**“Dating” or “Escaping”? Cuban Profiles in Dating Websites**

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**Introduction**

Cuba has one of the lowest Internet access rates in Latin America. Despite the uncertainty in the available statistics of Internet access,[[1]](#footnote-1) most sources agree in placing the island among the countries with the lowest rate of access in the Western Hemisphere.

For instance, according to the [World Bank](http://www.worldbank.org/), 14.3 of every 100 Cubans were users of the Internet in 1999. This figure rose to 15.9 in 2010, reaching 23.2 per 100 inhabitants in 2011 and 25.6 in 2012.[[2]](#footnote-2) The [International Telecommunication Union](http://www.itu.int/es/Pages/default.aspx) (ITU), based on 2010 data, showed that there were 40,097 fixed Internet subscriptions in Cuba; it means, 0.36 fixed Internet subscriptions per 100 inhabitants.[[3]](#footnote-3) Meanwhile, according [United Nations](http://www.un.org/en/) (UN), based on July 2013 data, there were 9.76 Cuban users of Internet per 100 inhabitants in 2005, 11.16 in 2006, 11.69 in 2007, 12.94 in 2008, 14.33 in 2009, 15.9 in 2010, 23.23 in 2011 and 25.64 in 2012, but the UN clarifies that, for example, in 2010, only 2.9 % of the 1,702, 206 users had Internet access.[[4]](#footnote-4) Officially, according to the Cuban government, there were 724,000 personal computers in Cuba in 2011, and the 65% of them were connected to networks of data with Internet access.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Besides this, the prices of Internet access are extraordinarily high. For example, in June 2013, the government opened 118 public centers for Internet access that offers three kind of services at three different prices: 4.50 USD per hour of full Internet access; 1.50 USD per hour of access to the national intranet network, plus international email access; and 0.60 USD per hour of access to the national intranet network. As a Cuban blogger explained to the Spanish newspaper [El País](http://www.elpais.com/)*,* the price of an hour of Internet access “is roughly equivalent to what I spend in a week on eating”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In such a scenario, where Internet access is not only a real privilege but almost an impossible action for most people, does it make sense to have a profile on a dating website? Moreover, what would be the purpose of a profile of this type and how does the context of accessibility influence their characteristics and dynamics? But, besides that specific digital context, there is a particular Cuban socio-political environment regarding the Internet access, characterized by the official emphasis on a “social use” of the World Wide Web, providing Internet access mainly from universities, official media and other governmental institutions, it is, from institutions and activities related to education, research, governmental politics and media. Then, another relevant question would be: does such an over politicization of the use of Internet and that “social” perspective of it mediate its private uses in the case of Cuban profiles in online dating sites? If yes, how does it mediate the discourses and practices of the users?

These issues are added to the existing debates on dating websites, particularly those related to the user behaviour, the presentation of the self on Internet dating sites, the narratives and attractiveness of the profiles, the veracity in online dating self-representations and the interrelationships between truth and lie on it, or the comparisons between online dating and conventional offline dating. For instance, whether online dating dynamics are fundamentally different from offline ones, or if it promotes better romantic outcomes. All those issues are, in the Cuban case, mediated by the above mentioned specificities of the context. We aim to analyze that mediation: how does it influence the configuration of the profiles, to what extend that mediation plays a central role in the dynamics of online courtship, or its presence in the narratives and representations mobilized on the profiles.

**Methods and Techniques of Research**

The analysis of online dating websites sets a number of methodological challenges. The complexity of the issue recommends a qualitative approach, mainly based on the discourse analysis of the profiles and, when possible, email interviews with the users.[[7]](#footnote-7) A qualitative perspective is appropriate for the proposed analysis, since it offers an insider's view of the subject of research and descriptions that suggest possible interrelationships, explain causes and effects and describe dynamic processes.[[8]](#footnote-8) The importance of the context for qualitative research and its holistic perspective[[9]](#footnote-9) -seeing the experience as a whole-, and its interpretative approach[[10]](#footnote-10) are also significant for the theme to be examined, due to the singularities of the scenario of research, both digital and sociopolitical ones. At the same time, the flexibility and contextualized way in which should be conducted qualitative research, as well as its critical enquiry approach,[[11]](#footnote-11) will permit to deal with the inherent complexity of the topic of research.

Since there are no specifically Cuban websites for online dating, we will analyze Cuban profiles at two international dating websites: [Connectingsingles.com](http://www.connectingsingles.com/) and [Datehookup.com](http://www.datehookup.com/). We will also include the only Cuban classified ads site, called [Revolico.com](http://www.revolico.com/).[[12]](#footnote-12) As we will see, although it is not a dating website, and it does not have a particular section of dating or contacts, we can find a few announcements of that kind. Its inclusion will allow us to have a case to compare Cuban profiles in dating websites with listings of contact with a more explicit sexual purpose, which is relevant for the analysis of the first.

**Mediation of “the Cuban condition” in Profiles from Cuba in Dating Websites**

Relationships between real and virtual worlds -or, better, between the social, cultural, economic and political context of individuals and their behaviours in digital scenarios- have been a critical topic of research in the field of the appropriations of information and communication technologies (ICTs). From the distinction among “virtual reality” and “real virtuality on its complex interrelationships and the proposal of “real virtuality” as the specificity of ICTs,[[13]](#footnote-13) to the exam of the implications of mapping the social onto the digital and vice versa, or the study of the efficacy of digital connectivity on some specific social practices and its articulation with other social networks,[[14]](#footnote-14) there is a really extensive and multidimensional field of research on these relationships.

In this study, the analysis of the context is a relevant dimension, given the scenario from which Cuban profiles in dating websites are generated. This Cuban condition has both a specific technological dimension – previously described on its general aspects-, and a socio-economic and political one.

Since the 90s, Cuban society is experiencing a deep crisis whose origin is in the fall of socialism in the Soviet Unionand the important consequences it had on special for the Cuban economy, beginning what was named the “Special Period”, characterized by serious real-life economic problems, especially a significant scarcity of products, increasing prices and a loss of the real value of the national currency. In macro-economic terms,

the end of economic aid and drastic reduction in commerce with the vanished socialist camp, preceded by errors and frequent changes in domestic economic policies, caused a 35% drop in GDP between 1989 and 1993, a 78% decrease in real social expenditures per capita, an increase in unemployment to 8%, and a deterioration in social indicators.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Although according to some economic analyses there was a period of economic upturn between 2011 and 2008, internal factors and the global economic crisis have hit Cuban economy, affecting macro-economic indicators, such as a severe slowdown in growth and the contraction of external financing. As a result, Cuba's social assistance programme has deteriorated, in a process reinforced by the key weaknesses in the provision of social services. The new scenario has had the adverse social effects and there is a consensus on the governmental incapacity to sustain the growing cost of social services in the future.[[16]](#footnote-16)

That economic climate generates a number of social phenomena, such as the low labour motivation in those jobs with no access to incomes in Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC),[[17]](#footnote-17) an important activity in the underground economy, a significant migration of skilled and university professionals who also shifted their state occupations to low skill jobs in enterprises with foreign capital or in tourism that provide formal or informal access to CUC, a decrease interest of the younger generation in higher education, or the increase of tourist-based dollar prostitution, practised even by university educated women and men.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Besides that economic context and its social consequences, the Cuban scenario is also characterized by a singular political climate -just one legal party system, the governing Communist Cuban Party, the lack of legal recognition to the political opposition, or the state ownership of the media-, and, what is more relevant to the analysis, an extensive and permanent state intervention and impediment on social practices. Even the Cuban highest rulers have recognized that “the State does not have to get into anything that is attempting to regulate the relationships between individuals”.[[19]](#footnote-19)

However, in Cuba there were a number of prohibitions as the buying and selling of homes or private cars, or the need of an official permission to travel abroad, which are being gradually eliminated and which are clear examples of the excessive state intervention in the private lives of individuals. But, instead of a total regime of social control, some authors have argued that the system's effectiveness is based on formal and informal social control mechanisms that “simultaneously emphasize openness and rigidity”,[[20]](#footnote-20) combining both freedom and restraint.

In this technological, economic and sociopolitical context, it is not surprising that there are really few Cuban profiles on dating websites. Difficulties on access to Internet -due to the low level of Internet penetration, as well as the high prices- become, at first instance, a barrier that impedes the regular Internet access of individuals. But, precisely because of this circumstance, the presence of those few profiles is a significant symptom of the resistance to those obstacles and the great interest of the users to access this type of websites. In a context signed by the (ghost of a) permanent and ubiquitous social surveillance -and, consequently, also a digital one-, the act of having a profile in a dating website becomes an explicit defiance to any control. But, unlike the public and more explicitly political defiance set for instance by the blogs created by independent journalists-, this is a defiance from the individual and private dimension. There are no direct references to political issues in Cuban profiles in online dating websites.

A total of 135 Cuban profiles were found in the online dating websites analysed. Of this total, 59.26% are profiles of men (looking for a woman or another man) and 40.74% are women (looking for a man). These low figures and the low frequency of connecting users confirm the difficulties in accessing the Internet. In the case of women, only 9.09% were active within the last 24 hours, 29.09% were active within four weeks and the rest (61.82%) were active over one month ago. Meanwhile, in the case of men’s profiles, 6.25% were active within the last 24 hours, 28.75% of them were active within four weeks and the rest (65%) were active over one month ago.

To this low frequency of access, another fact is added: the Cuban profiles are found only in those dating websites that offer a completely free service. Here the economic dimension has an explicit influence on that trend, coherently with the before described economic scenario and the high prices of Internet access. The economic dimension has then a direct effect on one of the most important aspects linked to the uses of ICTs: the immediacy and even the permanent connectivity, increased worldwide by the Internet access from smartphones.[[21]](#footnote-21) Aware of the necessity of that continuity, Cuban users with profiles in online dating sites include in some cases other contact information –such as email addresses or even telephone numbers-, maybe foreseeing the possibility of losing temporarily -or even permanently- their Internet access.

Privacy has been one of the most important concerns of Internet users from the first moments of the World Wide Web to current social networks.[[22]](#footnote-22)Then, it is particularly relevant that some users provide private data such as email or telephone, especially because the open and free nature of the websites they select. This allows anyone, even without being a member of the site, to access that information. Here, the Cuban condition becomes, at the same, the cause of the need to provide private data publicly, but also, according to the subjects, a certain source of protection against this situation. Asked about it, a Cuban woman with a profile in one of those sites considers that since “almost no one in Cuba has access to the Internet, it is difficult for me to be bothered by Cubans. Besides, nobody will call to Cuba from abroad if he has no real interest, because phone calls are very expensive”.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The Cuban condition -mainly its technological dimension and the difficult Internet access- becomes this way a source of safety, at least in the opinion of the subjects. But, while some individuals make public their private data, other ones even prefer not to publish his/her pictures. Among woman, 21.82% of them does not include a picture on their profiles, while 23.75% of men's profiles does not have photos. None of the users without picture answered the question about why they not include it in their profiles, however, it could be deduced that this decision is related to the preservation of privacy and personal identity.

Profiles photographs are “a central component of online self-presentation, and one that is critical for relational success”.[[24]](#footnote-24) As previous studies have demonstrated, users prefer to look at a profile that contains a picture, that also are contacted about seven times more often than those that do not have it.[[25]](#footnote-25) Cubans profiles in the analysed dating websites confirm this importance, since none of the profiles without photos have friends and either comments, that are possible only if associated to pictures in the case of [Connectingsingles.com](http://www.connectingsingles.com/).

While the absence of pictures in some profiles could be understood as a strategy against social control “inside” Cuba, the fact that the majority of Cuban profiles are in English -only five of them are in Spanish-, confirms there is an explicit “outside” projection and it proves that they are mainly looking for a relationship with a foreigner. In some cases, there is an explicit call for “some person” who can be “interested in come to Cuba”[[26]](#footnote-26) to meet singles; in other cases, it says that there is a particular special interest in a certain country so the person have interest in meeting people from that country: “I am searching for friendship and something else, I love Finland and I want to meet people there”.[[27]](#footnote-27) Here the inside/outside divide does not have (only) a technological nature but a socio-economic and even geographical one. In fact, that orientation towards daters located outside Cuba shows the strength of that divide, bringing to our minds the -poetically speaking-, “damned circumstance of water everywhere”.[[28]](#footnote-28)

But beyond that poetic image, the relationship of Cuban people with the “outside” has been complex since 1959. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution marks a different and rich pattern for studying external migration processes and their relationships with political and social conflicts. The main destination of Cuban emigration after 1959 has been the United States and the phenomenon has been characterized by different migration crisis (1959-60, 1980, 1994). Some authors have argued that Cuban emigration, usually interpreted as a political exile, has moved towards a process of economic nature and associate to family reunification.[[29]](#footnote-29) An analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of Cuban migrant shows that, in the case of legal migration, there is a balanced ratio between males and females (53% and 47% respectively), while in the case of illegal departures, about 80 % are men. Other important tendencies are the predominance of young people between illegal Cuban migrants as well as the increasing educational level of migrating people.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Besides the geographical condition -an island, isolated, that naturally marks the difference between inside and outside spaces- and the peculiar relevance of the migratory process after 1959, there are other circumstances that reinforce that inside/outside differentiation. For instance, the restrictions on travel abroad for Cuban citizens, slightly flexibilized by the reform of immigration policy in January 2013. Cubans are located -at least in the official discourse- outside capitalism. In such a context, the inside/outside divide becomes a matter of real and practical sense, expressed -in the case of profiles in dating websites- in the clear and even explicit orientation towards foreigners as potential partners.

Given the difficulties of access to the Internet, it does not seem to make sense that Cuban people use these kind of websites for dating between them. As a woman confesses, “it makes no sense to seek Cuban partner through these sites. Very few of us have access to Internet. […] I will not spend money on Internet access to find a Cuban man”.[[31]](#footnote-31) In conclusion, both the economic dimension and the technological one play a central role in the perspective from which the Cubans become members of dating websites. Internet access limitations and economic difficulties restrict the possibilities of having a profile in that kind of sites, focusing -when it is possible to access it- in foreigners as main target group. Having a profile in dating websites could be seen, then, as a certain kind of investment.

That outside or foreigner-oriented tendency is confirmed or reinforced by the presence of a number of profiles of women or men who declare to work at the sector of tourism. That is, they are people who are in regular contact with foreigners, as part of their daily work. This circumstance explains, on one hand, that these people have income levels that would allow them to access the Internet and, in the other hand, that they have perhaps more real chances to aspire to find a foreign partner. A person who works in that sector would have, probably, a more foreigner-oriented attitude, so having a profile in a dating website would be a complementary way for meeting people from abroad.

At some point, the interrelationships between personal and commercial interests even become absolute. We can find a profile that belongs not to a person, but to an enterprise: a private tourist agency called Club Friendship Cuba. The profile includes a full physical description (age, height, body type, ethnicity, religious or marital status), since these data are required to create a profile, but in fact the profile is used for advertising the services offered by a private company, in a context where there is no access to that resources for this kind of enterprises, given the state monopoly in the sector. Something unimaginable in another context -the creation of a profile on a dating site by a company to advertise it-, it shows, in an extreme way, the uniqueness of the appropriation that Cubans do of this kind of websites and its clearly external orientation, as part of an inside/outside divide.

**Self-representation of Cuban Profiles in Dating Websites**

Self-representation is a critical issue for profiles in online dating, as previous studies have demonstrated.[[32]](#footnote-32) That authors have noted, for instance, the complex interrelationships between the individuals' concerns with a favourable self-representation as well as a good impression, and a less honest behaviour in configuring their profiles, controlling their self-disclosure by presenting themselves in a more positive way and being less inclined to reveal what could be considered a negative aspect. With this being said, there is an intentional process of construction of a profile based on a more deliberate, controlled, and perhaps idealized self-presentation, taking advantage of the reduced cues and asynchronous nature of computer-mediated communication (CMC).[[33]](#footnote-33)

This intentional construction of the self is associated to a tendency towards having more strategic success, benefiting those users whose profiles are more attractive, desirable, and even idealized as a result of their process of configuration. This behaviour leads us to a particularly relevant issue: the relationships between truth and falsehood in building profiles on dating websites or, in other terms, the deception of the process, defining it from a broad point of view, as “the intentional misrepresentation of information”, that “can take a variety of forms, from outright lying to exaggeration”.[[34]](#footnote-34) In fact, as the study conducted by those authors points out, deception is a frequent trend in users of dating websites, since about 81% of them lied on at least one of the assessed variables (height, weight and age). However, with few exceptions, most of the subjects altered the information in a very slight way, as if it were acceptable to do so only to a certain point.

Certainly, the aforementioned characteristics of the CMC facilitate, to some point, the deception, since individuals are aware of it and, at the same time, they want to create attractive self-presentations since they are trying to manage the impressions they create in the other users through the profiles they construct.[[35]](#footnote-35) But, in reality, certain level of deception crosses all social interactions, as a practice of package and edition of the self in order to favourably impress the others.[[36]](#footnote-36) It becomes, this way, an everyday praxis and, therefore, the other individuals are prevented about it (since, probably, they follow the same scheme of quotidian action).

Given that general (theoretical) scenario, it is relevant to examine the narratives mobilized by -and the specificities of- Cuban profiles in dating websites: descriptions presented, topics underlined, values declared, dimensions highlighted, or issues not revealed. The foreigners-oriented nature of the Cuban profiles in dating websites would become a core mediation in the narratives used for the construction of profiles and, consequently, in the self-presentation they do.

It seems that users are aware of the possible image that people from abroad can have about intentions linked to prostitution or, at least, to certain economic interest in those Cubans who create profiles in dating websites. Given the articulation between economic scarcity, the raise of tourism as activity during the 90s, and the increase of prostitution, one of the most important issues faced by the subjects would be to create a profile that moves away from any suspicion of prostitution or economic interest, especially since they are profiles created with a clear orientation towards foreigners as possible partners to meet.

While this is the tendency in sites such as [Connectingsingles.com](http://www.connectingsingles.com/), in the case of the announcements of contacts published in [Revolico.com](http://www.revolico.com/), there are more direct and explicit references to be looking for some kind of sexual service by tourists or foreign residents in Cuba, or to be offering the service by Cubans. Also in the case of this website there are very few ads of this type but a higher percentage of them makes reference to that purpose. Between January 1st and February 28, 2014, a total of 2,786 ads were published in the section “others”,[[37]](#footnote-37) at [Revolico.com](http://www.revolico.com/), and only 14 of them were related to searching for contacts or dating. Seven of those ads were published by foreigners -tourists or residents in Cuba- who were looking either for some “temporal companion” or escort during their travel to Cuba. The other 50% of those announcements were published by Cuban people looking for sexual encounters or offering their service as escorts; any of them was looking for a formal relationship.

Since here the economic interest is explicit, then the self-presentation of both the “costumers” and the “provider” of the services are direct in those announcements: there is no need of hiding the existence of an interest. Foreigners looking for escorts or a temporary companion then emphasize aspects such as the age and physical characteristics of the persons they are looking for, ask for the possibility of sending pictures and underline their economic solvency. In turn, those who offer themselves as escorts, not only highlight their attractiveness but also they present themselves as nice, funny, serious people.

Contrary to this explicit statement of economic interest present in announcements published at [Revolico.com](http://www.revolico.com/), in the case of profiles on dating websites such as [Connectingsingles.com](http://www.connectingsingles.com/), users try precisely to avoid being seen as “interested” persons who are trying to use some foreigner for “escaping” from Cuba by the way of marriage. In that sense, they develop some narrative strategies and underline certain aspects on their self-presentations that could be considered as common scripts for creating an adequate image of the self.

Most of the Cuban profiles frequently highlight on their description a number of personal human values, such as honesty, sincerity, generosity, optimism, loyalty, happiness, modesty, seriousness and sensibility. This long inventory of values also includes being studious, romantic, loving and passionate. But, similarly to the self-presentation, those characteristics are used also to describe the person they are looking for: an affectionate one, a wonderful, genuine, working, true-hearted, responsible, sweet, graceful, hopeful and good person. Definition of the self can also be stated in terms of a confrontation between those things that one loves -“altruism, comprehension, truth, smile to everybody, to work and to be (in the future) good father and husband”- and the ones hated -“injustice, hypocrisy, lies, treason, inequality, egoism, dishonesty, vanity, lack of understanding and all kind of vices”.[[38]](#footnote-38) The image of perfection, in the case of men, reaches even to the point of trying to avoid seeming a male chauvinist, saying that he is “able to make any woman happy, [since] especially I like to cook and help my partner”.[[39]](#footnote-39)

There is a certain continuity between the description of the self and the description of the person wanted to de found: “I am an honest man and I am looking for an special woman like me”.[[40]](#footnote-40) Consistently, an almost perfect person -according to her/his self-presentation- then will desire to meet the perfect man/woman, “a person who also wants to find the perfect match”.[[41]](#footnote-41) Here the self and the otherness go together as part of that narrative strategy in the construction of profiles.

Coherently with those descriptions, there are a number of themes that recurs in the Cuban profiles. One theme is romanticism: most profiles state their desire of finding the true love: “I am here waiting to find my love, I know that is so difficult but not impossible, in somewhere there is this special love”.[[42]](#footnote-42) Usually, profiles include some romantic scenes on their characterisation, such as the commonplace of "to watch the sunset" or “to see the Moon together”, or “to take nice walks together”,[[43]](#footnote-43) “the stars shining, the birds flying, the sea, the mountains, a blue sky, fresh air […] we must take advantage from these pleasant things everyday as a last time”.[[44]](#footnote-44)

At the same time, they usually underline the seriousness of their purpose, highlighting that they are looking for “a serious relationship”. There are explicit mentions of the possibility of marriage and future plans, including to have a family, as well as references to not being on the dating website “to play bad games or help scammers to do their work”.[[45]](#footnote-45) “I am looking for a man to build a stable relationship and give him all of me. Please I would like to receive messages only from people who are interested in looking for a serious relationship in a long term”,[[46]](#footnote-46) states a profile, while other says that his plans is “to be a good father a a good husband in the future”.[[47]](#footnote-47) In that sense, someone confesses -underlining his intention to find a longterm relationship as well as the importance of feelings-, that currently he has no girlfriend because is “tired of meaningless, just physical, short relationships”.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Another frequent issue included in self-presentations is the incorporation of elements for making the profiles more “human”. This way, some profiles include personal details such as the sons and daughters the person has, or mention that his/her parents have passed away and s/he is “alone in my country”.[[49]](#footnote-49) In other cases, when explaining the reasons for creating a profile, there are references to certain personal situation involving precisely a previous painful relationship: “I am in this site because I am going through a very difficult step of my relationship, the broke-up”.[[50]](#footnote-50) This way, self-presentations include touching stories that not only would humanize profiles, but could also generate compassion and a desire to help in those people reading it. In that sense, a woman describe the person she is looking for as “someone that enjoys a good joke as well as sharing the problems in life”,[[51]](#footnote-51) in a clear reference to the well-known phrase of the marriage ceremony: “in good times, in bad, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health”.

Communicational dimension is another question included in some profiles, both in self-presentation and in the description of the person looking to meet. Thus, individuals are described as talkative persons, wanting to “meet people that love to have a conversation, by email, phone or whatever”,[[52]](#footnote-52) “someone friendly that enjoys communication”[[53]](#footnote-53) or “a sincere person, easy to talk to, [who] takes as well as gives from a relation”.[[54]](#footnote-54) Also men include that dimension on their description, considering that one of the most important thing in a couple “must be communication for all agreement, plans, preferences, and ways to go, all in all…to be as a same person”.[[55]](#footnote-55) This is not surprising, since those websites are, precisely, a space of communicative nature where, in the first instance, a communicative relationship will be established between subjects. Then, that dimension would be central for the relations by these ICTs-based resources.

All those aspects -romanticism, serious purposes, future plans, and so on- are elements of a narrative strategy for avoiding any possible association to prostitution, a likely trend since Cubans profiles focus specifically towards foreigners as potential partners. As part of that effort, it is also relevant that only two profiles answer the question about incomes, included in the data to be completed as part of the profile, and just one profile refers to the well-established position of the person on her career and her position of financial security, “with a job I enjoy”.[[56]](#footnote-56) On the other side, in some case, there is an explicit reference to the economic dimension, but denying any interest: “I don't have money and I am not here looking for money”.[[57]](#footnote-57) Although some authors have suggested that those persons involved in prostitution in Cuba -called *jineteras* and *jineteros*- do not identify themselves as prostitutes but “as being *en la lucha* (being in the struggle of daily survival to procure essential food and goods) or simply *resolviendo* (taking care of daily basic needs due to the scarcity of consumer goods in the island)”, there is a consistent strategy and a narrative effort in Cuban profiles at dating websites for avoiding any association with prostitution or economic interest.

Besides the mediation of that dimension in the self-presentation of Cuba profiles, the other aspect that is explicit mentioned by a number of users is the technological one. It is also used as an argument for reinforcing the seriousness of the profile's purposes. For instance, the difficulties for accessing Internet are mentioned, explaining that “we have not time on-line for a game”,[[58]](#footnote-58) telling this way that s/he is looking for something “real” and serios. Another profile explains that “I also have troubles in the Internet connection. I am not all the time online, and it’s difficult for me to chat online, due to the limited economic resources of my country as well. For Cubans it’s forbidden Skype or webcam chat”.[[59]](#footnote-59) This way, the technological aspect is included as part of the self-presentation, both for underlining the limitations of the CMC in the case of Cubans profiles -an important issue, since average users expect to pass from the exchange of messages by those websites to some more multimedia communication, such as chat or Skype, before definitely passing to a face-to-face scenario-, and for insisting in the seriousness of the individual's purposes.

**Conclusions**

Self-presentation in Cuban profiles on dating websites are mediated by the Cuban condition, particularly its technological and socio-economical and political dimensions. Given the difficulties for Internet access and the economic situation, the are few Cuban profiles in those kind of websites and they are present mainly in those ones that offer a complete free service. This circumstance sets a particularly challenge to them, since all the information is available even for those persons who do not have a profile on these websites, creating a dilemma regarding privacy. This dilemma, however, is only explicit in a few profiles that prevent to post pictures, while most of them even include information such as mobile numbers, in order to facilitate communication in a context where losing the Internet connection is a permanent possibility.

There is a clear and significant difference between those announcements offering or demanding sexual services that recognize it, and those profiles in dating websites that, to the contrary, try to avoid any suspicion of economic interest or link with prostitution, as well as avoid any possible perception that their intention is to use a foreign persons to “escape” from the island. Given that the majority of Cuban profiles in dating websites have a clear orientation towards foreigners as potential partners; this outside-direction can easily be associated to some economic interest or association with prostitution practices. That is why the economic dimension is carefully avoided or explicitly denied by some profiles.

All narrative strategies in self-presentation aim to avoid that association, building an ideal, almost perfect image of both the self and the other that is being sought. Precisely, one of the arguments used to underline the serious purposes of the person behind the profile, is the difficulty for accessing the Internet; it is, the technological dimension. It also limits the possibilities of passing from the exchange of messages by the dating website to other ICTs-based channels of multimedia communication, such as Skype. That limitation could probably be associated also to the effort made for building a more convincing self-presentation.

Human values included in the description, the emphasis on feelings or the recurring romantic images, all of it are elements of the narrative strategy developed for an ideal presentation of the self in Cuban profiles, to the point that sometimes there could be a certain suspicion about some exaggerations or even lies in the image of the self presented. It is relevant that such a private use of Internet does not include any reference to the context of social control and hegemonic perspective of a social use of Internet. Here the overpoliticization of Internet, a permanent issue in other communicative spaces from Cuba such as independent blogs, is silenced.

Instead of references to political issues in the presentation of self, it is preferred to present a description that explains why Cubans do not consider dating websites as resources for looking for a relationship with other inhabitants of the island and they focus their profiles towards foreigners as potential partners. In that sense, as we have seen, the technological dimension -articulated with the economic issue- becomes the core mediation in the presentation of the self by Cubans in dating websites, both on its content and its dynamics.

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7. There was a really low response rate (20%). Only two users reply to messages from the author. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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12. In Cuba, the word *revolico* means “confusion”, “hubbub” or “disorder”. It is often used to refer to a group of things that are put together, but without an explicit or obvious order. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
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17. In Cuba, there are two local currencies: the Cuban Peso (CUP) and the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC). There is an official exchange rate of 25 CUP for 1 CUC, which has parity with the U.S. dollar. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
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37. There is no specific contact section on this website. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Cuban man profile from [Connectingsingles.com](http://www.connectingsingles.com/). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Cuban man profile from [Connectingsingles.com](http://www.connectingsingles.com/). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Cuban man profile from [Connectingsingles.com](http://www.connectingsingles.com/). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Cuban woman profile from [Connectingsingles.com](http://www.connectingsingles.com/). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Cuban man profile from [Connectingsingles.com](http://www.connectingsingles.com/). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Cuban woman profile from [Connectingsingles.com](http://www.connectingsingles.com/). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
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