. Any page can help you. […] If I am in doubt about anything, I search for it on Youtube. Math, well, physics, it’s a way to learn fast. And… origami, as a child I loved it and now I have learned more complicated. If I have any doubt I search.

Most of the other informants say the same; that the instant access to information online makes it so easy and practical. Also the fact that you can get information from other countries is mentioned by Vanja, saying that some information might not be published in books or papers in Bolivia, however the information is usually available from Spain. However, the issue of language can sometimes be a problem, and Gema among several mention that even though
there is a lot of information available online, the information is often in English and a lot of people in La Paz/El Alto, or South America, don’t speak English very well. Regarding that, Karlos and Gary both comment on the low quality of translation services that they often use, and some texts they just don’t understand after the translation. However, it’s still a lot of information accessible just in your pocket.

7.2.2 Hobbies and interests
Gary and Karlos use internet for the majority of their information search, and they are the only ones that mention that they use blogs for this purpose. They have internet in their home, but it is slower than the one they have at work, and they spend time to search for information in both places. As Miguel, they also use Youtube:

On Youtube too, you write about the theme of sexual rights or sexuality and you get a full page [of information]. And the pages I follow are the ones of History Channel, Discovery, National Geographic, and CNN for example, and Universogay.com, History Channel and those. And also national magazines, in this sense internet is very useful.

When they are not at work they still use internet to inform themselves about things that interest them, and as Miguel they talk about how they seek to extend their knowledge about certain subjects. This goes also for Katerina, who tell that she usually search information about dance, hair or violin, both in Youtube but also on different search engines. Among the other girls, Andrea claims that she has never been to a library, whilst Sandra says that she prefers the old ways of informing herself:

Here there are computers in the libraries, but I prefer to turn to catalogs and card index, I am very antique. When I find interesting documents online I still prefer to print them and read them.

Vanja too use internet to search for dance videos, and Indra say that she also looks for girls sometimes, or just hang out on social platforms for LGBT girls. This will be presented more in the chapter “Relations online”.

7.2.3 Usefulness
An important aspect of the informants information search that several mentioned was the utility of the activity, often when it comes to work or school assignments. Vanja explain her thoughts:

Also on internet you search things that are useful. There are things you search [for]… Well, I searched for things that proved to be useful […] the information one is looking for is not only because you have to inform yourself, because it will also serve you. More than only, well, to inform myself I go beyond what I need to know, I look for even more information.
For her there is a clear meaning to improve your knowledge, not only because you have to in order to complete an assignment, but also because information in itself can prove to be useful. For Gema this aspect was also important when she started to search for information, and support, about her own sexuality:

Online, when… that about the community⁶, yes, there are places in La Paz where other people can give information, and they informed me. And after, no, I have not searched much online. I knew a bit before, but I wanted support and therefore I have searched [more].

She did not focus on getting her information online, however some of the other LGBT informants express a gratitude for the accessibility of the online information when it comes to more sensitive and personal needs of information, like Andrea and Indra.

7.2.4 Sexuality

The informants were asked specifically if they ever had search for information concerning sexuality, and even though all said that it was very taboo to talk about sexuality in their society they still shared information and thoughts on the matter. Two topics came up, one being pornographic content and the other being information about sexuality and identity. Miguel explained that he had searched for information about sexuality online:

Yes, one time I think… various times… No, I think… not so much. Well, some friends, we had talked about homosexuality for example, and I have searched information about how the sexual rights are in other countries, but I can’t say that...

Also Karlos has informed himself about sexual rights online:

I inform myself more about the community in Spain, and about sexual rights. On internet it’s easier to find this information, I also follow [people] on Youtube, Twitter and Facebook, and I inform myself about what they say.

However, Sandra talks about how she prefer to read books, and she states that she started off with going to the library in search of information about homosexuality, and she also read brochures and folders before she went online to continue her search.

I have found a lot of things, some superficial, that don’t have a lot of sources. I don’t deny that it serves, I have searched also about pleasure and I have intended to investigate about the female body, something that you don’t talk so much about…

This is something that tall the informants mention in relation to the sexual education in school, saying that he sexual education more or less only focus on STDs⁷, child prevention

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⁶ With "community" the informants refer to the LGBT community.

⁷ Sexually Transmitted Diseases
and the biology of the sexes, and most of them thought that internet was the best way to complement their knowledge, even though there was a few mentioning friends, family and, in Sandra’s case, books as well. Three of the informants, Miguel, Andrea and Vanja, also mention pornography when talking about sexuality, but only Miguel say that he search for it, while the others mention it as something that is there and available online. According to Miguel, “you can find anything” online, and he sometimes also search for events connected to sexuality, for example lectures or meetings regarding sexual rights organized by Mujeres Creando.

7.2.5 Source criticism – comparing books, friends and online information

Katerina says that even though she goes to the library in search of information, she will use internet there too, not only search for books or papers.

Well, in books too but above all on internet because… We have to admit it, here in La Paz the books don’t always have updated information but on internet… Yes I search in books but on internet too, a lot. If I want to know something I search a lot online.

All the discussions about texts credibility with the informants ended up with the informants talking about books and how they thought that online information was not as credible as printed books, except Katerina. She thought about how the authors own perspective will reflect how he or she write his book, but online, she can find plenty of perspectives with only a few clicks. “A communist will not talk like a priest or a feminist, so it’s important to know how to search”. Miguel has similar ideas about the source criticism online, saying:

Now we don’t ask so much, not because of fear but because… because it’s on internet. The teacher can give me one comment [on a subject], internet gives me ten, and offer me twenty more if I want to continue my search.

So, the access to many different sources makes him prefer internet, and he also reflects on how others, for example in a class room, think about getting information. If they can find all the information they want, and maybe even more accurate or easily accessible, why should they ask a teacher? “I think that in today’s society we raise ourselves in a certain way, due to all the information we have available”. He continues with the reflection talking about friends as a source of information:

Normally, the information that you get, well, you have to look for it. Friends that talk, sometimes they don’t know what they are talking about and they say things like “you have to be

8 Mujeres Creando, or Creating Women in English, is a feminist organization for lesbian women in La Paz that are working with women’s rights, postcolonial feminism and activism as well as creating space for women and questioning the gender norms in their society.
more free, nothing is bad with homosexuality” but when I take their hands they say that I cannot
do like that… So they can say a lot, but it’s not true, it’s still a taboo [for them].

So, he doesn’t rely on information given by friends, not in aspects where he knows that
prejudice and ignorance can affect their opinions and knowledge. Andrea mention that she
however count on the information and experiences of her friends, especially when it comes to
sexuality and relationships, she trust their judgment. Indra prefers books for their details:

It’s easier online, but the information is more interesting in books… The authors write with
more details, online you have to search more to find something good. There is more but… you
can also find it faster [in a book].

The informants have different views on what is more reliable and where they can find more
information or details, and I would say that that might go together with how they are
searching for information. Gary says:

It depends how you use it, if you use it well, perfect, it will serve you a lot. But if you use it bad,
well, you will be badly informed too. […] You have to know how to search.

This is also mentioned several time in the group interview; that it’s important to know how to
do searches and other activities online, and if you don’t, you will not find what you’re looking
for.

7.2.6 What does information cost?

In Bolivia there is a lot of people with very little money, and even though my informants
come from the middle class they also mention costs as one aspect on how they search for
information. Katerina says:

Yes, it affects, since I have to pay for internet and the page maybe doesn’t load, and nothing
happens… Then it’s difficult, and I can’t even see some content online…

The informants agree that internet is quite expensive, but some applications like WhatsApp
for example, use very little internet and thus they use it a lot on their mobile phones instead in
sending text messages through the phone directly. Miguel has another view on the costs of
information, saying that internet is also the cheaper option in some aspects:

For us here, piracy is important, without it we would have nothing. A book can cost 700
bolivianos°, and then one cannot buy it.

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° One Boliviano was equal to one SEK at the time of the study.
This is an important aspect and when talking about books, this is the only time one mention that one can actually buy books – all other comments refer to borrowing books from the library, or reading obligatory reference books during ones university studies.

7.3 Online security and safety

In this part of the study I will show the informants thought and experiences regarding issues like privacy, discrimination, safety and security online. This was something that some of the informants also had strategies for, trying to improve their own safety, and is the second of this study’s main themes.

7.3.1 Privacy and anonymity

Two informants take up the issue of privacy, and think that it’s important. Miguel says:

It’s about privacy. If I have only seen a person one time, well, I don’t think so. I want to take care of my information a bit... I am not afraid to publish information, but I have everything hidden, as phone number, numbers to my family... But they can also take a photo, manipulate it and therefore [...] I have also created false accounts on Facebook, to play, other times to see what other people are doing and therefore I know that it is very easy to do it, to create a false account.

He wants his information safe for other people besides his friends, and Vanja says the same thing:

I don’t like Facebook because it’s very public. It’s very public and things, let’s say that you want to talk to someone that is far away, something that is only for you two, and other people can open and read. It seems quite public to me, very much in the open. [...] They say that you can send secret messages but still there are people who can open and read your email, I don’t trust in this a lot.

Miguel and Vanja are both very careful not to let people that they have not chosen to see their information or have access to their photos, but nothing has ever happened to them personally. Katerina however has an experience regarding privacy from Facebook:

I was going through the requests I had and a girl appears, and she seemed familiar so I entered to see who she was and she had one of my photos on her profile, like it was hers. I asked my brother to help me and the photo is not there anymore, but I don’t understand… She was not a friend of mine, so she did not have access to my photos.

To have control over ones information, but also ones proper appearance and identity, was regarded important for these three, the others however were not concerned with this as a question of privacy, but rather as a question of security.
7.3.2 Discrimination and safety

The informants were asked if they had seen or themselves experienced discrimination online, and most of them thought that they had seen, especially discrimination grounded in a person’s color, gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity. Gary says:

Direct for example, there was a girl that they made close her account. They did things that were… sexual. Well. Bad. When I heard about it I couldn’t see because it was closed. It started with that they put her photo into a pornographic one and then posted the link on her Facebook. Then people entered and molested her… Well, it’s not unique.

This was something that Miguel mentioned as a possible threat even though he had never seen it done, and the fact that many people can see or participate in the online discussions about a person makes he think that the risks are higher than in the street. The more people who can join, the more potential discrimination is present. Gema says:

Above all it happens to people that have political opinions, and between them there is a lot of this. There are always comments that create a discussion and in this there is racism, a lot of feelings…

It can happen to those to engage in a lot of discussions she says, but from Katerina’s experience it can happen also to her, even though she rarely comment anything online. The informants give many example on discrimination online, and Andrea believes that there is more online than face-to-face:

In my opinion, discrimination is more massive in social networks than on the streets. There are pages created only for this, to molest. ‘Who are we going to molest today, Evo Morales? And they publish things the whole day, and others share it and it turns massive. There is a lot of homophobia, I have seen that. And racism but if there is a colored homosexual, there is a lot to say. Even diseases, and that’s why I say that in Facebook there is everything. […] But while we are talking about offline, it affects you. It molest you. And well, if a thousand persons affect you online it is not as if one person does it in reality.

She bring up an interesting opinion, but the other girl’s don’t agree with her about what is worse; having one offline experience of direct discrimination, or facing plenty of situations online, every day. Karlos, having several personal experiences, agrees with Andrea, saying that since it is more, it’s hard to distance himself, and defend himself:

It’s the advantage of discriminating online, social media allow you to hide yourself, it’s like a shield, and you can say the things you want… to the people that you don’t like, through this shield. They would never say it to my face, they are cowards and they use social networks to do it.

He thinks that it would be better if he could see the people that expressed homophobic opinions, because he would then be able to meet them on equal turns. Gary says that some
people are just badly informed, and about that Katerina says:

Sometimes it’s not very strong, the smallest comment could be violent, even involuntary… I have not seem images against certain social groups or a certain racial group, age or gender… but there are always these comic messages, we can say, about women’s habits for example. It’s not very strong, but it’s something.

It’s something, and she is referring to the machismo that is to widespread and common in the Bolivian society, also online. She mentions examples of something that the others did not take up, that being the discrimination disguised as creating and reproducing degrading stereotypes.

7.3.3 Security and threats

When talking about security the informants mostly referred to social media, and Facebook, as the place where they are most concerned about security. Vanja says:

Well, six year ago, I could tell you… There it started because you get invitations from your friends and before I accepted everyone, yes yes yes, but now no. For one thing, I don’t know them, and thus I think, this is danger and a risk too. One doesn’t know […] who is at the other end. Because of precautions I prefer not to accept. Before, yes, as I was before I accepted anyone, but not now.

So, Vanja has become aware of the risks that her previous behavior put her at, and has since then changed, and several informants mention this change of not accepting people that they doesn’t already know as friends on Facebook. Miguel claims that he only has people that he knows offline as well as friends on Facebook, because he doesn’t want strangers to be able to access information about him. He says:

There are a lot of people that put everything they do, all the time, like today I am going to take a bath, also their phone number, so it’s not difficult to find these persons only with what they put on Facebook.

I am told in the group interview that the Bolivian government has launched a campaign\textsuperscript{10} to inform people about risks and to give deterrent examples about kidnappings and such. Speaking about how people are aware of all the risks in a way that for me seems quite extreme, Andrea says:

I think it’s about awareness, because there was a campaign and news about that they kidnapped children, violated teenagers and so, in the national newspapers. […] Also in the schools they

\textsuperscript{10} Here is one article about online risks from 2013 from the Bolivian government. http://www.elderechoinformatico.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1507:campana-grafica-de-consejos-de-seguridad-para-redes-sociales-dia-internacional-de-internet&catid=194:eventos
talk about how to be safe online, safely guard ones information and it was in the television too, inviting experts to talk about Facebook and security.

This campaign seems to have left it marks in the informants, since most of them give examples of kidnappings and assault as potential security risks even though none have heard about it happening to anyone nearby. Gary:

You cannot trust anyone. You have to know the person before adding him or her. You can never know if it is the person on the photo, maybe it’s a pervert, a murderer, mentally insane, psychopath and more… The risk that you add someone that you don’t know on Facebook is very risky because you don’t know who it is and you cannot trust him.

The level of awareness and feelings of insecurity varies in the group of informants but all of them are talking about risks as something very real and plausible. Being so aware of security risks online leads to that they have adapted and changed their online behavior as well, trying to avoid to be an easy target. Those who took up threats online were only LGBT informants; Gary, Karlos and Sandra. Karlos said:

There are also persons that use it [internet] for bad things, bad intentions, for example sexual things that has happened a lot to Gary. That they send us bad messages and requests.

They are both activists and say that before coming out as homosexuals in a relationship online, older friends and acquaintances suggested them to think about it and be prepared to meet both threats and violent assaults from known and unknown people. However, they didn’t think it would be so much as it turned out.

Social media are unfortunately used for this. If we publish a photo where we express our love, persons who are not our contacts come and comment, send messages, insults, aggressions and threats.

These are direct threats and bullying, and even though they were warned and thought a lot about privacy settings they still meet a lot of negative comments on their profiles:

In the beginning we didn’t think about the risks to suffer from insults because as we said, Facebook also offer you security options. […] But, it’s a risk to have Facebook because we will receive threats and so.

As Karlos say, they are open and active within the LGBT-rights movement, visible in magazines and online, and thus they have to count with this kind of comments still, because people are “badly informed, cowards and stupid”.

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7.3.4 Strategies and behavior

The informants all say that they are aware of that their behavior can be more or less connected to risks online, and when they have become aware of that most of them have changed their behavior to some extent. Katerina says:

I take care of myself quite a lot, yes, because you always hear about these things that they hack your account and that they can kidnap you, thousands of things that one cannot know if they are true but… That’s why one is a bit careful […] when I entered Facebook I didn’t think about these things, and I published whatever, but now I don’t.

Being careful she says, which results in that she doesn’t publish things that might put her at risk. Gary and Karlos use the same strategy to avoid putting themselves at risk.

Yes, we don’t put a lot of information on Facebook for example, there is limited and necessary information. We also don’t publish personal photos of the house, our home or how we live. If we are with friends on a party, we can take a photo and publish it, but of our families not anymore because we don’t any person with bad intentions to do anything… against our families or to us.

They are well aware of what can happen to people that are kidnapped, and tell about one girl who was targeted because she was posting intimate photos “sexy and sensual”, and this makes them hesitate before they post too much about themselves. Also in groups on Facebook and other platforms, Andrea is thinking about this.

In the groups, 50% are real persons but 50% are not, they are false profiles. A persons that doesn’t pay attention to that can let herself get acquainted and something tragic can happen. It can happen, but it’s not only within the community, it’s also between boys and girls, it has happened.

She spends a lot of time online and says that she can see how some profiles behave a bit differently, and how they often are very direct in their ways to take contact with people and then she will avoid them. Karlos also has his strategy clear:

There are two options, one is to put yourself at risk, and one is to protect yourself. Protect yourself would be to only accept persons that you already know, and to put yourself at risk, many do that, is to add people that you don’t know and then you cannot know to whom you are talking.

The informants that claimed to not have any particular strategy to secure themselves from risks and unwanted attention online still mentioned that they were careful with whom to add on Facebook nowadays, but most of them had also done differently when they just started to use internet, being teenagers.
7.4 Relations online

In this part I will present the informants thought and experiences about relationships online, this being the last of my main aspects in this study.

7.4.1 Searching and creating

It was not so common to search for relations online within the informants, however, Indra says that she used to join groups only for lesbians and that she could flirt there: “Well, I also see photos of other girls, and if they catch my attention, if they don’t have a partner…” but she would want to create a relation with someone too far away, and thus she is not so active in her online dating. Andrea hasn’t searched for relation online herself, but can see that internet can be of help in the context:

There are persons who are open, liberal, and others who are shy, and persons who are shy cannot interact easily with people… I can talk about anything online, I prefer to go online. I can say everything, I have my family added and it doesn’t matter what they say, my family knows that I am in the community…

She is the one in the group that enjoys internet most, and she feels that there she can be free to express herself. Katerina has a similar experience with one of her classmates:

I have a friend that only talks with me on Facebook. We’ve classes together, but he has only said hello to me there. But when he added me on Facebook we started to talk a lot, he is very shy.

They can talk for hours on Facebook, she says, but regarding friends on Facebook Katerina hasn’t got a very clear strategy for her relations, and says the she has around 800-1000 people added as friends, but she doesn’t know them all:

No, it’s strange, because they search me and I don’t know them… I don’t know what happened, if it is the page or not…

She’s accepting people’s requests but sometimes miss the fact that they have no friends in common, and then she has not bothered to take them away, “it’s complicated”. More determined searches for relation has Gema done:

Yes, on Facebook and Twitter, and sometimes on HiFi. We can say that they have seen me, and they start to follow me, and later me too…but in Twitter everything is public so we went to Face [book] were we could talk more privately. And then there is also WhatsApp, there you can also talk…

When staring to talk about their experiences in searching relations online, more informants share that they too have engaged in this. Andrea says:
Well, I haven’t searched in Facebook, but one time I talked to a person, yes, to search… I entered a page, find lesbian partner in La Paz, and there was a girl that published her photo, and I entered, and she interested me and I said hello, and well, we could meet…

So, for finding a presumptive partner she searched online, however she took the relation to an offline context in order to continue. Sandra says:

I haven’t searched on Facebook, but I’ve had the curiosity to see if there were any groups of the community in La Paz, and first I saw that there were national groups, and then I noticed that there were also regions and I went in to some. Some were close, other open, only to get to know new people, I had that intention. […] some wanted to talk on Facebook so I added them, they were many and it surprised me because I didn’t have a lot of friends from the community back then…

Not knowing too many people and not know where to go to find other LGBT people, internet was useful for her, and she says that she has also had a distance relationship with a girl she met online – however it was hard to maintain for her, due to the distance. Now she also runs her own groups online, where women can talk about feminism without having to defend themselves.

7.4.2 Maintaining and developing

Several of the informants were talking about how new technology and social media could help them to stay in touch with friends and family even though they had a lot of physical distance between them. Being online within the community allows the LGBT informants to talk about common problem together with people that they might not have in their direct surroundings, and therefore the see that the online community can be a support and another place to interact. For Vanja, that is the only reason that she still is using Facebook for example.

I got to know two friends from Spain, and I have also one friend that is living in Germany at the moment. So, I use Facebook to stay in touch with them, and to see their photos. If not, I would not know anything about their life there, because it is too expensive to call.

Also Miguel, having his girlfriend working in another city of Bolivia half of the month says he is using WhatsApp to maintain their relationship during the time she is away. After getting to know people online, there might be opportunities to meet also in an offline setting, and this is something that Miguel does from time to time, using Facebook and Couchsurfing\textsuperscript{11} to find people to whom he can practice his French.

\textsuperscript{11} Couchsurfing.org is a platform where people can host/be hosted on someone’s couch, making it cheaper to travel and also to be able to meet people from different countries.
Yes, in the group of La Paz for example, later also in Language Exchange, normally. And, if they have events, if anyone wants to know the city and I have time… then… to take a beer or something.

He likes to meet people and wants to learn and improve his language skills, and this kind of platform facilitates that.

7.4.3 Ending relations

For the LGBT informants, internet can also be a way to end relationships, due to that people get to know about their sexuality and doesn’t accept it. Gema says:

Well, in my Face [book] I only have people who accept me, you know… the others have deleted me, and they cannot see what I write now. But also… even though they don’t accept you, the world is not going to end.

And she is not alone, also Indra says:

I have had two friends that I cannot anymore see their photos, they have really eliminated me, but I’m not so good with these things… But I know that they have eliminated me because I cannot see their comments or anything.

The girls were discussing how many more have eliminated them, and it wasn’t unique, but they agreed that it was better to have friends who could accept them on Facebook, and not to bother too much with the others. Sandra however, kept friends who had different opinions as friends, and explained why:

I have everyone as friend, from Catholic’s to lesbian anarchists. I try not to say that they are wrong, but sometimes when I post about abortion for example, they write to me and tell me that I’m wrong, that it’s wrong. Then I try to reason with them, giving my perspective, but not to convince them, they are allowed to have their opinion.

She would like to keep her friends from her childhood, but she is also clear that she will not censor herself online just to get their approval.

7.4.4 Practical pros and cons

Having new technology as a complement when communicating with people can be both and bad, according to the informants. For example, Miguel says that one aspect of online communication is that people can think more before actually sharing their thoughts with another person:

Well, talking online you can think more and in a conversation in the street it’s very different and you cannot think up to five minutes in what to say. So, for me it’s more… correct online, the conversations don’t flow like in the street.
This has both its positive and negative aspects, for example that one might avoid misunderstandings, or say things that one might regret, while engaging in discussions online, however he also mention that conversations can take longer time, and not everyone think before they write even online. Even so, he enjoys engaging in conversations online and choses when to make comments or not, depending on what is being said. Katerina says the same thing:

Well, at the best I’m thinking in how to write the things. Sometimes I erase and write in another way, and sometimes I write something and don’t think more about this… but sometimes I think two times, if there is something more…

When asked if she feels that this might have negative aspects she mention that people might lie more in these situations, and that it might be harder to lie straight into someone’s face without showing the insecurity and hesitation.
8 Discussion
In this chapter I will discuss the results of the study, summarize them and see if it is possible to draw any conclusions from them and see connections with earlier research and the theories I have based the study on. The different chapters do not come in an order of importance, but try to follow the structure of the study.

8.1 Theoretical perspectives

8.1.1 Uses and gratification theory
The findings presented in the chapter on “General usage” show that the informants have clear goals and reasons for their online activities. They mention gratifications like:

- Fast and cheap communication anywhere
- Be social and talk to friends
- Learn new things, increase knowledge
- Stay informed and inform other about oneself
- Having fun, relax and play

So the informants don’t seem to just automatically use the social media or communication platforms that other use, but they also have their own uses and gratification system when acting online and choosing platforms. Even so, most of them still use the most common platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and so on. The informants also talk about how they search for information and also in this activity there are several gratifications that affect how they specifically search for information as well. For example, in the aspect on communicating with people, some platforms like WhatsApp give the informants fast and cheap access to their friends and family, and this instant access makes them choose this one before others, like Facebook or SMS. However, the informants also say that ICT and online communication is expensive. Katerina said that if it is not even sure that she will have access to the information that she is searching for, she will be reluctant to waste both time and money on the slow connection and the few hours she has. When it comes to learning or finding specific information, some informants will choose books as the media because it will satisfy their needs better, while others will use internet, blogs and Youtube videos to find what they want, in the way that suits them best. These patterns add to the ones of Horst et.al. (2008); where
they said that youth mainly used ICT and internet for talking and learning, my informants mean that they also divert themselves, plan events and offline activities as well as advocate their opinions.

8.1.2 Social penetration theory
This theory states that the more disclosures shared in a relationship over a longer period of time, the deeper and intimate the relation can be. This seems to be the case also when it comes to online relationships, even though we can discuss how. Starting with Katerina, she noticed that one of her classmates was more talk active online and they can talk about many things, even though he will say many words in school. So, their relationship took a step up to the second stage according to this theory, when taking it from the offline to the online context. Other relations, like when Gema has tried to flirt with girls online, have gone the other way and could start to become more intimate when they met in an offline context. Sandra on the other hand, mentioning that she once had a distance relationship, says that she broke the relationship due to the distance, it was too hard to meet and thus the relation could not develop as she wanted it to.

8.2 I love my computer – informants creating relations to virtual tools
In an intent to apply these theories not only on the relations built on online tools, but to the possible relation between the informants and the tools themselves, there are some patters that might be interesting to discuss. For one, it seems like the informants who spend more time online, like Andrea, Miguel and Karlos, also create deeper “relations” with their ICT’s and platforms. For example, they express that it’s very hard for them to be without internet, “TV yes but internet no”, that they “feel lost” and “disconnected from everyone”. These expressions imply more engagement than just the fact that communication with friends will be a bit delayed or not as instant for a time. Also, they don’t mention that it is the friends or family that they are missing, but having “internet” itself accessible. According to the SPT we could see that there is a possible correlation between how much time and disclose – for example photos, chats, information sharing and updates – one shares on a platform or online, the stronger the ties or “relations” will be created with the platform itself. The informants will be able to share as much disclosure to a platform – and therefore also to people around them – as they might do in intimate relationships.
Another aspect of the relationship between user and tool, is that it seems to be a possible correlation between the times spent online and how many needs the informants will fill with this time. Some of them use online platforms for chosen needs, such as communicating with distant friends, or search for information, but some informants will use it for several needs. The more time they spend online, the more functions will the online activities fulfill, like diversion, communication, information search and dissemination of information, possibly about one self. However, this cannot be proved with such a small selection of informants, but there is a tendency that might be interesting to study more.

8.3 My world reflects me – how we pay attention to matters close to heart

An interesting aspect of the informant’s experiences online, is that the most obvious difference between the LGBT informants and the non-LGBT informants is that the LGBT informants are more aware of, and have more personal experience from, discrimination online. Katerina is the only non-LGBT informant that has experiences discrimination, which was based on her gender and based in the machismo culture, while all of the LGBT informants had seen or experienced discrimination, some even threats, due to their sexual orientation, and possibly gender as in the case of Katerina, connected to machismo. Informants from both groups mentioned ethnicity and skin color as a possible reason for discrimination, but only LGBT informants talked about sexual orientation as one. This can imply that the informants are more likely to notice issues that concern them, or that they have personal experience from, while other issues will be filtered. Also it could imply that the informants are more interested in issues that concern them, and surround themselves with likeminded people that will bring up these issues, and thus they will have a homogenous flow of themes and opinions in their flows, due to selection.

Another aspect on how our experiences can be filtered towards our interests or orientations is that the ICT and online tools of today also filter for us. Twitter, Google and Facebook will all suggest information, tweets and advertisements based on our history of actions on that platform (Weber 2010). Therefore, the interests of the users will in several ways increase their awareness of things that are close to their hearts already – both from their own selection and later the selection built in the platforms.
8.4 Living online – how the informant’s virtual living-room and habits looks like

In their online habits and behavior the informants are a quite homogenous group, mostly using the most common platforms like Facebook, Youtube, Twitter (not so much) and WhatsApp. The patterns one can see is that there are in general bigger differences within the groups of LGBT and non-LGBT youth, than it is between the groups. How and what the informants know seem to be more connected to the time and engagement they have with the new technology, which differ a lot within the informants, than their sexual orientation. However, there is one clear difference between the groups, being that LGBT informants have special groups and network only for and by people within the community, where they can find information, search for relations and engage in discussions and activism with other LGBT people. This is a similar pattern showed in by Gäredal and Nathorst-Böös (2009) and also in GLSEN (2013). However these LGBT informants don’t seem to use blogs in general, it’s only Karlos and Gary that mention this as a main activity, as suggested by the GLSEN study. Also, the more the informants spend time with social media and ICT, the more usages and more needs it seems to be filling. This time will depend both on interest but also on resources and access – several informants mention that internet is expensive, and public internet or internet connection in the mobile phones is also slow.

ICT and online tools are also described differently, both as something that bring possibilities and opportunities that the informants enjoy and as a risk factor in people’s lives, something that some informants are reluctant to use and get dependent on. The attitude towards the different media probably decide how much the informants want to engage in them, so that those who are skeptical will be reluctant to increase their usage. They will also be more prone to see the negative aspects, and due to this also base some doubts on lack of knowledge, as Sandra, Katerina and Vanja. Also Miguel mention that he think that peoples internet usage can be too much, implying that online activities could be exchanged for others with possible gain.

8.5 Finding likeminded, finding credible information

One other aspect of the results is that the informants when searching for new relations, tend to search for likeminded people. Miguel searches for people who are open to speak French with him and the LGBT girls search for other LGBT girls, some of them prefer feminists or at least people that are aware and against the machismo. This selection adds to the tendency on how their own choices and preferences will affect their experiences of “reality”, especially when they join groups for specific subjects, political views or sexual orientation. These groups and
networks will probably be the quickest way to get relevant information and share relevant information with equally interested people, however they will fail to introduce other opinions or challenge the user’s perspectives on the world.

When it comes to information search, the informant’s behavior and thoughts are equal to the one of relation search – they search information about already known topics like their interests, their professions or for school work mostly, with the exception for Gary and Miguel that also search for new and varied information. Interestingly the LGBT informants will search for information connected with sexuality more than the others, not as an interest but as a part of building identity maybe? The sources of information is mostly considered reliable if the user “know how to search” for most of the informants. This demands a bit more skills and source criticism than going to a library, asking someone else to fins relevant books or articles in a certain topic, and even though Vanja and Sandra feel more at ease with books and libraries, the other informants see several advantages with internet searches. Vanja and Sandra are also those who are less prone to use ICT and online tools, and thus I would say that they also have less skills regarding this, implying that it’s logical that they search on platforms that they are familiar with – like libraries.

8.6  You can trust no one – security awareness

The majority of communication that the informants have seems to be with people that they already know, and they also stress the fact that they preferably want to know people before adding them on Facebook for example. When talking about security, the informants claim to be aware of risks and that they have strategies to protect themselves, some more than others. People online can be “pervert, murderer, mentally insane or psychopaths” while none of the informants mention or compare the same aspects of people on the streets. Some informants, mostly those in the LGBT community, say that they prefer to meet discrimination on the street, at the same time as they protect their information online to not have to meet possible danger offline. They are also the informants that have most experience from online discrimination and threats, in line with the results of the GLSEN (2013) study. Also the government campaign about internet threats can be a factor that increase the feeling of insecurity. Several informants also mention that they don’t know how things work online, and therefore they take big measurements to secure themselves even though they are not always sure from what, or how they would be endangered. It seems like the limited technical knowledge as well as propaganda campaigns – not being information campaigns, but
seemingly focusing on the worst case scenarios – creates exaggerated fear and feelings of insecurity in all the informants, even though only some of the LGBT informants who are also activists have experience from hate speech and actual threats. Most mentioned in this aspect was Facebook, the platform where most of the informants were aware of security risks. Security awareness and strategies are talked about as a competence, something that the users have to learn.
9 Future research

I see many possibilities to further investigate these questions and build other studies. Below I have outlined some possible research questions or themes that could be seen as inspiration or starting points for further research.

- Some of the informants expressed a fear of spending too much time on social media and ICT, however it seems like it is hard for them to actually know what they are doing and how much they are doing it. Having informants write a diary, or join them for a day as participatory observation, trying to see how much they are connected and where they are.

- It would be interesting to make a quantitative study on youth experiences on discrimination and security issues, actually trying to find out what they have experiences themselves and what they are most afraid of, trying to see if there is any correlation or if propaganda campaigns decide what they fear online?

- Regarding security awareness and behavior, one could make a study focusing on a possible correlation between age and risk awareness instead of LGBT and non-LGBT youth, with for example informants about 15 years old, and around 25 years old.

- Most interesting I would find it to research further the relationship created between users and ICT platforms, investigating if and how this appears and what kind of aspects that will deepen this relation.
10 Conclusion

As stated in the problem definition I set out to investigate how youth in La Paz/El Alto were using ICT and social media, especially looking at three different activities: online relations, online security and online information management. I also wanted to see if there were any obvious patterns in how LGBT and non-LGBT youth had different experiences, behaviors and opinion regarding these activities. Generally there were more differences in usage and experiences within the two groups than between them, in all areas of focus.

I found that the informant’s use social media and ICT in many and diverse ways with different goals and focus, depending on their knowledge, resources and interest in using the media. Those with little interest will spend less time on, and also trust less in, the different platforms, and they will also use the tools for fewer aims. This behavior cannot be proved to correlate at all with the informant’s sexual orientation, nor gender, despite the fact that other studies suggest so, such as GLSEN (2013) and Gäredal and Nathorst-Bööss (2009). This might depend on the low number of informants, as well as cultural aspects.

However we could see that LGBT youth will be more focused on searching information and contact with other LGBT persons online, as stressed in the GLSEN (2013) study, more so than the non-LGBT search for new contacts or relations. This can be connected to an invisible heteronormativity; non-LGBT youth will not be aware of, or have, the need to connect, find information or talk about their sexuality as such, since they are the norm even though they might not be aware of it.

Regarding security, all of the informants were well aware of security risks online and had strategies to protect themselves, even though more of the LGBT informants had personal experiences of online violence and discrimination. Comparing with other studies I would say that my informants had different experiences due to their different online presence and not because of their sexuality, and mostly they talked about what they had observed being done to others – with the exception of Karlos and Gary.

It seems also like the informants are not only creating relations to the receivers of messages that they send online, but also to the medium itself. Some of the informants, those who spend most time connected, will express a feeling of stress and discomfort if they cannot be connected as much as they want, but don’t express only a feeling of lost connection with friends, but a feeling of lost connection from “everything”. The media and the platforms are also affecting the informants experiences and findings online, from a selection of people.
added and posts liked made by the informants, and later a selection based on the previous one, built into several platforms and therefore creating an online experience that will be filtered to reflect the users in more ways than offline contacts will be. Thus the relation between media/platform and user is interactive from both sides and no part is passive in the process of creating and developing the relation, even though one is programmed to its actions.

Finally, the informants will mostly talk and manage information during their time online, mostly engaging in people and topics that they are already familiar with. It seems also like their habits will direct their behavior since those who are most used to, and from a young age trained with, books will continue to turn there for information, whereas those engaging more and are a bit younger prefer internet.
11 Literature

11.1 Reports/Studies


11.2 Articles

http://www.ensani.ir/storage/Files/20110209150302-%D9%81%D9%87%D9%85%20%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C%20%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%AA.pdf


http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/opinion/30zhuo.html?_r=0

11.3 Other material


Royal Spanish Academy/Real Academia Española. Retrieved the 12/3 2014 at:
http://buscon.rae.es/drae/srv/search?val=machismo

Appendix 1. Interview questions

**Background:**

Name, age and city.

What types of social medias are you using, and how much?

Are you using computer, cellphone or other ways of going online?

How many hours are you spending online per day/week? How high priority does tics have for you?

**Online activities regarding information:**

What are you doing online? Reading blogs, Facebook, Twitter, google?

Which themes are you engaging mostly in? What is most attractive online?

Are you commenting blogs?

What kind of information are you looking for, have you been looking for?

Have you tried to inform yourself about sexual rights or sexual identity online? Where could you otherwise find the information?

Where if the information most credible?

**Security and strategies:**

Are you thinking about online security? In what way, how are you thinking about it? Are you worried about your security online?

How do you feel when posting online?

Can you say whatever you want?

What would be an example of online discrimination?

**Relationships:**

Have you met new people online? Is that easier than meeting new people in real life?

What kind of relationships are you looking for online?

Do you keep contact with friends online, and how?
Extras (can be interesting to discuss):

Activism online, anything you have seen and been interested in?

What kind of info would you have been needing prior to identify yourself? What kind of info would have helped you, and is needed?