Internet in Public

An ethnographic account of the Internet in authoritarian Cuba

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Abstract

The Internet's democratizing potential is a hot topic in the study of authoritarian regimes. In the new decade, scholars and policy makers have applauded the benefits that online access to information and communication may bring. Despite these benefits, some protests against authoritarian regimes have failed because dictators utilized the Internet to repress insurgents, while other connected, yet authoritarian, states have not seen any popular uprisings. In this light, the implications of Cuba's expanded Internet access are uncertain. To emphasize the ways that the Internet is used by the masses, this ethnographic study directs its attention to the unprecedented ways that Cubans go online. It finds that the Cuban telecommunications monopoly forces Cuban netizens to share both network and physical space, where prices, speed, and unavailable access points keep their Internet usage on a leash. Communication with exiled family and friends is prioritized for Cuban netizens who are unable to use the Internet as an integral part of their everyday lives. Because the regime limits popular Internet usage to such an extent, more sophisticated Internet regulations that hinder anti-regime resistance are of minor importance in Cuba.

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Contents

1. Introduction

The introduction of popular WiFi access in 2015 made a significant change to Havana's inner-city landscape. Only able to go online in certain public Internet spaces, Cuban locals share benches, steps and shade to connect to a slow, state-owned (but finally accessible) World Wide Web. Parks and street corners that are lit up by smartphones even in the darkest hours finally allow Cubans to communicate and access information from all over the world—but only in public.

In the academic literature on authoritarian states, expanded Internet access is often associated with popular uprisings and, in best case, democratization. If not, scholars focus on the strategies that authoritarian regimes employ to rein the Internet themselves. Few, however, ask the people in front of the screens about their own motives for going online. Yet, we know that today's younger Cubans do not support Castro's Revolution (Krull & Koboyashi 2009: 174), while their political disillusionment makes them unwilling to partake in societal change (Freedom House 2009: 17). Almost three decades after Cuba survived the collapsing communism in the Eastern Bloc and the Soviets, and six years after the so-called Twitter Revolutions took over in Iran and the Arab world, the "special case" of Cuban regime sustainability continues.

This ethnographic study centers around the visitors of Cuba's public Internet spaces. These spaces consist of public computers available at the state-run telecommunications offices as of 2013 and WiFi hotspots outdoors as of 2015. They embody the Internet expansion that allowed Cubans to use the Internet on a regular basis for the first time in their lives. Following theory, the increased Internet access should be conducive for future democratization. Given the Castro regime's authoritarian nature, however, we also understand that Internet access is regulated to the extent that it may benefit their grip over power.

The ways that Cubans exclusively are allowed to surf the public network in public spaces are unprecedented. They subject netizens to regulations both in real-life, at the physical Internet spaces, and online, through technical means. What kind of Internet users these spaces produce, is first raised in this paper. It finds that Cuba's new Internet is so regulated that netizens do not take advantage of the political opportunities that it may carry. At the same time, the limited access makes it unnecessary for the Cuban regime to employ as sophisticated regulations as other autocrats.

Despite thorough literature searches, it appears that this perspective has not been brought up before. Theorists have previously attempted to tackle the question of the Internet's flaws and potentials in Cuba, but fail to consider the users that the Internet policies target. By overemphasizing the zero-sum game between state regulations and online activists, they omit the perspective of the non-political masses (Pearce 2015: 1159). Nonetheless, the common people's perspective is crucial when analyzing the Internet's impact on democracy or authoritarianism. Depending on how citizens relate to them, political regulations vary in efficiency and encourage or discourage regime resistance (Lessig 2003: 341). Since the Internet expansion in Cuba aims at connecting ordinary users to the global Internet, an empirical study of this specific population was necessary.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore how Cuban citizens use the public Internet spaces that the state authorities have set up across the country. This includes gaining a deeper understanding of how Internet users perceive the state regulations that they are subjected to and how these perceptions affect their online activities.

On a larger level, the thesis makes visible the relationship between Internet regulations and citizens' usage. It adds to the scholarly debate on popular Internet use by describing novice Internet use in the context of regulated access. It also makes a methodological contribution by exemplifying how Internet regulations can be studied using ethnographic methods.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How do Cuban Internet users in urban Havana perceive the government's Internet regulations?
2. How do Internet regulations affect their online activities?

1.2 Delimitations

The most overarching delimitation of this study is the novelty of the public Internet spaces. Because the phenomenon of public Internet spaces is still developing in Cuba, its full effects might not be visible yet.

Furthermore, this is a predominately qualitative study. Quantitative data, on the other hand, was added as a complementary description of popular Internet use in Cuba. In its quantitative capacity, a bigger sample would have been preferable. Due to limitations in time and resources, however, the analysis uses the urban parts of Havana as reference point.

Further discussion and rationales about methodological issues can be found in the methods chapter.

1.3 Disposition

The subsequent sections of this thesis are composed as the following:

In Chapter 2, I present the existing scholarship on the Internet and its role in democratization and authoritarianism. Chapter 3 provides the relevant background on information and communications in Cuba, including the history of Internet in the country. In Chapter 4, I describe the theoretical framework that has been employed in my study, accompanied by a methodological discussion in Chapter 5. The rest of the paper is devoted to the results: Chapter 6 outlines the findings, that are summarized and concluded in Chapter 7 and further discussed in Chapter 8.

2. Literature Review: Internet in Authoritarian Regimes

2.1 Internet as Emancipation

Ever since the collapse of communist rule in Central Europe and the Soviet Union, popular access to information has been understood as one of the main forces against authoritarianism. Numerous studies on the breakthrough of democracy in former communist states point to a common explanatory factor: citizens' enlightenment about the freedom in the West. Researchers and policy makers still refer to the establishment of Radio Free Europe and funding of samizdat literature as examples of contributions to the democratization in some of the former communist states. Today, however, the "information age"-optimism (Kalathil & Boas 2003: 1) that characterized the 1990s, lives on in its narratives rather than in practice.

Since the millennial shift, the belief in information as form of emancipation has centered around the popular use of the Internet. As a new version of Lipset's (1959) modernization theory, Kedzie (1997) proposed that technologic development fosters democracy. In what he called the "dictator's dilemma," globalization forces authoritarian regimes to advance their technology, which in turn gives their citizens more access to the outside world (Kedzie 1997: 90). Once the Internet has expanded, Webster (2002: 92) argued, "informational capitalism" does not let the ruling elite to sustain. Rosenau and Johnson (2002: 55) posited that the Internet supports the non-governmental scene, increasing the choices of political affiliation among the populace and forcing nation-states to be more accountable. Similarly, in their cross-country analysis, Best and Wade (2009: 269) found that increased Internet use was associated with government transparency and NGO effectiveness. They proposed that the public raises its awareness about government abuse with the help of non-governmental organizations that use online means to gather and distribute information.

On a smaller scale, Bailard's concept, "mirror-holding," means that citizens evaluate their own government in comparison to what they have learned about other governments online, while Abbott (2012) enhances the Internet's use in checking fact against propaganda. In a study on rural Italy, Poy and Schuller (2016: 26) found that broadband availability encouraged information-seeking in the households and increased voter turnout. According to Wheeler (2006: 17), surfing on the Internet makes users more open minded, confident and secure in their opinions, regardless of their intentions to use the Internet for political enlightenment.

Theories linking the Internet, information, and democracy have been reflected among policy makers as well. In her 2010 speech "Remarks on Internet Freedom," then-American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reinforced the importance of the Internet access in U.S. foreign policy, stating its role in "helping people to discover new facts and making governments more accountable" (U.S. Department of State 2010).

According to Shirky (2011: 35), however, the U.S. agenda on Internet Freedom has overemphasized the Internet's capacity to provide citizens with information from the West in favor of communication in-between citizens. He belongs to the newer strand of academics who argue that the most important function of the Internet is to allow citizens to coordinate large-scale responses to politics using online communication platforms (Shirky 2011: 28). Especially since the popular uprisings in several Arab countries, mobilization coordinated through social media, often with the help of mobile devices, has indeed been regarded as the largest threat to authoritarian rule—a concept that Diamond predicted to be "liberation technologies" (2010: 78). By offering opportunities that do not exist in the authoritarian reality, Parker (2014: 4) writes that social media turns powerless individuals into revolutionaries. Not only can social media reach a large part of the populace, Bennet and Segerberg (2011: 794) argue that its personalized usage also fosters higher levels of engagement than conventional, ideology-based collective action. According to López (2002: 66), improved communication possibilities create a sense of political efficacy and impact ability among citizens.

2.2 Internet as a Tool for Autocrats

Although some large-N studies have confirmed the positive correlation between popular Internet use and regime type (see Milner 2006; Groshek 2009), empirical evidence on the Internet's role in democratization processes remains scarce.

In their endeavor to make visible the Internet's ambiguous effect on regime type, Best and Wade (2007) created a framework for Internet regulations. Following the writers' reasoning, all means of Internet policy have either a democratic or anti-democratic impact. Regulations that increase civil rights or political liberties ("the freedom to develop opinions, institutions, and personal autonomy without interference from the state") are democratic, while regulations that undermine the same rights are anti-democratic (Best & Wade 2007: 406). For instance, inexpensive Internet communications are conceptualized as democratic because they make it easier to pursue activism or political information-seeking, while high Internet access prices would discourage similar modes of use and therefore be undemocratic. Similarly, free speech laws should bear democratic effects, as opposed to criminalization of political dissent online (Best & Wade 2007: 408).

In reality, Internet regulations are more complex than Best and Wade's description. Expansion of access is often combined with tightening of undesired modes of usage. Internet use may simultaneously work in democratic and anti-democratic directions, and it is not certain that policy and government intentions match outcome and citizens' actual use.

Kalathil and Boas pioneered ideas on the complexities of expanded Internet access in 2003 with their book "Open Networks, Closed Regimes" that reconstructed Kedzie's (1997) concept dictator's dilemma. The authors described how authoritarian regimes have manipulated the Internet use in civil society, politics, the economy, and the international sphere to dampen bottom-up emancipation while extracting economic benefits from the increased connectivity (2003: 8). Hence, authoritarian regimes

block or allow certain Internet content according to their own needs (Göbel 2013: 399) and to avoid increased popular access to the outside world. While attempting to economically strengthen the ruling class using the Internet, these regimes are unlikely to impose democracy on themselves and might therefore exclude the broader populace from the technological development (Best & Wade 2009: 258). As Johnson (2004: 65) put it, "computer and information technology can be used as much to keep things the same as to cause change"

Much has changed since these couple of seminal works, however. Today, the Internet is used by the vast populace in many authoritarian states, and it has evolved from being merely a medium of content to providing an entire virtual community. The so-called Web 2.0 is characterized by greater interactivity and collaboration between users, content providers, and enterprises. The modern-day phenomenon of user-generated content on the Internet might be interpreted as an inherent democratization of the Web, but it also gives authoritarian regimes more leverage to regulate netizens' use by means far beyond censorship. The Internet's capacity to distribute information can be utilized by autocrats to improve their propaganda, while the efficient communication channels facilitate surveillance and create new ways of regime legitimation. Just as the so-called Internet optimists claim that the Web 2.0 has the capacity to foster democratization more efficiently, Internet pessimists point out that the ever-evolving Internet is more unpredictable than any other previous media (Morozov 2011: 83).

Censorship, the most well-known form of authoritarian Internet regulations, is evolving from large-scale blocking to covert, special arrangements between regimes and online service providers (Morozov 2011: 150; Lessig 2006: 199). While Pei (2012: 39) argued that the Internet eventually will become too big to censor, Morozov (2011: 100) predicts that future technologies will use algorithms to identify the pages to censor for each individual. The recording of users' online activities is even more useful for surveillance purposes, especially since modern-day Internet users reveal large amounts of information about themselves just by going online. Other than discouraging online activity outside the boundaries of what is considered acceptable or legal in their countries, Pearce (2015: 1164) finds that governments might utilize social media to harass their opposition by collecting the private information that they share online.

With regards to real-life collective action, social media can have a demobilizing effect by enabling regimes to identify, threaten or use direct violence against activists (Chenoweth 2016). According to Parker (2014: 5), authoritarian regimes skillfully invoke three types of feelings that discourage online resistance among potential dissenters: isolation, fear, or apathy. Furthermore, activists who report about police brutalities online might disincentive others to go out and protest, "leaving the movement's hardliners and risk-takers on their own" (Chenoweth 2016). In fact, only 30% of non-violent resistance has succeeded since the Twitter revolutions in 2010, compared to 70% in the nineties, when the number of protests was significantly fewer (Chenoweth & Stephan 2016). Khazraee and Losey (2013: 52) argue that studies of single moments in collective action movements overestimate the Internet's efficiency and omit regimes' long-term suppression efforts.

Social media is also used as a more sophisticated substitute to old-fashioned propaganda. In their draft study on China's Internet, King et al. (2016: 28) found that in combination with allowing only domestic social media options, the Communist Party is devoted to "changing the subject" on the Internet in order to construct a calm public sentiment. Venezuela's Hugo Chavez used Twitter for self-promotion, while Cuba allegedly has hired regime-friendly bloggers (Morozov 2011: 113). The Internet has the advantage of being perceived as less biased than conventional media outlets, which is why it is favorable for authoritarian regimes to use it for propaganda (Rød & Weidmann 2015: 341). According to MacKinnon's (2011: 33) concept "networked authoritarianism," strategic regimes embrace the changes brought by digital communications by competing with dissenters online, rather than strictly censoring them.

Another mechanism suggests that some allowance of online public deliberation actually increases state legitimacy. According to Jiang (2010: 270), regimes can use the Internet as a replacement for electoral democracy. Online petitioning and complaints systems, for example, enable officials to observe the occurrences of smaller problems in real time and quickly resolve them, or adjust local policies to citizens' grievances. They also encourage individual input rather than group-based collective actions, the former being seen as much less threatening to stability (Nathan 2003: 15). Chinese, official media have been forced to open up space to public opinion so that they do not lose their readership to independent, online sources (Lagerkvist 2006: 130), but this also means that they can continue controlling the media scene with higher levels of legitimacy. Thus, the aggregation and processing of popular demand increases the bureaucracy's stabilizing power and give it further legitimacy to continue its rule (Göbel 2013: 395). By allowing civil society participation or individual political expression through social media, Southeast Asian states have managed to filter certain unwanted policy issues and debates out of politics (Jayasuriya & Rodan 2007: 785). In this way, social media serves to expand participation while reducing contestation (Jayasuriya & Rodan 2007: 774-775).

Hence, strategies have shifted from controlling the Internet itself to controlling the ways that citizens are using it. According to a large-N analysis on authoritarian countries during the years 1993-2010, regimes that have most reason to worry about public opinion have higher levels of Internet implementation. Regardless, the likelihood for democracy remains unchanged (Rød & Weidmann 2015: 344-345), since the most technically savvy authoritarian regimes are confident enough to let Internet use consolidate their rule (Rød & Weidmann 2015: 348).

2.3 Modern-Day Internet Use

Theories on individual Internet use focus on the determinants of usage, as well as the determinants of specific online activities. Firstly, the technology acceptance model suggests that the individual's beliefs about Internet use produces certain attitudes that affect their level of Internet engagement. Porter and Donthu (2006: 1005), for instance, found that persons who perceive the Internet as easy and useful go online more than those who regard it as expensive and difficult to access.

The uses and gratifications framework, on the other hand, is more concerned with the specific motives for individual Internet use. The framework, that traditionally analyzes the active choices that media consumers make to be gratified, experienced an upsurge with the arrival of the Internet, that allows for an even more subjective consumer role. In the scholarship, the most common gratifications of the Internet are the fulfillment of communication needs, information needs, and entertainment needs (Ruggiero 2000: 15). The same groups of gratifications, more or less, have remained in newer literature on social media. While information has been the most salient gratification on the traditional Internet (Papacharissi & Rubin 2000: 185), Whiting and Williams (2013: 366) ranked social interaction as the most desired gratification (88%) that individuals extract from social media. In line with this, Ellison et al. (2007: 1164) argue that Facebook users create social capital by maintaining personal relationships from the offline world. Even more important for the democratization scholarship, Cheng et al. (2015: 1110) found that Chinese university students' search for gratifications on mobile social media encourages civic action. This effect held true for all gratifications except entertainment and personal affection (Cheng et al. 2015: 1112).

Many other scholars, however, point to the negative impact on citizens' political engagement that the search for gratifications may have. In the context of expanded Internet access, Wylie and Glidden (2013: 141) argue that the link between technology and political activism is too far-fetched. Apolitical people do not start to use the Internet for political means only because it is available, they contend, especially not if other structural factors discourage participation. In their study of American newsreaders, Tewksbury and Althaus (1999: 457) suggested that online newsreaders disregard political news since they find it difficult to pick in the online jungle. Especially since online entertainment has increased, Internet pessimists have re-introduced Putnam's (1995) dystopian view that civil society deteriorates when leisure media consumption takes primacy over news consumption.

This might even become a deliberate regime strategy. In the case of Russia, Morozov (2011: 57) notes that the government has made sure that citizens are distracted from Internet activism by providing large amounts of online entertainment. He writes that "the most effective system of Internet control is not the one that has the most sophisticated and draconian system of censorship, but the one that has no need of censorship whatsoever" (Morozov 2011: 58), noting that very few Internet users in Russia are interested in viewing online political content at all. He compares this to the cold war-era, claiming that the Western media that eventually became available in the Eastern Bloc and the Soviets neither pushed people to think about political issues nor made them dream about prosperity and consumerism (2011: 59); instead, Western entertainment distracted them from the political reality they were experiencing, made them more content with their everyday lives and, by extension, their regime (Morozov 2011: 65). Parker (2014: 203-205) adds that Russian netizens use domestic social media to a much larger extent than the globally predominant Facebook. Despite the accessibility of the World Wide Web, only a small percentage uses it as news source.

Furthermore, some argue that the modern-day Internet movements that engage people the most are those that gratify their entertainment needs. In China, where the Internet is much more censored than in Russia, young netizens are quick to pick up on online trends, like live broadcasting, for instance.

Wu (2016) argues that they do it with their own, personal reality in mind: for finding mates, better jobs, or to climb the economic ladder. Thus, online movements go far beyond the political sphere.

This also holds true for individuals with very limited Internet access. In a cross-section survey in twenty-five developing countries, Gomez (2014: 288) found that Internet café users favor cultivating personal relationships or indulging in entertainment over education and other information-seeking practices. Development specialists' goals to close the so-called "digital divide," that is, class-related differences in computer literacy, are hard to meet since people did not use the Internet as intended.

Lastly, modern-day information is not as inherently democratizing as previous research assumes. The uprise of social media's information-sharing possibilities has created a so-called "information war" between different political forces (Cadwalladr 2016). During the U.S. 2016 Presidential Campaign, for instance, Internet users posted online news on social media that often turned out to be fake (Donath 2016), believed by many to be a decisive influence on the elections outcome.

In summary, the Internet is most commonly conceptualized as a catalyst for democratization. When individuals just began to use the Internet for private purposes, experts predicted that access to information would be the most important mechanism for democracy. The subsequent development of social media and mobile access, however, made interpersonal communication seem more important.

More recent scholarship claims that the Internet can empower not only the populace but also autocrats, who use the Internet to eliminate their competition. Some works add that modern-day Internet use is not fostering knowledge as much as it is distracting its users from real-life problems and exposing them to contradictory claims to the truth.

3. Background: Information and Communications in Cuba

3.1 Offline Politics

There have been various attempts to explain Cuba's sustained authoritarianism in the literature, but the predominating ideas, however, all relate to the citizens' isolation from the surrounding world.

Ever since the Cuban revolution in 1959, access to information has been limited for the Cuban citizens. Up to this date, all forms of media are state property, and all news has to be approved by the Department of Revolutionary Orientation before being published. They do not allow for government criticism, report selectively on both domestic and international news, and all carry propagandistic overtones (Valle 2016: 25), as freedom of expression and freedom of the press is subject to the "ends of the socialist society" (Constitution of the Republic of Cuba 1992, Article 53).

Efforts from the U.S to establish anti-governmental sources of media, such as Radio Martí in 1980 and TV Martí in the 90s, failed because the regime jammed it (López 2002: 74). Even if Fidel Castro's successor, Raúl Castro, might allow more criticism as part of Cuba's increased openness towards the outside world, dissident writer Amir Valle points out that persecution still awaits the person whose criticism implies anything other than individual grievances (2016: 109).

A central part of Castro's censorship is the surveillance that forms part of everyday life in Cuba. As the "eyes and ears of the Revolution," Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) were founded in each city block in 1960. Strongly associated with the country's security apparatus, these neighborhood watches still have the primary task of keeping files on residents and being on the lookout for any "counterrevolutionary" behavior (Roque Cabello 2015). According to some, the authorities' penetration into the lowest levels of society has created a general sentiment of fear in Cuba (Parker 2014: 141).

In addition to information, communication has historically been severely restricted. In 1992, foreign researchers reported that phone calls from one side of Havana to the other required several attempts to connect, not to mention long-distance calls (Goodman 1992: 29). To this day, only 11% of the households have fixed phones. Before pay phones were installed in 2000, Cubans typically relied on neighbors and acquaintances to make calls (Hemlock 2000). Private cellphones were permitted in 2008 and quickly caught up to 30% of the populace (International Telecommunications Union 2015). A direct phone line between Cuba and the United States was not reestablished until 2015 (Winsor 2015).

3.2 The Internet in Cuba

The Internet policy in Cuba has followed a much different path from most other countries. Opposed to the individualist vision of the Internet as serving the user and their free will, the collectivist-oriented Cuban regime sees it as a social tool, regulated by the state with an idea of benefitting the community (Uxo 2010: 126). In conformity with the Cuban Constitution, the Internet cannot be subject to private property (Baron & Hall 2015: 340) and because of this, all telecommunications in Cuba are owned and operated by the state monopoly ETECSA.

Since the introduction of the Internet in 1996, the Cuban regime has drawn social and economic benefits from the Internet by promoting it in certain public institutions. A national Intranet limited access to resources in the domestic domain and substantially limited its threatening impacts (Kalathil & Boas 2003: 44-68). According to Uxo (2010: 124), Cuba's investment in computer literacy, including the opening of the University of Information Technology in 2002, was a strategy to continue controlling domestic knowledge and formed part of Cuba's confrontation with the U.S.

The possibility of obtaining Internet access reached the public consciousness when, in 2011, a fiber-optic cable was drawn from Venezuela (Freedom House 2013: 218-219). The cable was not put into use until 2013, and the delay was speculated to be Cuba's reaction to the Arab spring revolutions during the same period (Freedom House, 2013: 218-219), especially after former President Fidel Castro called popular Internet use "the most powerful weapon that's ever existed" (Biddle 2015).

While tourists have been using the Internet in high-end hotels since 2001 through satellite, Cubans were only allowed to enter these hotels in 2008—at an hourly rate equivalent to a monthly salary. In 2013 however, access increased significantly when ETECSA opened 118 navigation centers using the new cable. Even more game-changing was when, in 2015, 233 WiFi hotspots were gradually introduced throughout the country and allowed non-professional Cubans to connect to the Internet with their smartphones and laptops. Today, ETECSA's public Internet spaces can be used by anyone who purchases an Internet access card, which meant that many Cubans leapfrogged directly to mobile Internet access in favor of using fixed computers. But even with a price cut from US $5 in 2013 to US $2 in 2015, the cost of one hour of surfing makes up ten percent of the average monthly salary (Nelson 2016: 17).

The deficient market encourages purchases of Internet access cards on the informal market (Biddle 2013: 6), as well as the use of illegal apps that allow for several devices to share connections (Fenton 2016). Shops that sell Internet content through USB memory sticks and the creation of apps that work offline are other popular ways of circumventing the limited connectivity (Fenton 2016). Despite increased access, only around 5% percent of Cuban households can connect to the Internet in their homes, since applications are rarely accepted (International Telecommunications Union 2015).

In contrast to technologically developed authoritarian states such as China, Cuba denies Internet access where it is potentially subversive rather than through a massive firewall (Kalathil & Boas 2003: 44). Only a selection of dissident websites is blocked for the general public (Biddle 2013: 1). Laws are strict,

nonetheless: Decree-Law 209 outlaws Internet use ”in violation of Cuban society's moral principles” as well as e-mails which ”jeopardize the national security”. This includes both political content and a total ban on pornography (OpenNet 2007). Independent bloggers and online writers who do not respect these laws are not only blocked; their writers are subjected to surveillance, intimidation, and occasional detentions (Committee to Protect Journalists 2016: 8). Students from Havana's University of Computer Sciences have reportedly been designated the task to monitor potentially subversive Internet users (Franceschi-Bicchierai 2014), and authorities have replaced long imprisonments with arbitrary arrests as a strategy of intimidation (Jennische 2013). In fact, arrests on political grounds have increased every year since 2010, from 2,074 detentions to 8,616 in 2016. By the end of November 2016, the political police had already arrested as many as 9,484 persons (Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional 2016).

In the context of the Cuban Internet, research has either put focus on policies (see Kalathil & Boas 2003, Baron & Hall 2015, Hoffman 2011), or online activism (see Biddle 2015, Parker 2014). While Cuban online dissidence creates invaluable communication with the outside world (Parker 2014: 131), it does not represent the Cuban masses and is of less importance for the domestic audience.

Recently, international news media have drawn attention to the ways that Cubans circumvent the limited access by sharing content offline or creating apps for bad-quality connections. In line with this, Williams and Ulvsand (2015) wrote their Bachelor's thesis on young Cubans' strategies to go online. Using in-depth interviews, they found that the Internet was too inaccessible to play a role in the lives of young Cubans. However, their study was conducted before the establishment of public WiFi hotspots, a fact that itself calls for a reevaluation of the Internet usage in Cuba. Second, their thesis lacks analysis of how the respondents' Internet habits relate to Cuba's Internet policy. By combining the policy perspective with the common netizen perspective, this thesis aims to capture the factors that are crucial for Cuba's future development in terms of Internet access.

In Cuba, Internet expansion is expected by many to foster democratization, even if such tendencies have not yet been manifested. While theories relating to “Internet Freedom” predict that the Internet will enlighten the masses about injustices and offer them opportunities for resistance, they do not explain how this is possible on a heavily regulated Internet. In line with the younger generation's political disillusionment and the Chinese and Russian experiences of netizen conformation to the regimes' tight grip over the Internet, this study finds that Cuban netizens are only concerned about Internet regulations insofar as they affect their personal gratifications of going online. Furthermore, novice Cuban Internet users, who have leapfrogged directly to cellular Internet access and highly personalized social media on the Web 2.0, are even less likely to be gratified by online activities that align with the idealistic views of the “Internet Freedom”. In the worst case scenario, the Cuban Internet regulations encourage online activities that distract users from domestic political matters.

4. Theoretical Framework

This thesis uses Ronald Deibert and Rafal Rohozinski's (2010) study to specify Internet regulations, and Anders Hektor's (2001) framework to clarify how Internet users (netizens) perceive them.

Deibert and Rohozinski outline the complexity of Internet regulations, categorizing them into generations. The first generation of regulations aims at denying netizens' Internet use. According to Grojec's master's thesis (2013: 17), first-generation regulations were widely employed by authoritarian regimes before the rise of social media. The second- and -third-generation regulations, however, control and competing, are characterized by more widespread Internet use and more sophisticated regulations. The specifics of the Internet regulations, along with the definitions of additional writers, are explained in the section below.

Important to note, however, is that this study serves a different purpose than that of Deibert and Rohozinski. While these researchers tested and mapped out the existence or non-existence of regulations in a wide range of countries, I argue that more attention should be directed to the particular regulations that enter the consciousness of netizens and their effect on Internet use. For this reason, I have excluded some technical aspects of Deibert and Rohozinki's categorizations in favor of other authors that emphasize the users' perspective.

In addition, this paper loosely employs Hektor's dissertation on Internet use in everyday life. It postulates that Internet users relate to their environment and ICT-setting, which influences their online activity. These activities, in turn, produce individual experiences that reflect back into the environment (Hektor 2001: 96).

Hektor's framework requires the kind of exploratory, ethnographic field studies that I have conducted, though the original framework is concerned with the factors that influence information-seeking in households. I have adjusted the framework to better contribute to the understanding of how Internet regulations affect the Internet activities of netizens. In the operationalization section of this chapter, I explain in greater detail how the framework has been altered in accordance with the purpose of this thesis.

4.1 Internet Regulations: Denial, Control, and Competing

First-generation Internet regulations aim at denying users Internet access by blocking access to servers, domains, keywords, and IP addresses. This is primarily carried-out through specialized software or manual instructions to routers and can also be complemented with real-life policing at cybercafés (Deibert & Rohozinski 2010: 22). Given their unambiguous constraining capacity, these mechanisms are fully effective even if the individual user is not aware of their existence (Lessig 2006: 344). They make it difficult for citizens to access media concerning politics and prevents them from associating with certain political groups (Best & Wade 2007: 407).

For the purpose of this thesis, I have also added Lessig's categories "architecture" and "markets" to the first-generation regulations, referring to all physical denial of Internet access. Architecture denies Internet usage through technical means (hardware or software), such as dial-up speed, while the most obvious form of market-based denial would be its pricing. Slow or costly Internet can result in citizens being less able to exercise their civil and political rights online (Best & Wade 2007: 408).

Second-generation regulations go beyond straightforward denial to "control," aiming at making regulations subtle by forming the legal and normative environment (Deibert & Rohozinski 2010: 18). Even if an authoritarian government usually cannot enforce laws in full, occasional examples can be made of dissenters to intimidate and cause self-censorship among the masses (Best & Wade 2007: 408). Furthermore, the expressive aspects of laws can create voluntary obedience regardless of the sanctions (Cooter 1999: 608). Laws are more efficient when people make them a subjective part of who they are, creating societal norms that constrain them even before they act (Lessig 2006: 344). In Lessig's words (2006: 344), "a law that secretly punishes people for offenses they do not know exist would not be effective in regulating the behavior it punishes". Hence, laws help to constrain Internet use through the punishment that they threaten to impose (Lessig 2006: 124), while norms discourage Internet use through the community stigma that follows (Best & Wade 2007: 405). Together, they shape the way that Internet users behave.

According to Evgeny Morozov (2011: 47), the continuously used metaphor of China's Great Firewall (an excellent example of a first generation regulation), limits our understanding of China's evolving Internet policies. China has since developed a third-generation regulation system—an extensive propaganda apparatus—that makes censorship less relevant. Third-generation regulations are about strengthening authoritarian capabilities by competing in informational space with potential opponents. In the context of rather well-established Internet connectivity, regimes can establish local alternatives to global Internet services, surveil and co-opt competitors, and increase their overall online presence as an attempt to dominate the public sphere (Deibert & Rohozinski 2010: 27). The Internet, that has the advantage of being perceived as less biased than other media outlets, gives authoritarian regimes the opportunity to boost their discursive power online (Rød & Weidmann 2015).

4.2 Operationalization

The theoretical framework has been operationalized in correspondence to the research questions. Below is a description of how the theoretical framework has been applied to the analysis of the thesis.

- How do Cuban Internet users in urban Havana perceive the government's Internet regulations?

This question seeks to understand Cuban netizens' awareness of the constraints that are imposed on their Internet usage. In this case, "perceiving" refers to both awareness (or unawareness) and opinions. The following categorizations define types of Internet regulations:

Denial (first generation regulations): censorship, both as perceived by interviewees and established by the researcher; real-life policing at public Internet spaces; slow and/or costly Internet access.

Control (second generation regulations): the legal framework as perceived by users and researcher;[1] the social norms as perceived by users and researcher.

Contesting (third generation regulations): the perception of local Internet alternatives, such as regime presence and propaganda; consumption of state-run online services; communication with authorities online, and perception of warrantless surveillance, all according to users' and researcher's perception.

This question is partly inductive; therefore, factors that are identified in the employed works, but that are important for the Cuban context, have been included in the findings.

- How do Internet regulations affect their online activities?

First of all, this question seeks to provide information about how Cuban citizens use the Internet. The websites and applications that netizens visit and use is referred to as Internet usage, or online activities. I have identified three categories of activities: private communication, information-seeking, and entertainment. While other types of Internet use exist, these are extracted from the previous literature on Internet use (see Chapter 2). Private communication includes using online means to make calls, send emails and text messages, as well as social media usage. Information-seeking is conducted for education or work related purposes or news consumption. Entertainment refers to the indulgement of music, films, and sports as part of leisure activities.

[1] While pornography is illegal in Cuba, this is beyond the scope of my study.

Furthermore, I assume that people's online activities are related to the constraints that are put on them. Therefore, this research question also seeks to understand how netizens' usage is influenced by Internet regulations. In order to specify the ways that Cubans perceive that Internet regulations affect their usage, I employ Hektor's (2001) concepts "environment" and "ICT-setting". Environment refers to the big picture: the authoritarian state with its illiberal Internet policies. Thus, all predispositions of going online and using the Internet, as experienced by Internet users, refers to the environment. The ICT-setting, on the other hand, is concerned with the specifics. All findings that deal the circumstances at the physical public Internet spaces are part of the ICT-setting.

I postulate that Internet regulations (forms of denial, control and competing) manifest themselves through the environment and/or the ICT-setting. The perception of the environment and ICT-setting affects the ways that Cuban netizens use the Internet. Important to note, however, is that this operationalization exclusively enables analysis of perceived influences and does not lay the ground for causal claims.

In the findings, I also present inductive insights about the environment and ICT-setting.

5. Methods of Study

This is a qualitative, ethnographic field study. The methods that were employed are interviews and participant observation. While the methods were conformed to capture the subjective perceptions of the Cuban Internet, some complementary quantitative data was gathered as well.

A combination of two ethnographic methods was used in order to strengthen the validity of the study. Interviews served to understand the common Internet users' perceptions, while participant observations provided first-hand information about the experience of using public Internet spaces. The methods complimented one another by compensating for the weaknesses associated with the other.

Firstly, interviews alone might not be adequate if the researcher is attempting to study something other than the interview situation itself (Becker & Geller 1957: 28). Therefore, the risk of language misinterpretations, sensitive topics, systematic distortions, and factual errors can be partly offset by adding participant observation (Becker & Geller 1957: 29-31). Furthermore, observations can make visible some taken-for-granted, everyday practices that participants do not even remember to mention during interviews (Clark, Holland, Katz & Peace 2009: 5). Observations alone, however, bear weak reliability because they force the researcher to fully rely on her own perception (Denscombe 2014: 205). Therefore, by comparing field notes and interview data, I could form a complete and reflexive understanding. Participant observations helped me to better prepare for interviews and observe what may not have been clearly explained in the interview situation, while interviews clarified what I should pay attention to during my observations. Insights gained from one method helped me to continuously reevaluate my strategies for the other.

5.1 Interviews

During September and October 2016, I conducted interviews with fifty Cuban Internet users. After an exploratory phase of participant observations, I decided that short, conversational interviews were the most suitable way to obtain data. Conversational interviews revolve around one particular activity of the studied population (Pelto 2016: 138), which, in this case, is Internet usage. Therefore, participants were interviewed at the public Internet spaces—the very places where the online activity takes place.

The interviews were formal in the sense that I specifically requested interviews from people that were present at the public Internet spaces. Furthermore, they were based on a questionnaire (Appendix III) that I had prepared beforehand (Spradley 1980: 124). Most questions were open-ended in order to capture citizens' perceptions without suggesting any desirable answers. For instance, I did not ask interviewees "do you think that the Internet is expensive?," but rather inquired about its accessibility in general. Since this study focuses on the Internet usage in Cubans' everyday life, I also did not prompt interviewees to think of the Internet as a political tool (Wheeler 2006: 3-4). To satisfy the quantitative part of the study, however, I also gathered some quantifiable information about interviewees' Internets habits, for instance the type of websites they visit.

Depending on the nature of the answers I received, I complemented the questions with follow-ups. The conversations with Internet users, which were approximately ten minutes long, allowed me to conduct between 1-3 interviews during each field visit without taking up too much of the respondents' time. Given that I usually interrupted respondents in the middle of their online activity to request an interview, I let them interrupt me during the interviews too. For instance, respondents would ask me personal questions or show me pictures of their children on Facebook.

Sometimes, interruptions were even useful for the ethnographic process. In line with the phenomenological tradition, observations of immediate human experiences added valuable inductive insights to the study (Jackson 1996: 2). This included discovering the plurality of ways that the public Internet appeared in the consciousness of its users, "regardless of how they are conceived and classified" (Jackson 1996: 7-10).

To recruit interviewees, I approached the individual in question and presented myself as a Swedish student investigating Internet use in Cuba (more about sampling strategies used can be found in the next section). After confirming that the person in question indeed was Cuban, I would request to ask some questions about their Internet use and take notes for the purpose of my thesis. If affirmative, I took a seat next to them and conducted the interview while scribbling down notes. Afterwards, respondents usually returned to their online devices. I would remain seated to make more extensive notes as quickly as possible. If something was unclear, I turned to the interviewees and asked them to clarify. Sometimes this led to the interviewees opening up even more. In these cases, interview situations extended to approximately twenty minutes in length.

While taking the names of respondents and audio-taping the interviews usually makes the data more credible, I chose not to. In Cuba, the Internet is a highly politicized topic, and I expected that anonymity would allow the respondents to speak more freely. Furthermore, my anonymity as a researcher without authorization from the Cuban state was just as important as theirs. Additionally, note-taking is usually regarded as less threatening than recording (DeWalt & DeWalt 2010: 164). In those cases that the data contained compromising content, the absence of names and recordings was a precautionary measure for both the participants and as myself (Pelto 2016: 118).

Another aggravating circumstance was that many Cubans use the WiFi hotspots in groups. Even if I only interviewed one person from each group or family, preferably at a distance, their company's presence still risked influencing their responses. While it is difficult to guarantee fully truthful answers, I have accounted for social desirability-bias, fear of the state, or peer pressure as much as possible.

Regardless, there were also great advantages to interviewing netizens in the very space where they go online. It increased the reliability of the answers as reflections about Internet issues were right at hand. Furthermore, in ethnographic research, there exists an idea that the researcher should focus on the domain of everyday, immediate practical activity. In order to capture all the complexities of my research questions, I talked to respondents in the specific place where Internet use and its regulations are realized and manifested (Escobar 2011: 150).

Considering that the interviews were conducted in Spanish, which is not my native language, in a country prior unfamiliar to me, there exists a risk of misinterpretations. I tried to minimize this risk by immersing myself with the Cuban context and analyzing the meaning of interviewee responses as thoroughly as possible. I would ask the respondents to repeat when necessary. The fact that I was not a Cuban native could even have made the interviews less intimidating for respondents, who might fear the domestic security apparatus.

Before commencing the interviews at the WiFi hotspots, I conducted three informant interviews (Pelto 2016: 90). This allowed me to discuss Internet regulations openly with Cuban residents. The informants updated me on the current state of connectivity issues and advised me on how to approach netizens. Since informant interviews only serve to provide necessary pieces of information (Pelto 2016: 90), I selected a diverse group of informants: Kristine Erlandsson Juárez (Deputy Head of Mission at the Swedish Embassy), Patrick Oppmann (CNN's correspondent in Cuba), and six members of the independent paper Hablemos Press.

5.2 Sampling

I conducted interviews at nine WiFi hotspots in urban Havana,[2] leaving out one that was mostly used by tourists (see Appendix I for the full list of locations). Sampling of interviewees was opportunistic, as I needed to choose from the people who were physically available (Pelto 2016: 148). However, I specifically searched for interviewees that fit the age and gender quota: twenty-five women and twenty-five men, eighteen to fifty years of age. I informally assessed whether they were over or under thirty before requesting an interview, and arrived at a sample where the median age was around twenty-nine for men and thirty-four for women. A couple of respondents ended up being a few years older than fifty, since I was unable to accurately assess their age before the interview (see Appendix V).

Even though my aim was not to compare the experiences of these different groups, I wanted to vary the respondents to get as truthful a picture as possible; especially because differences in attitudes are assumed to be big across generation groups in Cuba. I chose not to interview people older than fifty, however, because this group was most likely to turn down interviews in the beginning of my study, often with the excuse that they knew too little about the Internet. Furthermore, this age group was seemingly underrepresented in parks, and almost exclusively used the Internet for voice calls, an activity I did not want to disturb. Regardless, since people younger than fifty are more likely to adopt new technologies, they are more relevant interviewees.

I chose not to conduct any interviews at the navigation centers, where the stationary computers are available. First of all, navigation centers were heavily controlled by security guards and other staff, creating a personal security risk both for me and potential respondents. Second, the navigation centers

[2] I have defined "urban Havana" as the following four municipalities: Centro Habana, La Habana Vieja, Playa, Plaza de la Revolución

are just one part of the services available at ETECSA's points of sale, which made it difficult to identify Internet users among the other customers. While I risked leaving out a certain group of Internet users from my sample (for instance, the less privileged ones that do not own a smartphone), WiFi is seemingly a more popular way for Cubans to connect and is therefore automatically more relevant for my study.

As the qualitative part of this study often revolves around the characteristics of specific Internet spaces, I must stress that only spaces in urban Havana are discussed.

Further sampling issues are associated with the quantitative aspect of this study. As there is no obvious reason to suspect that the quantifiable questions differ across Cuba, I chose to generalize them to the entire country. Defining the population is uncertain, however, since it is hard to come by reliable numbers. The fact that WiFi hotspots were not introduced in Cuba until 2015 motivated me to use the latest figures available: ITU's estimation that 31% of Cubans used the Internet regularly in 2015 (International Telecommunications Union 2016). This would give a population size of about 3,538,798. I chose to equal Cuban "Internet users" with "users of public Internet spaces," even though about 5% of users do have access in their homes. I made this decision because the people I encountered that have Internet at home (four respondents) all told me that they had to use the WiFi hotspots anyway due to slow and time-limited home connections. In the findings, I interchangeably refer to the population as "Internet users" or "netizens".

The sample is probably biased towards WiFi users in comparison to navigation center users as the study does not include netizens who exclusively use navigation centers. Furthermore, I have only interviewed netizens of urban Havana. Given the high centralization of Cuban politics and ETECSA's monopoly on telecommunications in Cuba, however, it can be assumed that netizens in Havana and other parts of Cuba do not to differ in any systematic manner. Since many urban citizens travel across the city to go online, visitors to different geographical hotspots are probably not substantially different from each other either. I could not obtain a true random sample, however, so it is not certain that the respondents are completely unrelated to each other. It is also uncertain whether the fallouts, who declined to be interviewed, have anything in common that I was unable to capture.

The descriptive statistics have been calculated with a 95% confidence level. The most optimistic rules of thumb say that a sample of thirty interviewees is enough if the variance is small enough (Teorell & Svensson 2007: 132); however, the general level of accuracy for my sample (in a worst case-scenario were binary answers diverge at the 50/50 rate) is 13.86.

Given the rather small sample size, the rough estimation of population size, as well as possible biases in the sample, figures should be regarded as indicators. I chose not to break down results into sub-groups since I did not want to thwart the sample's representativeness further. In addition to being discussed the findings, statistics are presented in greater detail in Appendix II.

5.3 Participant Observation

During September and October 2016, I conducted participant observations at WiFi hotspots and navigation centers in urban Havana. I visited WiFi hotspots thirty times to do research and take field notes, although I used the public WiFi around twice every day for private purposes. I conducted ten participant observations at navigation centers and visited ETECSA's offices an additional eight times to buy Internet access cards.

Following the phenomenological approach, I sought to capture users' shared experiences by studying the very places of embodiment (Escobar 2011: 150). In the public Internet spaces, I assumed the role of an active participant, meaning that the researcher seeks to do what other people are doing in order to experience the object of study themselves (Spradley 1980: 60). Since I was observing a public space, I appeared to be like anyone else who normally participates in the setting. Hence, my presence did not constrain anyone from acting in their normal way (Denscombe 2014: 200). While the participant observations were not based on informed consent, they satisfy ethical guidelines by ensuring that researchers do not to harm those being observed and do not disclose their identities (Denscombe 2014: 201).

I began conducting participant observations at WiFi hotspots as part of interview planning (Pelto 2016: 167) and I continued making them as an integral part of the interviewing process (see Appendix III for participant observation guide). The purpose was for me as a researcher to share the experience of using Cuba's public Internet with the interviewees (Jackson 1996: 20). By participating in the activities that the respondents were describing, not only did I gain a fuller understanding of their accounts, I also created my own experience of using the Cuban Internet. In the navigation centers, my observations were less based on interviewees' accounts, but I could still observe my own offline and online experiences. I also had the opportunity to test how public computers were subjected to Internet regulations. As a complement to the theory-bound research that I was conducting, I made narrative redescriptions of my experiences to create deeper understanding of the ongoing activities (Jackson 1996: 39).

As much as ethnographic methods usually seek to make sense of a particular cultural scene (Spradley 1980: 5), my participant observations revolved around a new practice that was just forming among Cubans themselves. As a researcher from the outside, I was actually more familiar with the practice of using the Internet than the study population. Thus, I cannot be certain that the participant observations yielded the same experiences for me as they do for Cuban Internet users. Since I am used to higher-speed connections, WiFi at home, and mobile data outdoors, and because I am dependent on online banking and managing of other affairs online, it is possible that the constraints on Internet use were more obvious for me than for most other Cubans. The reverse effect, however, is also possible, as I did not experience the same hardships of going online outside the setting under observation (DeWalt & DeWalt 1998: 362). I have attempted to account for these potential fallacies by comparing my own experiences to those of respondents.

5.4 Coding and Analysis of the Material

To make sense of the qualitative part of the interviews and field notes, I started by "disassembling" the database (Yin 2011: 178). This process included assigning color-codes to pieces of data according to their topic. Next to the topic, I would note how it related to the environment and ICT-setting. This process helped me as researcher to overview what the data was saying. Afterwards, I "reassembled" the database (Yin 2011: 179) by grouping the codes according to the generation of Internet regulations that they belonged to. In this way, I created a guide to how my data related to the Internet regulations in accordance with the theoretical framework.

The quantitative part of the data was coded using spreadsheets. Since all questions were binary, I assigned ones and zeros to the different questions (e.g., uses social media: 1 = yes; 0 = no). Most of this coding was conducted during the field research, simultaneous to transcribing of interviews notes. Some additional coding was made subsequently.

Interview notes differed in length since interviewees' answers varied in their elaborateness. For this reason, some interviews were more extensively analyzed in the qualitative sense than others. Some people are quoted several times; others are not referred to at all. I want to stress, however, that all interviews were important pieces to this study and that all interviews were necessary in order to obtain the quantitative figures that I am presenting.

5.5 Generalization

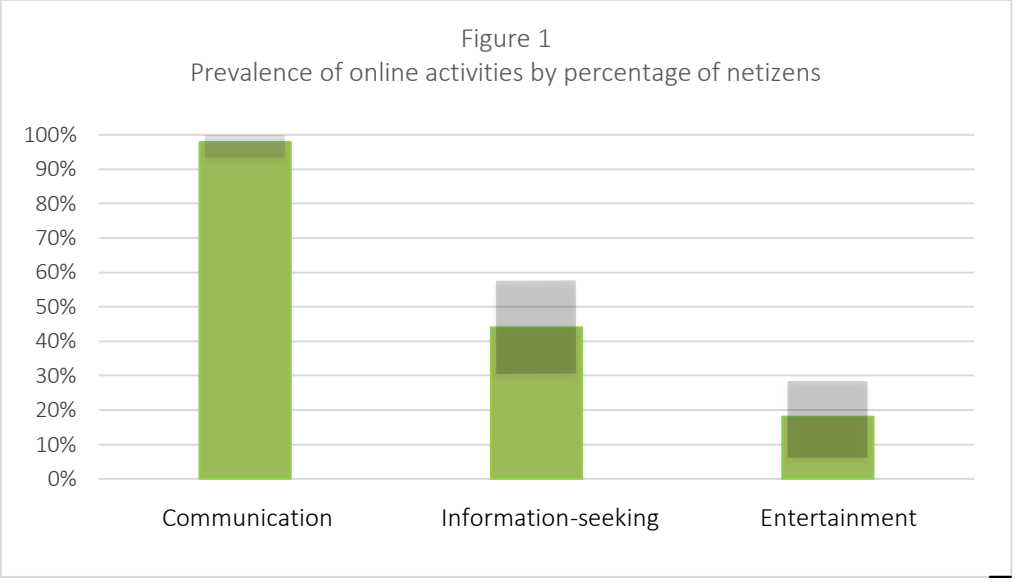
This thesis represents a case of popular Internet expansion in authoritarian states. Even if Cuba's way of expanding the Internet has its specific characteristics that cannot be transferred to other countries, this study adds to existing literature by emphasizing the user-perspective of the Internet in authoritarian states.

Above all, however, I argue that there is a value in understanding how novice netizens experience increased Internet access. These insights can be used in future analyses of technical opening, regardless of country characteristics.

6. Findings

"The Internet is all we talk about here," a Cuban lady told me during the last week of my field study. By that time, I had already picked that up. From young people to the older generations, everyone seemed to be interested in and trying to use the Internet. I once overheard a young boy talking in place of his grandmother, who did not seem confident enough to hold the smartphone in her own hands. "Grandma loves you," the young boy said into the screen and made a kissing gesture. In fact, the Internet was all I could talk about myself. Not only did the hardships of getting online occupy my thoughts—the Internet had an actual, physical presence in Cuban everyday life. "In Cuba, you do not go *on* the Internet; you go *to* the Internet," I heard someone say.

Despite many constraints that are put on the Internet use, Cubans are excited to finally have regular communication with exiled family and friends. For many, the general life quality has improved since they were able to access the outside world. Other opportunities with using the Internet are comparatively unexplored in Cuba, although there exists a popular desire to try them. Figures 1 and 2 outline how many Cuban netizens use the Internet for which online activities.



Percentage of netizens that use the Internet for (private, long-distance) communication, information-seeking and/or entertainment, including sports. The transparent bars represent the uncertainty of the corresponding percentage point.

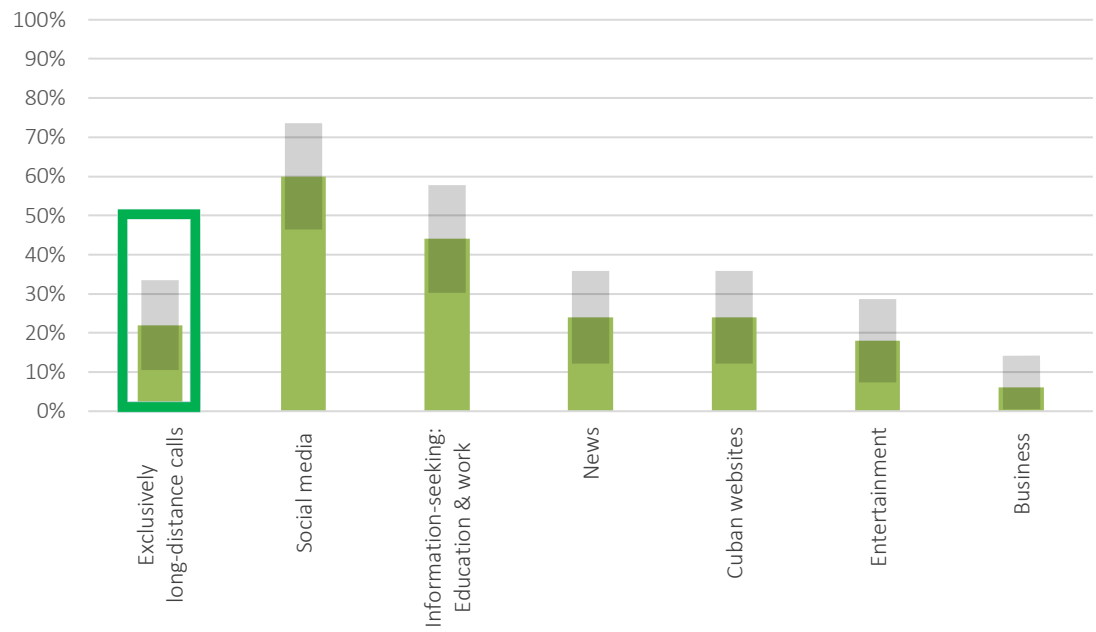
A study on people's reasons for going online shows that, on average, the Internet is used more for information-seeking (96%) and entertainment (86%), than private communication (73%).[3] Netizens of the two countries included with low popular Internet penetration rates, however, India and Nigeria, put private communication (94%; 89%) higher.

[3] Figures from Statista, July 2014. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/408683/reasons-for-going-online-worldwide/>

Similarly, this thesis paper finds that Cuban netizens, whose Internet access is very limited, prioritize private communication above everything else. Some Cubans exclusively use the Internet to make long-distance voice calls, while other Internet users complement their online socializing with social media activities.

In the context of limited access, information-seeking and entertainment are significantly less common uses of the Internet in Cuba than the global average. Cuban netizens who look up information online (44%) try to improve in their job or studies (or find information out of personal interest, which I have included in this category), while only 24% also visit news sites. Out of the 24% who visit Cuban websites, most read domestic news. Using the Internet for entertainment (18%) means keeping up with sports and other events, like following celebrities, and enjoying music and films. In my sample, the only netizens who do business online are those who rent out housing to international tourists (6%).

Figure 2
Prevalence of online activities by percentage of netizens



Percentage of netizens that use the Internet exclusively for long-distance calls, social media, information-seeking (education or work related), news reading (domestic or foreign), visiting domestic websites, or entertainment (including sports). The dark green square signals that long-distance calls exclude all other categories. The transparent bars represent the uncertainty of the corresponding percentage point.

In this chapter, I present the findings of my field research in accordance to three generations of Internet regulations: denial, control, and competing. The subheadings correspond to the regulations that were presented in the operationalization.

6.1 Denial

6.1.1 Architecture and markets

Among Cuban Internet users, one issue supersedes any other: access. This ability to go online depends on the physical burdens surrounding Internet use; its architecture and markets. In Cuba, the two are almost inseparable, as ETECSA's monopoly on telecommunications administers both technology and retail.

For starters, there is the process of even obtaining access. The access cards, called "Nauta," can only be purchased in ETECSA's points of sale. Scratch cards with disposable logins permit one hour of surfing at the costs of 2 CUC,[4] or five hours for 10 CUC.[5] Holders of a permanent e-mail account may recharge their card with up to 50 CUC, but surf online at the same hourly rate.

Long lines are the norm at these ETECSA buildings. Queues often curl around the block, and persons are only allowed entry on a "one in, one out" basis. Despite the long wait, several interviewees have experienced ETECSA occasionally running out of cards, or only selling the less affordable, five hour cards. This is either a deliberate form of denial, or a market failure resulting from the large number of access cards that circulate the unofficial market. As a thirty-five-year-old male interviewee told me:

"We have to queue for hours to buy a 2 CUC card… But we have jobs we need to be at, there is no time for that, so we end up buying a card for 3 CUC on the street instead."

On my first day in Havana, I queued for two hours before being attended by a desk officer. I walked out of ETECSA with five hours of Internet access and a premature frustration with the inefficiency of Cuban everyday life. I found that the market constrains the Internet user not only through its high prices but also by the inadequate distribution that demands both time and energy from consumers. Having in mind Porter and Donthu's (2006) finding that individuals who perceive the Internet as expensive and inaccessible are less willing to use it, Cuba enforces an efficient strategy of denial.

The next step for possessors of Nauta cards is to locate a place to use them. One option is to use the card right away at the public computers that are available at the ETECSA offices. ETECSA's "navigation centers" (derived from "navigating" the Internet) consist of 2-12 personal computers that can be used for the amount of time that the access card allows. Two more navigation centers are located in Havana's computer-literacy establishments known as "Youth Computing Clubs". Seemingly more popular among the Havana population, however, is visiting one of the city's WiFi hotspots. At the time of writing, thirty-four hotspots are available throughout the greater Havana area. Of those thirty-four, ten are located in the central parts of the city—some in selected city parks, others just on

[4] According to Cuba's dual monetary system, the convertible peso (CUC), pegged to the USD, is used for most consumer goods. Nevertheless, Cuban wages are paid in the national currency (CUP) that is worth around 25 times less.
[5] On December 19, 2016, when this study had been conducted, the hourly rate was reduced to 1.5 CUC. The findings in this paper relate to the previous rate of 2 CUC.

street corners. Both navigation centers and WiFi hotspots can be as far as five kilometers apart even in Havana's most central parts, so the low density of public Internet centers subjects the user to further denial of access. A couple of interviewees told me that they have to travel by bus to go online.

Once at the Internet location, the user faces the constraints of architecture: poor-quality connections. Urban Havana's 600,000+ inhabitants (figures from 2004), as well as tourists starving for Internet, share ten WiFi hotspots that have a capacity of 50-100 connected devices each. Judging from the crowded parks, however, popular demand greatly exceeds this capacity. While the downloading speed for one device is one megabit per second (satisfactory for emailing but too slow for video streaming), the congested networks rarely even allowed my Facebook feed to load. Still, the speed at WiFi hotspots was better than in navigation centers. My private usage of the navigation centers only lasted as long as my laptop was out of function—it quickly became apparent that the only reason to use a public computer would be the lack of a private device to bring to a hotspot. Using my own laptop in a park with pretty bad speed was still better than queuing for at least one hour to use a public computer where some websites would not load at all. Not to mention, ETECSA suffers regular interruptions that may last for days.[6] A deal that was on signed between Cuba and Google in December 2016, however, allows the company to install its servers in Cuba, which would allegedly allow faster access to websites like Gmail and YouTube, while content hosted by other providers would remain unaffected.[7]

Out of the fifty conversations that I had with Internet users at WiFi hotspots, 64% (with error margins, 55-81%) of Cuban netizens complained about the pricing. Prices of browsing the World Wide Web were reduced from 4.5 CUC to 2 CUC an hour in 2015 (and 1.5 CUC in December 2016). While some respondents regarded 2 CUC as comparatively good, Internet access is still too expensive for the vast majority of Cubans. Many users can go online only because they have family members that reload their Nauta accounts from abroad.

More strikingly, 90% (82-98%) mentioned the low-quality connections as problematic. At times, the public WiFi networks are so congested that the login page does not load at all. It can take up to ten minutes to go online—if it works at all. Many users leave the hotspots without having accomplished what they intended.

Speed and pricing issues are interrelated for Cuban Internet users. The high hourly rate multiplies during the time it takes for any page or application to load, and the ticking minutes create stress and distract the user from their online project. Most netizens do not have the time to use the Internet as

[6] Mata, Z. (2016, December 9). Cuba's Phone Company, the Economy of Inefficiency. Retrieved from: http://translatingcuba.com/cubas-phone-company-the-monopoly-of-inefficiency-14ymedio-zunilda-mata/#more-50712

[7] Weissenstein, M. (2016, December 13). Google, Cuba sign allowing faster access to company's data. Retrieved from: https://apnews.com/f707251b6d584d059256859917551ac8?utm_campaign=SocialFlow&utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=AP

much as they want—a product of slow speed and high hourly rates that make users prioritize only the most important, which is to stay in touch with their nearest and dearest.

The most common usage of the Internet is contacting family and friends that live abroad.[8] I personally restricted Internet usage almost exclusively to private communication during my time with ETECSA's public network, since I did not want to waste my limited time on activities that I perceived as less relevant. According to my sample, 98% (94-100%) of Cuban netizens use the Internet for private, long-distance communication (Figure 1). The hourly rate of Internet access costs less than phone calls and, unlike earlier communication tools, enables video calls. Except calling, they typically use social media to send messages or interact with exiled family members through photographs. Since social media usually is nothing more than an extension of private communication, it does not resemble Diamond's (2010) concept "liberation technologies."

Out of the respondents, 22% (10-33%) do not use the Internet for anything other than international calls (Figure 2). Most are middle-aged women who use IMO, an application for video calls that works in spite of low-quality connections. Apps that need to be downloaded from Apple's or Google's app stores, like Skype, are still blocked because of the embargo that does not allow U.S. companies to generate business in Cuba. Except for opening IMO on their smartphones, this group never comes across the World Wide Web and its constraints.

Furthermore, several respondents claimed that Cubans generally call their relatives abroad to ask them for monetary help. Given the shared problem of limited access, they rarely use the Internet to contact people within the country. The only respondent that did not have relatives abroad uses the Internet for information-seeking purposes.

Even if Havana's Internet users made it clear that private communication was their priority, its limitations still impact their daily lives. A twenty-two-year-old student told me that she felt sorry seeing how people struggle to get in touch with their closest family. Another interviewee, a thirty-six-year-old man, called it a "sacrifice" and an "epidemiology" among the people. He also said:

"It's a societal problem. Many have girlfriends and boyfriends abroad, and they end up breaking up after some time because they can't communicate. It's too expensive."

Furthermore, the majority of respondents expressed the desire to use the Internet for other purposes than communication. Were they not subjected to denial through markets and architecture, most would use the Internet for information-seeking, usually related to their studies or work. While some netizens already do, they stress that their access to information is very limited because of the low connectivity. A forty-year-old woman who teaches medicine at the University of Havana said:

[8] According to Fusion's survey on Cubans living in Cuba from 2015, 33% of Cubans have family abroad. 34% of Cubans receive money from family or friends abroad.

"Access to information has been so bad. During the special period,[9] we didn't even have books. Now we have the opportunity to acquaint ourselves with research from all over the world, but the bad access still limits me."

Other unfulfilled information-seeking activities relate to personal interests such as finding recipes or learning foreign languages. A smaller group of netizens would prefer to enjoy online entertainment, for instance downloading films and music.

Some respondents also mentioned the business potentials that the Internet brings in other countries. Out of my interviewees, three men who rented out apartments to tourists used the Internet for business purposes (Figure 2). One of them visited the WiFi hotspots to check his AirBnB account (a homestay network that recently expanded its services to Cuba). Potential guests could see his low response rate, which without the context of limited Internet access, made him a less attractive lessor. Some interviewees that were aspiring musicians and artists also expressed the wish to promote their work online, but were unable given sporadic access and a limited domestic audience. Just like scholars on modern-day Internet use argue, the Internet serves personal advancements rather than ideological purposes.

A final group of respondents said that they would like to use the Internet more, but were still unaware of the possibilities that the World Wide Web offers. Some pointed out that, in the rest of the world, the Internet could be used in all aspects of life (shopping, travelling, banking…), which they believed was far away from the Cuban reality. In fact, throughout my field research, WiFi users highlighted their lack of knowledge about how the Internet works. This is likely to be a persistent issue as long as access denial is so substantial. Certainly, it does not encourage any resistance to the regime.

Cuban Internet users are denied Internet access through price constraints (markets) and speed constraints (architecture). Together, they create time constraints. The environment, characterized by ETECSA's monopoly that keeps prices high and the network quality unsatisfactory, limits not only users' time online, but also the type of websites they try to open and for what they can use the Internet. The ICT-setting also denies them access: the public Internet spaces are inaccessible due to their low density and long queues, while websites are inaccessible because of slow speed caused by breached capacity. Just like the statistics from the developing countries India and Nigeria suggest, personal interaction is the primary motive for using the Internet in the context of limited access, even though information-seeking is a close second. Many Cubans netizens, who are forced to limit their usage substantially, are unable to move down the scale of priorities.

Hence, the market and architecture's denial operates through the environment and the ICT-setting. It limits users' time online and makes them choose private, long-distance communication in favor of other online activities.

[9] "The special period in times of peace" was a euphemism for the Cuban economic crisis that began after dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989.

While "architecture" originally refers to technical ways of denying access, Cubans have to struggle with the offline, tangible architecture as well. This type of architecture is defined by the general discomfort of the public Internet spaces. In fact, "discomfort" was the major theme of the interviews that I conducted—there was an absolute consensus that the public Internet spaces were "incómodo," which translates to "uncomfortable" or "inconvenient". "Cubans are always searching for a new, better place to use the Internet," a thirty-one-year-old interviewee told me. Getting online using Cuba's current Internet system is a part of their everyday-struggle.

The public Internet spaces are unsatisfactory in many ways. First of all, the navigation centers only permit surfing the web, since the set of software installed to each computer, other than the browsers, does not function.[10] I was ignored by the staff when I asked why the computer would not detect my USB-stick, and I was never able to save a file in "My Documents".

WiFi hotspots, on the other hand, offer the benefit of using one's personal online device. Since modern-day Internet use more or less requires a smartphone with personalized applications, navigation centers have become obsolete. The WiFi hotspots, however, are often nothing more than decayed city parks with an antenna. They make the user dependent on uncontrollable variables, such as weather and fellow visitors. Seating is scarce, especially during the day when the sun is unbearable. Internet users that do not find a bench spot in the shade have to lean against a tree or sit down at the sidewalk while going online. When I sat close to the grass, ants would crawl up my legs. Many benches are uncomfortable and falling apart. Some hotspots are set up on street corners and do not provide seating at all. Close to many of the hotspots, traffic is disturbingly loud, and I was usually approached by resellers of access cards once or twice each time I was surfing. Thefts discourage users from coming at night.

Still, the respondents unanimously consider the WiFi hotspots to be more accessible than the navigation centers in ETECSA's offices. "I like that they are open," a twenty-year-old man told me. "People pass by, I can come here with my friends."

Interviewees that go online for work or education related purposes, however, complained about not being able to focus in the crowded spaces. Furthermore, the parks only encourage brief surfing. "You can't do business here in the WiFi parks at sunrise," a thirty-eight-year-old lesser of tourist housing told me. "I can't sit here for four hours straight. I would have been much more productive if I could use the Internet at home". Again, we can see that many users relate to the regulations in terms of their own, personal advancement—not political injustices.

Consequently, I add an additional perspective to the notion of denial through "architecture". I argue that the ICT-setting, characterized by substandard public Internet spaces, subjects users to a discomfort that in itself functions as a form of denial. In sum, the ICT-setting denies Internet usage through architecture, including Internet speed and discomfort, and the environment characterized by a defective market with high prices.

[10] Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Calculator, Windows Media Player, Notepad, Windows Excel, Word, PowerPoint, Adobe, WinRAR, Character Map

The interviewees, however, do not see architecture and market-related issues in terms of access denial. Instead, they typically think about it as part of Cuba's crooked path towards connectivity, blaming regime incompetence, the U.S. embargo, or the country's slow development in general. Hence, Cubans are generally dissatisfied with the Internet, but for other reasons than foreign society would assume.

6.1.2 Censorship

Censorship in Cuba is neither substantial nor sophisticated. A group of dissident online blogs and magazines were unreachable during the time I resided there,[11] although I could access censored articles and blog posts by searching on Googling for versions that had been posted in international media. Two of my informants (Kristine Erlandsson Juárez, the Swedish Embassy, and Patrick Oppmann, CNN) described blocking as sporadic and poorly maintained. In September 2016, ETECSA started to filter out keywords like "human rights" and "democracy" from their text messaging service,[12] though I was able to successfully use these words in emails and on Google using both on my smartphone and public computers. No signs of filtered Google results were visible to me. The U.S. embargo actually put a bigger constraint on my Internet use, as it denied many applications that I was accustomed to using.

Likewise, many Internet users that I spoke with reported that either the U.S. embargo or the slow speed restricted them from accessing web pages more than censorship did. In addition, these obstacles made censorship difficult to detect. Blocked web pages often look like technical errors, and sometimes pages simply do not load. One respondent whom I discussed censorship with, said: "It's hard to know… sometimes the Internet is just slow."

Only a couple of respondents felt constrained by the censorship on the Cuban Internet. A twenty-eight-year-old man said: "There is a girl in Miami who is a contra-revolutionary. Her website is always blocked, but even if it's crap, I want to be able to read it."

A similar idea was presented by a forty-four-year-old female journalist, working at a cultural institution: "The [blocked websites such as Diario de Cuba] interest me, so even if I don't agree with everything that they say, I like diversity and consulting different sources." When asked why the websites were blocked, she said:

"It's the ideology, they [the regime] think that it is the best way of protecting the social environment. I don't agree, even if the websites would be bad, I don't like the idea of censorship. There has to be some circulation of ideas. In Cuba, everything is critical—art, poetry, even reggaeton [a music genre]… And it doesn't make society better to censor it."

[11] 14yMedio, CubaNet, Diario de Cuba, Martí Noticias

[12] Frank, M. (2016, September 6). Cuba government filtering mobile text messages, dissidents say. Retrieved from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-censorship-idUSKCN11B265>

Another group of respondents discussed censorship in past-tense. They regard the opening of WiFi hotspots as the end of the era of limited freedom of information. A fifty-one-year-old woman said:

"During a long time, we were very isolated. We did not have access to anything from the rest of the world. But now that there is more tourism, and people from other countries are coming here, and we have Internet... I think we will know more about what is going on."

Similarly, a twenty-nine-year-old man said: "Now, they have opened the door—it [censorship] just didn't work anymore. So it is getting more open, slowly but steadily."

The largest part of netizens, however, do not feel constrained by censorship at all. Even if many know that technically, censorship denies them access, they claimed not to be interested in using censored websites. This tendency resembles Morozov's (2011) idea that Internet censorship is unnecessary if users' online gratifications are unrelated to politics.

Instead of searching the Internet for domestic issues, Cubans want to access information from abroad—whether it is for private, academic, or work related purposes. Since the recent opening of foreign information is so significant to them, domestic censorship is of minor relevance in comparison. Two respondents also said that it is easy enough to find different sources of information as substitution in case something would happen to be censored.

The Cuban environment of limited press freedom and freedom of information has not been fully transferred to the online sphere. First of all, Cuban netizens are generally uninterested in censored content and, related to this, they understand Internet as the opposite of the closed environment that characterizes the Castro regime. To them, the Internet equals free and objective information. In this light, ETECSA has been able to block websites without people noticing or caring. The ICT-setting, with its slow speed, makes it more difficult for users to detect censorship, since blocked websites are diffused with bad connections. Even if Lessig (2006: 344) points out that censorship is fully effective regardless of users' awareness, it does not substantially affect the online activities of most netizens. This study suggest that censorship does not make a big difference to constrained, and possibly uninterested, Internet users.

6.1.3 Policing

The occurrence of policing at Havana's public Internet spaces is equivocal. Police officers regularly patrol WiFi hotspots, and security guards (SEPCOM) are present in the navigation centers, although I never saw them interfering with anyone's Internet usage; not even when I was intentionally searching for anti-regime content.

Furthermore, visitors to WiFi hotspots typically feel safe having police officers around, since there had been cases of robberies of smartphones and access cards when the spots were just launched. During one interview I conducted in a park in the neighborhood Vedado, I spotted a police officer leaning over the bench where a young man was using his smartphone. The officer seemed to be monitoring the young man's phone very carefully. I asked my interviewee what was going on, but she

just responded: "I don't know… Maybe he is curious." Since I am not familiar with the circumstances of this particular situation, it does not make up strong enough proof of policing.

Though uncommon, there have been arrests in the public Internet spaces. Representatives of the independent magazine Hablemos Press showed me a video of an arrest of a group of men who were using Connectify, an application that allows the user to share their WiFi connection with other devices. Furthermore, police officers are constantly on the lookout for black market vendors of access cards. Other than this, I did not hear of any detentions based on specific Internet activities.

Thus, Cuba's security apparatus does not seem to actively participate in denial of the Internet use. Policing is not denying citizens Internet use through the environment nor the ICT-setting. In contrast, the presence of police officers even encourages some to use the WiFi hotspots. In the next section on control, however, policing will be discussed in terms of the normative boundaries it puts on a user.

6.2 Control

6.2.1 Legal framework

Few netizens express concern about Cuba's legal framework on Internet use. Laws stating that the Internet must be subjected to the "goals of the revolution" do not explicitly explain what is in and what is out of the reach of this concept. Additionally, the legal framework does not manifest itself at all through the ICT-setting. On the contrary, it is very covert. The Internet user is not exposed to any rules when buying the Nauta cards, using the navigation centers, or logging in to ETECSA's public network.

Still, Internet users have developed their own understanding of what the legal framework means. The general conclusion is that they are free to use the Internet according to their needs: "I'm not from the ISIS, I'm not an anti-revolutionary, so I don't care," a twenty-four-year-old man said.

None of the respondents admitted that they feared sanctions. This conversation with a twenty-eight-year-old man is representative of how Cuban netizens relate to the legal framework:

> Respondent: "We are afraid to write something political because it's prohibited."
>
> Me: "So are you afraid?"
>
> Respondent: "Me personally, no. I don't do anything wrong. Everything I do is within the frames of what is allowed. And I'm not interested in pornography or anything like that."

Thus, the notion of sanctions does not constrain Internet use, at least not at a conscious level. The authorities' increased detentions might intimidate other dissidents, but still not be significant to the general public. Strict laws are less meaningful if people do not feel restricted by them; even if the environment is characterized by laws against "anti-revolutionary" information and expression, it has not penetrated the knowledge of Cuban netizens. In the next section on norms, however, I present the possibility that Cuban netizens are restricted by the laws on a covert, psychological level.

6.2.2 Norms

Even though netizens express disinterest in the Cuban laws, their norms generally align with the legal framework.

A considerable group of respondents were defensive about using the Internet for any so-called "bad" purposes. A twenty-six-year-old woman said:

"Well, I heard you can use it for bad things… I don't know, like pornography, or political things. I don't want to do that." This perception is representative among all groups of respondents, regardless of age and gender.

Similarly, another woman, fifty years of age, said: "But I don't like dirty things". I asked her: "What are those?" She replied, "I don't know, this is only what people have told me; there is violence, and other immoral things online."

Additionally, a twenty-eight-year-old man showed more explicit support of the laws:

"There needs to be some kind of control over the Internet. I mean, people can't just go ahead and post sexual pictures of children, for example. All means of communications need to have their own norms, so I guess that the government has its reasons, and I'm fine with that."

Another distinguishing trend is the distrust that netizens display amongst themselves. Generally, respondents trust "official websites" (acknowledged, international sites) but not user-generated content. No one mentioned the inherent value of ordinary citizens being able to share information online, and only one interviewee appreciated that the Internet may facilitate political activism. On the contrary, some expressed that the Internet should be protected from misuse by ordinary people. In Cuban netizens' views, cyberspace is for individuals who use it according to the norms that are in place, not for politically active citizens.

Hence, there are tendencies of voluntary legal obedience among Cuban netizens. The legal framework is subjective to many users, who have made it a part of who they are. Their obedience, in turn, reinforces the normative environment of Internet use. With regards to these people, laws relating to the Internet are effective even if they do not explicitly consider themselves to be controlled by them.

Normative issues are of particularly high importance in Cuba, where all online activities must be conducted in public. Therefore, more than the normative environment, the ICT-setting puts normative boundaries on users. In the WiFi parks, users can always hear each other yelling into their phones, hoping to be heard on the other end of the call. Many families share one device to make video calls together.

An outnumbered group is not bothered by being surrounded by other people. This description by an eighteen-year-old student is typical:

"Look around you. It's like this in Cuba; we are used to it. Everyone focuses on their own thing and no one cares about what the other person is doing."

The other, larger group, however, feels restricted by the lacking privacy. "I want to talk about intimate things, but it's impossible here," a fifty-year-old woman, who only uses WiFi hotspots to make voice calls, told me. "I would prefer to have Internet at home, so I could use it the way I want."

Most respondents expressed an unease to make personal calls in front of strangers. A fifty-one-year-old visual artist said, "They don't want us to view porn or political content, and in public we are afraid that someone will see us and tell. It's a psychological pressure."

I myself carried out professional conversations relating to issues such as democracy at several occasions, an awkward task in a country organized around covert surveillance. It is difficult to find a spot that allows for undisturbed speaking, especially in the crammed WiFi hotspots. Being aware of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, I imagined that someone could be eavesdropping. I felt nervous when police officers patrolled the WiFi parks, even if my experience told me that they were not interested in me at all.

On the other hand, some perceived the WiFi hotspots as more secure than the institutional setting of the ETECSA offices. In the navigation centers, I experienced a social stigma reinforced by the constant line of people waiting and glaring, even if nothing would ever happen. Even though computers are shielded with plastic screens, it is still possible to glance at the neighbors' monitors. I refrained from opening any private pictures on social media, or Googling any issues that I considered private, as just one glance from another person would reveal details about my private life. Once, I could see a man using an online dating site, but usually people were writing messages on Facebook and Gmail. If I stood up and moved around the computers, a security guard would show me back to my spot. Whether they did this to protect other users' privacy or keep control over the setting is unclear. With time, however, I experienced the visits as less and less hostile. As for any other Cuban, the officialness and the queuing all became more natural—it was just the way it was. In any case, I was still avoiding the navigation centers.

The prevention of using Internet in private forms control both through the environment and the ICT-setting. The environment marked by interpersonal suspicion controls netizens' willingness to use the Internet for anti-revolutionary purposes, but the most substantial control is the constraint that the ICT-setting puts on voice calls. The majority of users are uncomfortable talking while other people, or even ETECSA staff or police officers, can hear them, and avoid certain topics that they find too private.

6.3 Competing

6.3.1 Local Internet alternatives

The opening of public Internet spaces has undermined Cuba's previous attempts to preserve browsing within a domestic sphere. For Cuban netizens, using the World Wide Web equals accessing the rest of the world. Information-seeking is preferably conducted on foreign webpages—since the local language is Spanish, Cubans can access infinite sources of information in their mother tongue. The interest in Cuban webpages, on the other hand, is remarkably low. Cuban netizens typically consider domestic websites to be uninteresting, substandard, and poorly maintained. Furthermore, they consider Cuban news sites to be propagandist:

"I'm already familiar with Cuban news and they never say anything new," said a twenty-eight-year-old man.

A thirty-six-year-old man who works in the tourist industry asked me, "What good does it [Cuban news] provide you with? What do they talk about… politics? You have to take a look at the type of information they transmit. It's only about revolutionary politics. No one is interested, they don't contribute with anything. They only talk about the same people and the same things".

The global Internet, on the other hand, enables Cubans to fact check against the propaganda that they are subjected to through domestic media. Respondents who seek information for work, education, or news reading, say that the Internet allows them to read objective information that is not available in Cuba. A twenty-eight-year-old man, who works at the National Software Company, said:

"I don't want to read the Cuban version of information. On the Internet, you can find different points of view, that's why I always look for something else."

Still, the global Internet does not inspire Cuban users to emancipation. Many are altogether tired of Cuba. Just like Morozov (2011) described that Western entertainment allowed media consumers to escape the closed, communist reality, so does the Internet open the doors for Cuban Internet users. A female interviewee said: "We do not travel, so the Internet us a substitute for us, it keeps us in touch with the rest of the world."

I was surprised when a law student said he uses Twitter to follow social movements. "In Cuba?," I asked—"No, in other Latin American countries. Cuba does not interest me," he responded.

As much as the World Wide Web is used as a source of objective information, it is not seen as part of the domestic political scene. "Yeah, the Internet might help people to know what it going on," a twenty-two-year-old student who had many friends that had already emigrated said, "and they will see that they have the same rights as other people, but that will only make them more eager to move to Miami and carry gold chains around their neck."

At this moment, there is not necessarily a link between information-seeking and engagement with domestic policy.

Only 24% (13-36%) of users visit any Cuban websites at all (Figure 2). When they do, however, it is usually for news. The most popular site is Cubadebate.cu, a news magazine that forms part of the Cuban Press Directory. Hardly any interviewees read the online version Granma, the official newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party. So far, Cuba's state-owned media has not adjusted to popular demand, as was the case in China (Lagerkvist 2006).

Despite low user interest, the Cuban state is all over cyberspace. It shows its presence through governmental webpages, Twitter accounts (Granma.cu even print their tweets in the online magazine), and the unpopular domestic portals that make up the national Intranet.[13] In December 2016, ETECSA reduced the hourly rates for the Intranet from 0.60 CUC to 0.25 CUC, in order to "facilitate access to websites and portals of cultural, information and research interest, with Cuban content."[14] At the 0.60 CUC hourly rate, however, none of the respondents used the Intranet, not even when I glanced at other people's computer screens at the navigation centers.

Using Cuban websites for other types of information-seeking, apart from reading the news, is very uncommon. Out of the respondents, only one visits Ecured.cu, the Cuban equivalent to Wikipedia, and another uses the health portal Infomed.cu. With exception from Infomed.cu, these websites have obvious propagandist overtones: Ecured.cu updates "today's quote" on their main page by exclusively using quotes from the revolutionary philosopher and national hero José Martí. Searching for ETECSA's points of sale in order to locate the closest one, Ecured tells me that "they are located in central places, close to the communities they serve, in order to facilitate access to the people,"[15] but provides no physical addresses. Cubadebate includes a permanent section called "Fidel's Reflections," and after Fidel Castro's death, these websites were shut down for some hours or days. When they were relaunched, their content centered around the deceased former President for the next few weeks.

Regardless, around half of Cuba's domestic websites that are listed on the government website Cubagov.cu are not operational at all—clicking on them simply leads to an error page. Even if there were some efforts to create domestic social networks, like Cubared.cu, using them does not make sense to Cubans who are not well-enough connected to communicate with other nationals. Additionally, propagandist websites do not impose themselves on the Internet user. Since the usage of smartphones usually limits the range of websites and applications in use, few people encounter propaganda unless they actively seek for it. In this way, the primacy of smartphones over personal computers makes it difficult for the government to penetrate the online sphere.

In contrast to developed Internet societies like China, online citizen-state communication is non-existent. Most interviewees did not even understand what I meant by asking whether they ever used the Internet for this purpose. One informed interviewee told me, "No, we do not have any interactive government websites in Cuba, there is only one-way directed propaganda". The only possibility for

[13] This website unifies all services available on the Cuban Intranet: http://www.redcuba.cu/

[14] 14ymedio (December 19, 2016). Cuba's State Phone Company Lowers Internet and Email Prices. Retreived from: http://translatingcuba.com/cubas-state-phone-company-lowers-internet-and-email-prices-14ymedio/#more-50878

[15] Oficinas Comerciales de Etecsa. <https://www.ecured.cu/Oficinas_Comerciales_de_Etecsa>

citizens to give their input that I found was through the government website, where a hyperlink reads "Welcome and do not hesitate to send us your opinions". Sometimes the link works, but other times clicking it only results in errors.

Thus, in contrast to regimes with more sophisticated, so-called third-generation regulations, the creation of a regime-dominated online sphere has failed in Cuba. The lower pricing of the Intranet does not incentivize users to choose it over the Internet, and Cuban online services are not visibly promoted through the ICT-setting. Cuba's offline environment makes people look for something different online to satisfy their need for objective news updates. But even if users are tired of Cuba's propaganda, they do not necessarily use the global Net to engage in domestic matters. Some users are even uninterested in Cuba as a country, and only seek information about foreign events.

6.3.2 Surveillance

Just like propaganda, warrantless surveillance has been an undeniable part of Cuban post-revolutionary society. Users have not, however, transferred the notion or fear of surveillance onto the online world.

Still, the possibilities to surveil Internet users are evident. First of all, the only available network is a public one, owned and operated by a government agency. This fact alone makes surfing vulnerable to surveillance. Second of all, surfing can never be anonymous in Cuba: when buying an Internet access card at the ETECSA office, identification details are put in a system together with the twelve-digit number of the card. For holders of a permanent card, the personal e-mail address needs to be used as login to access the Internet. Thus, everything done online using a specific card is associated with a specific person. While I feared surveillance and limited any "suspicious" online use, only a couple of interviewees mentioned that their Nauta login could facilitate monitoring. A forty-two-year-old woman reasoned about this issue when I asked her about her thoughts on Internet security:

> Respondent: "I don't know, maybe ETECSA knows what we are doing and investigates those who do something wrong. Maybe there are words that you are not allowed to say..."
>
> Me: "Has someone told you it is like that?"
>
> Respondent: "No, not really, but I guess it could be. Is it like that in Sweden?"
>
> Me: "I'm not sure, actually. So does it bother you?"
>
> Respondent: "Well, I guess the idea bothers me, yes. But as I said, I only use the Internet to call my family."

Generally, the consciousness about the security risks associated with the Nauta network is low. A nineteen-year-old student told me that he feels safer using his own smartphone when going online:

"In the parks, people might look at what you're doing, but in the centers all your activity saves with the administrators".

Owning a smartphone allows the individual to surf on their own device and everything that is associated with that: use the applications they have downloaded, including making online phone calls,

upload and download material, and save information. Even if this does not exclude the possibility for surveillance, it makes the users feel more secure. The previous interviewee had not reflected upon the fact that the same Nauta account is used both for the personal smartphones and public computers.

Most respondents however, affirm that surfing is safe as long as they do not give out their passwords to other people. One group of interviewees even said that they felt safe only because they had their Nauta login. This protects them from misuse by other individuals, they figured.

In sum, the environment does not invoke any widespread fear of online surveillance that restricts the Internet use among the ordinary Cuban netizens. The ICT-setting may also calm fears about online surveillance, since the newly launched WiFi hotspots allow for usage of the personal device. Users, who are denied high levels of Internet usage, do not perceive their online activities to be relevant subjects to surveillance.

7. Conclusion

In this study, I have described how popular Internet use interplays with expanded, yet heavily regulated, Internet access in authoritarian Cuba. It contributes to the scholarship on Internet in authoritarian regimes by emphasizing the perspective of ordinary netizens and presents novel descriptions of Cuba's public Internet spaces in terms of Internet regulations. Below, I answer the research questions.

- How do Cuban Internet users in urban Havana perceive the government's Internet regulations?

Given the evidently authoritarian character of the Cuban regime, popular consciousness about Internet regulations is remarkably low. In the highly collectivist Cuban society, users have benefited from the Internet as an individualist technology. Cubans focus on their personal utility when going online, not the shared opportunities and problems that connectivity precipitates.

All users, however, share one problem: the denial of access that ETECSA's monopoly subjects them to. This includes high hourly rates and slow speed, as well as too few and poorly planned Internet spaces. This denial of usage, however, is not typically understood by users as an authoritarian policy. In contrast, netizens perceive access denial as a product of state inefficiency, bad economy, and the U.S. embargo, that hinders them from using the Internet as much as they want. As long as Cubans are denied access, more sophisticated Internet regulations remain beyond their scope.

Not only is Cuba still denying their citizens large extents of usage, which many authoritarian regimes have abandoned in favor of more complex and covert regulations; Cuba is also denying Internet use in original ways. In addition to unavailability such as pricing and speed, I argue that Cuba's case requires the dimension "discomfort," operating through the substandard public Internet spaces that aggravate an already difficult situation of going online. In urban Havana, at least, the most obvious regulations are those that are physically visible and tangible.

Cuban netizens' weak relationship to other Internet regulations is therefore also a product of access denial. Prohibitive prices, insufficient speed, and substandard Internet spaces deny netizens access to the extent that other types of regulations become invisible. Censorship, for instance, is hard to detect for netizens who are not given the possibility to thoroughly explore the Internet. While China has made censorship less relevant by moving on to controls that shape the entire online sentiment, censorship remains irrelevant in Cuba because Internet regulations still consist of basic forms of denial.

Similar to the majority of Internet users in China and Russia, Cubans do not see themselves as a part of any anti-regime resistance and their Internet usage is generally limited to conventional, personal activities. Policing at WiFi spots and facilitated surveillance are even seen by some Internet users as constructive security measures. Not to mention that many netizens have adopted a normative framework on acceptable Internet activities that aligns with Cuba's laws. This increases the laws' capacity to control netizens and lays the groundwork for a politically compliant population.

Unlike many other authoritarian regimes, Cuba has not succeeded in creating a regime-dominated online sphere. This is because access to the outside world is so central to the large number of netizens that are frustrated with domestic propaganda. To them, the World Wide Web is an escape, and the only Internet regulations that matter are those that affect their access to the global Web (and in many cases, the U.S. and not Cuba blocks global services). However, the popular strive for freedom of information does not necessarily coincide with an interest in societal change or resistance within Cuba.

In summary, denial of usage is the most substantive Internet regulation for Cuban netizens, who prefer to use the Internet as a window to the rest of the world. Other, more advanced forms of regulating the Internet use are unimportant to netizens who rarely go online, and are unnecessary for the regime to invest in as long as Internet usage is denied to the extent that it currently is.

- How do Internet regulations affect their online activities?

The denial of Internet usage limits netizens' online activities to their absolute priorities. For most Cubans, these priorities are to contact exiled friends and family using voice call applications and social media. Supposing that some users are interested in emancipatory uses of the Internet, like theory wishes, these possibilities are not provided at this moment.

Even communication, however, is constrained by the fact that all Internet activities must be conducted in public. Many visitors to Havana's WiFi hotspots avoid making voice calls through the Internet because they do not want anyone else to hear. In this manner, the physical Internet spaces constrain netizens' usage even more than policy does.

Furthermore, netizens express the desire to use the Internet for so much more. Mostly, this is related to the longing for foreign information, as Cubans would like increase their information-seeking practices now that the Internet finally allows them to. This holds true for students and professional endeavors, news, as well as personal exploration such as language learning. Others wish to use it for entertainment, while aspiring entrepreneurs see it as potential to improve their businesses. Usually, however, the Internet is not regarded as a political tool. As Internet pessimists emphasize, netizens prefer using it for individual satisfaction and advancement rather than for a greater good. Additionally, the omnipresent propaganda motivates them to escape to the global Internet, just like citizens of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviets used to distract themselves with Western entertainment.

Regardless, it is difficult to anticipate exactly how Internet use would evolve if access improved. As long as the Cuban regime manages to limit most netizens' use to long-distance communication, however, they have little reason to employ further Internet regulations. The rigorous denial of access, in combination with normative considerations at the public Internet spaces, efficiently keeps netizens' usage in check. Given the current state of the Internet, its users are generally not motivated to push for political change.

8. Discussion

Authoritarian Cuba is facing great prospects for change, though the journey is paved with many insecurities. The normalization of diplomatic relations with the U.S. in December 2014 made many look forward to an end of the embargo, and possibly even democratization. The passing of Cuba's former dictator Fidel Castro in November 2016, and his replacement Raúl Castro's planned resignation in 2018, are also seen as windows of change. Much depends, however, on how the next U.S. President Donald Trump proceeds with the policies of his predecessor Barack Obama, who first initiated dialogue with the Castro regime.

Even if the Cuban Internet has grown significantly during these times of change, no vibrant online society has marched forward. A well-known group of dissidents continues to provide the international community with critical opinions from the inside, but the average netizen is busy calling their family, downloading pictures from Facebook onto their phones, or struggling to open Wikipedia in preparation for their next term paper. Revolutions can develop quickly and unexpectedly during the right circumstances, but as long as Internet access is denied to the extent it is today, we cannot anticipate much.

In its purest form, the Cuban Internet expansion is inherently democratizing. Even if Cuban citizens still are denied access, the possibilities to go online have gone from almost non-existing to limited. Any access to communication and information-seeking opens up possibilities that were not there before. Recalling the terminology of Best and Wade (2007), the Internet expansion bears "democratic effects" in its wholeness.

On this premise, we know that some regulations of Cuba's Internet attempt to counteract its democratic effects. The most extensive of these efforts is the denial of access that puts anti-democratic constraints on the democratic effects that popular Internet access enables. Access denial makes it more difficult to pursue democracy-enhancing activities such as news reading, information-seeking, and communication relating to civil societal cooperation and mobilization, among others. Then again, these activities also require a wish from netizens to conduct them.

Therefore, we must remember that certain regulations do not imply certain effects. Government policy does not necessarily play out as expected or intended. For instance, Best and Wade's framework (2007) would classify online propaganda as an anti-democratic regulation, but the general annoyance with Cuba's propagandist efforts typically motivate Internet users to turn to international sources instead. This, in turn, inspires either efforts toward emancipation or leads to a neglect of domestic issues. Furthermore, the so-called "information war" that fills the modern-day web with conflicting claims to the truth, especially in combination with algorithms that display different content to different users, discredits the entire notion of popular access to information as something democratic.

Regardless, Internet regulations bear implications far more uncertain than what Best and Wade's framework predicts. Cuba's historical isolation from the outside world, and the presence of a large, exiled community, turns the Internet into an overseas platform. Since the hardships of accessing the outside world is such a large part of the Cuban context, it is likely to be decisive for how the Internet regulations play out in the future. In this thesis, I have shown that the implications of Internet regulations depend on netizens just as much as they depend on regime intentions.

This is particularly important to remember in the case of contemporary Cuba, where regime intentions are difficult to predict. While writing this thesis, one question I asked myself was whether it could be the economy, and not authoritarianism, that stood in the way of free Internet access. Could it be that Raúl Castro's regime seeks change but simply lacks the funds to improve Internet access? Cuba's recent deal with Google, as well as the price drop of Internet access cards, made it look that way. To some extent, this might be the case, but, then again, the Cuban economy is still subject to Cuban authoritarianism. Were it not for Cuba's revolutionary ideals, there would be no state-owned monopoly that regulates citizens' Internet usage. Furthermore, if Cuba is lacking the funds to liberate the Internet access, they might also be lacking the funds to create more advanced tools that continue regulating. If so, access denial serves as an inexpensive middle ground to both allow and regulate netizens' Internet use.

Regardless, the aim of this thesis has not been to establish the precise reasons for Internet regulations in Cuba. Rather, I have sought to analyze netizens' perception of regulations and their implications for popular Internet use. Given the uncertain future of Cuban Internet policy, however, research should continue to focus on the dynamics between government regulations and netizen use. In order to create a more comprehensive picture than I was able to provide, the scholarship would also benefit from large-scale surveys on Cuban citizens' online activities.

Furthermore, I am looking forward to partaking in future research on how popular Internet use shapes societies globally. The more the Internet is being used in the world, the more decisive are its regulations. Assuming that all regimes share the effort to consolidate their rule, Internet regulations and their relation to popular usage should be investigated in democracies as much as in authoritarian states.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Public Internet spaces

WiFi hotspots

Balneario Universitario 1ra y 42, Playa
Parque 13 y 76, Playa
Parque 14 y 15, Plaza de la Revolución
Parque Coyula, Playa
Parque Fe del Valle, Centro Habana
Parque Línea y L, Plaza de la Revolución
La Rampa, Plaza de la Revolución
Universidad, Plaza de la Revolución
Parque Trillo, Centro Habana

Navigations centres

Centro Multiservicios Príncipe, Centro Habana
Centro Multiservicios Vedado, Plaza de la Revolución
Joven Club Palacio Central, Centro Habana
Joven Club Plaza I, Plaza de la Revolución
Oficina Comercial La Copa, Playa
Telepunto Focsa, Plaza de la Revolución
Telepunto Obispo y Habana, Habana Vieja

Appendix II: Statistics

USES THE INTERNET FOR PRIVATE COMMUNICATION
YES = 98 %
Confidence interval: 3.88
Percentage of population: 94.12-100 %

EXCLUSIVELY FOR VOICE CALLS ABROAD
YES = 22 %
Confidence interval: 11.48
Percentage of population: 10.52-33.48 %

USES SOCIAL MEDIA
YES = 60 %
Confidence interval: 13.58
Percentage of population: 46.42-73.58 %

USES IT FOR INFORMATION (WORK/EDUCATION)
YES = 44 %
Confidence interval: 13.76
Percentage of population: 30.24-57.76%

USES IT FOR NEWS
YES = 24 %
Confidence interval: 11.84
Percentage of population: 12.52-35.84%

USES IT FOR SPORTS/ENTERTAINMENT
YES = 18 %
Confidence interval: 10.65
Percentage of population: 7.35-28.65 %

USES IT FOR BUSINESS
YES = 6 %
Confidence interval: 6.58 %
Percentage of population: 0-12.58 %

SPEED CONSTRAINS USAGE
YES = 90 %
Confidence interval: 8.32
Percentage of population: 81.68-98.32%

PRICE CONSTRAINS USAGE
YES = 68 %
Confidence interval: 12.93
Percentage of population: 55.07-80.93%

USES CUBAN WEBSITES
YES = 24 %
Confidence interval: 11.84
Percentage of population: 12.52-35.84%

Appendix III: Questionnaire

1. Do you only use the WiFi hotspots, or do you use navigation centers too? Why? What do you think about WiFi hotspots/navigation centers?

2. What do you do when you go online?

3. What do you think about privacy when you use the Internet?

4. Can you reach all websites? Why, why not?

5. If you had the Internet at home, would you use it differently?

6. Generally, what do you think about the Internet service in Cuba?

7. Is the Internet important in your life?

8. Do you trust the information you find on the Internet?

9. Do you take your personal security when you go online? (Do you think about it when you write or post things online, for instance?)

10. Do you use any Cuban websites?

11. Have you ever communicated with the authorities online? (Sent an email to an institution, filled out a form?)

12. Have you read any government information online?

13. If you lived in another country, would you use the Internet differently?

14. Why do you think the Internet is so limited here in Cuba?

15. Do you think you will use the Internet differently in the future?

Appendix IV: Guide to participant observations

WiFi hotspots

- Activities that interviewees do: downloading, streaming, calling abroad, searching for information, etc.
- Going online: speed, blocking, the Cuban Internet, propaganda
- Policing, other enforcements of the law, any signs of surveillance
- How I experience the ICT-setting
- How I experience going online given the environment

Navigation centres

- Websites that people visiting
- Going online: speed, blocking, the Cuban Internet, propaganda, cyberzones
- Policing, other enforcements of the law, any signs of surveillance
- How I experience the ICT-setting
- How I experience going online given the environment

Appendix V: Age of interviewees

Men	Women
18 18	18 18 18 18
19	19 19
20	20
22	22 22
23	25
24	26 26
27 27	28
28 28 28	32
29	40 40
30	42
31 31	44
32	46
35	47
36	49
38	50 50
39	51
43	53
45	
51	
Median = 28.9	Median = 34.2