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Uses and benefits of social networks for trans identity management: keys to understanding the identity development of students in higher education

Usos y beneficios de las redes sociales para gestionar la identidad trans: claves para comprender el desarrollo identitario del alumnado de educación superior

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Abstract

The use of social networks among transgender people to explore their identity and seek support is growing; however, the Spanish educational literature still presents serious gaps in the understanding of this phenomenon. The main objective of this study is to analyse the use and management of trans identity in social networks among higher education students. Twenty-nine transgender people were interviewed to find out about their personal and interpersonal behaviour and habits on virtual platforms. The results confirm that these people make strategic use of virtual spaces. They carefully select the platforms and establish behaviours adjusted to their possibilities to guarantee experiences that successfully respond to their identity needs: 1) They create several profiles on the same platform (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) or maintain different accounts on different networks; 2) They make different presentations of their identity on each account or, sometimes, they use a specific profile to present their trans identity; 3) They carefully study and choose the content they share or publish, including their network of contacts. The conclusions show that the protection strategies employed by trans users do not only and exclusively refer to the presentation of their non-normative identity, but include a compendium of manoeuvres associated with the content and characteristics of the network. They also point to the need to familiarise educational agents with this issue and offer some implications.

Keywords: LGTB/LGTBI; trans; social networks; self-disclosure; education.

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Resumen

El uso de las redes sociales entre las personas trans para explorar su identidad y buscar apoyos está creciendo; sin embargo, la literatura educativa española todavía presenta serias lagunas sobre la comprensión de este fenómeno. Este estudio tiene como objetivo principal analizar el uso y manejo de la identidad trans en las redes sociales del alumnado de educación superior. Se ha entrevistado a 29 personas trans para conocer sus conductas y costumbres personales e interpersonales en las plataformas virtuales. Los resultados confirman que estas personas realizan un uso estratégico de los espacios virtuales. Seleccionan cuidadosamente las plataformas y establecen conductas ajustadas a sus posibilidades para garantizar experiencias que respondan exitosamente a sus necesidades identitarias: 1) Crean varios perfiles en una misma plataforma (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) o mantienen cuentas diferentes en distintas redes; 2) Realizan presentaciones de su identidad distintas en cada cuenta o, a veces, se valen de un perfil concreto para presentar su identidad trans; 3) Estudian y escogen minuciosamente el contenido que comparten o publican, incluso, su red de contactos. Las conclusiones, permiten señalar que las estrategias de protección que los usuarios trans emplean no remiten única y exclusivamente a la presentación de su identidad no normativa, sino que abarcan un compendio de maniobras asociadas al contenido y las características de la red. Además, apuntan la necesidad de familiarizar a los agentes educativos en torno a esta temática y ofrecen algunas implicaciones.

Palabras clave: LGTB/LGTBI; trans; redes sociales; autorrevelación; educación.

Introduction and objectives

Lesbians, gays, trans, bisexuals, intersex, queers and all those who do not respond to cisheteronormative expectations (LGTBIQ+) continue to experience situations of discrimination (stigma, prejudice, rejection, etc.) (Mahowald et al., 2020) that have a negative impact on their health (Ross et al., 2018). This problem means that, compared to cissexuals, they are more likely to develop psychopathological disorders (depression and anxiety) and dangerous behaviours such as suicidal tendencies or substance abuse (FRA, 2020; Ross et al., 2018). This is even more so among transgender people, with a prevalence of up to 60-70% (Bradley, 2020).

Currently, in order to avoid these outcomes and find safe and positive spaces that promote their personal, educational, social and identity growth, they have decided to rely on virtual spaces. However, the few approaches made to address trans experiences online, while highlighting their usefulness for managing, exploring and making identity visible (Cavalcante, 2016; Vivienne, 2016), warn of the limitations that make it necessary to use them ingeniously and strategically (Buss et al., 2022). This is a booming subject, so in Spain there are many gaps both in the use of networks to manage and make visible their identity, their interests and the benefits they bring, as well as the most appropriate method of including them in a vital sphere for humanity such as education.

Social networks: a source of communication and knowledge

In recent years, the progress of information and communication technologies (ICT) has radically transformed ways of life and human relationships. People, through a wide variety of websites and messaging platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, ...), create more and more content and publicly disclose more and more information (Escobar-Viera et al., 2018).

The number of users worldwide who use at least one active social network for communication exceeds 4.5 billion (62% of the population) between 3-7 hours depending on device and website (Kemp, 2021). These figures soar among 18-24 year old (97% have one), who connect to online social networks (OSN) at all hours (45%) (Vogels et al., 2022). In Spain, the trend is similar. More than 87% (40.7 million) of the population uses OSN (98% of 18-24 year old) at least two hours a day, especially through mobile devices, with Whatsapp (94%), Instagram (78%) and YouTube (73%) being the most used applications (Araña, 2022; Kemp, 2022; UNICEF, 2022).

OSNs are a communicative virtual space where people post data in different formats (text, audio, videos, photos, etc.) (DiMicco and Millen, 2007; McLoughlin and Lee, 2007) to make themselves visible, create and edit content, exchange information (emotions and thoughts), interact and build social ties (Escobar-Viera et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2019). Each user, depending on the features, content and possibilities offered by the apps, usually maintains an active account simultaneously on 6-7 platforms (Kemp, 2021, 2022). The general aim is to create networks of different contacts and to keep them in separate spaces depending on the content to be disclosed (DiMicco and Millen, 2007; Hanckel et al., 2019), as it sometimes "requires some form of self-disclosure" (Nabity-Grover et al., 2020, p. 1). They are also a means to deliberately project a desired or idealised self-image (Goffman, 1959), even a more natural alternative 'self' (Xiao et al., 2020) not exposed in the 'offline' personality. That is, a heterogeneous ecosystem of networks that allows information to be controlled, manipulated and separated according to audience - family, friends, schoolchildren, etc. (Nabity-Grover et al., 2020) in a way that is not possible in direct interactions (Farber, 2017).

The exponential growth of OER in society has followed the same trend in the educational context, where they are incorporated not only for administrative and dissemination tasks among educational agents (Marín and Cabero, 2019), but also as tools that promote new, more collaborative and interactive learning dynamics (Gil and Calderón, 2021). Undoubtedly, they have radically transformed the way of understanding educational practice and classroom relationships; however, few approaches offer models or "good practices" for their integration, especially in diverse educational scenarios.

Social networks and transgender people: a virtual source of learning and development

For LGTBQ+ people, according to McInroy et al. (2019), OSNs are a source of meaningful communication, socialisation and learning. Their multiplicity of services and resources - together with the privacy and anonymity they guarantee (Khan et al., 2019; Haimson and Veinot, 2020) - have meant that they are 20% more likely than cissexuals to use them as safer and more affirming supportive spaces in the initial stages of constructing a non-normative identity (Escobar-Viera et al., 2018; Tuah and Mazlan, 2020). They use them to search for information or resources, share content or self-present themselves, but also for other purposes to ensure that the connections, content, platform features and possibilities match their needs about how much to disclose/hide, to whom and how (DeVito et al., 2018).

The literature, aware of this reality, is beginning to analyse the use of OSN and virtual spaces in LGTBQ+ identities such as the trans community. In addition to being useful for exchanging information or learning about their identity (Buss et al., 2022; Cavalcante, 2016),

they are valuable for disclosing their minority status and sharing feelings in order to find sources of emotional support and even establish connections or a shared culture with other people (Haimson and Veinot, 2020; McInroy et al., 2019). As the 'reciprocal disclosure theory' (Andalibi, 2019) indicates, just as hearing the stories of people who have faced and overcome LGBTphobic moments makes trans users feel more comfortable sharing their experiences, naturally showing personal stories of overcoming them makes an individual a point of reference for similar realities (Andalibi, 2019).

OSN can be an 'identity testing ground' (Cavalcante, 2016, p. 115), where trans people strategically adjust and manage the virtual presentation of their identity to respond to social demands (Haimson et al., 2021). Their level of visibility can vary from platform to platform (Carrasco and Kerne, 2018), appearing differently to separate networks of contacts depending on the website's capabilities and audience characteristics (DeVito et al., 2018). Tumblr and Reddit have been widely recognised as Trans-friendly platforms, the former due to the network selection and identity switching possibilities it offers (Cho, 2017; Haimson et al., 2021) and the latter because of the anonymous or pseudonymous identities it enables (Farber, 2017). Facebook, on the other hand, frequently used as a source of entertainment, news and broader communication (family, work, etc.), is not as well received (Tuah and Mazlan, 2020). The trans population prefers Twitter because the former until recently did not offer gender alternatives beyond the binary (Buss et al., 2022) and because it requires what Cho (2017) calls "default advertising", i.e. it implies that actions performed (e.g. liking a LGBTfriendly post) are visible to contacts. Consequently, trans users use what Hanckel et al. (2019) consider identity "healing" strategies: (1) disclosing and managing their self-presentation or addressing issues related to gender and sexuality in a caring way to a select audience, and (2) building and fostering communities of peers with whom to share experiences for emotional support during identity development. Trans users therefore benefit from the multiplicity of services offered by RSOs in order to reduce or mitigate LGTBphobia in cis heteronormative society, although this information is not considered in the school sphere (DeVito et al., 2018; Hanckel et al., 2019).

Taking into account the theoretical review carried out and the scarcity of literature on the subject at the state level, this exploratory study has two objectives: 1). To analyse the preferences of young transgender people studying in higher education in the RSO and 2) To study the decisions or considerations on which they rely to manage and present their identity in the RSO.

Method

Population and Sample

This study involved 29 trans students (14 female, 9 male, 3 non-binary and 1 agender) with a mean age of 20.69 (SD= 2.52), who are in higher education. These individuals use a variety of OSNs, including Whatsapp (100%), Instagram (97%), Youtube (90%) and Twitter (69%). The device they use most often to connect is the mobile phone (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Frequency of use of online social networks

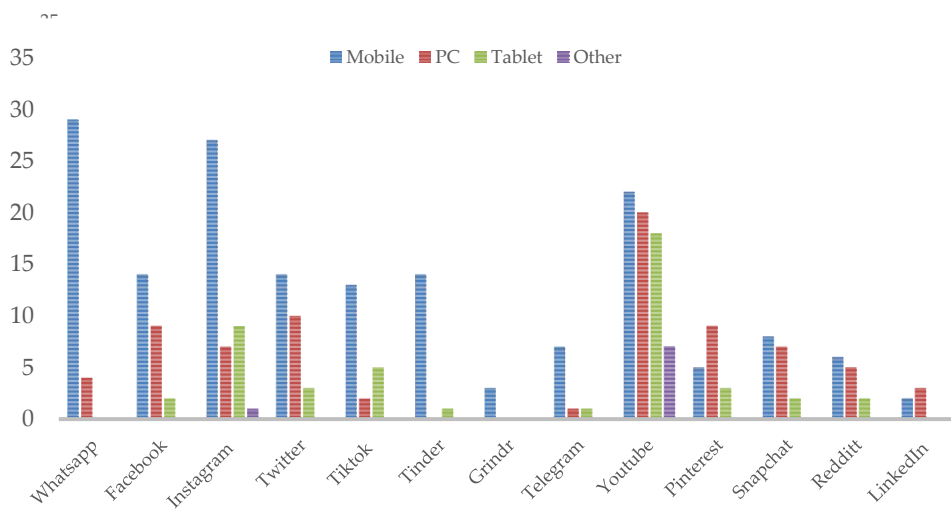


Figure 2. Most commonly used devices

Instrument

The research is qualitative in nature, so the data were obtained through semi-structured interviews that sought to extract information on different protective factors available to the LGTB community. The script covered the following thematic axes: development of positive personal attitudes and behaviours for health, opinion on the socio-political and educational situation, contribution of OSR and the media, and opinion on the support of family, peer group, significant others and the LGTB community. However, only information related to the aims of the article is included in this paper.

Data collection and analysis procedure

Participants were recruited through Spanish LGTBI associations who, after receiving an email with an informative letter (objectives, tools, etc.), agreed to disseminate a recruitment message on their messaging and social media platforms (Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp). A purposive sampling was conducted among 1215 LGBT people to select a diverse group of participants based on factors such as age, gender and OSR use. The study does not aim to generalise the results, but rather to respond to a real perceived need in a

geographical context in which, on the one hand, there is a growing interest among different socio-educational agents in understanding the lives and experiences of trans people and their protective factors and, on the other hand, ICTs and OER have become increasingly important as educational resources.

The interviews were conducted using digital media for video-calls (Google Meet and Skype) and lasted between 45-107 minutes. Beforehand, the objective of the project was explained and, once the anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided had been guaranteed, the consent form was signed, which made it possible to set up the process, record the sessions and then transcribe them naturally.

In order to establish the definitive list of categories, the transcripts were analysed using the content analysis procedure based on the guidelines established by Ruiz-Olabuénaga (1999) with the NVivo 12 programme. This list underwent some changes as the content of new interviews was analysed. Once the final categorisation was fixed, according to Nieto and González (2002; cited in Barquín et al., 2022), the set of interviews was recoded by applying a reproducibility design to ensure the reliability of the study. During recoding, four experts from the team examined two interviews jointly (a total of 493 quotes framed in 28 categories), and reached an agreement of 88 % ($k = .883$; $p < .001$). The final list is made up of 2825 quotes in 31 categories, although there are three main categories related to this work: use of online social networks; trans identity development in OSR; and digital platforms, trans reality and health.

The study complied with the ethical considerations required by the Ethics Committee of the University of the Basque Country (CEISH) (M10_2021_140).

Results

Social networking: a wide variety of services for multiple uses

The results show that transgender youth, aware of the extensive catalogue of OSN and the possibilities they offer, create several profiles or accounts on the same or different platforms, with different purposes.

Firstly, it can be seen that a large number of individuals have several accounts on the same platform for different purposes. EN15, after acknowledging that she has created two different profiles on Instagram, qualifies that *"I have always had a single account for my personal use where I accept requests from my close contacts, so... I decided to create a profile that [as a creator of educational content] I use to produce material and sell it... where they only know that I am studying a degree in education"*. EN2, also distinguishes between the private and professional nature of her accounts by using a profile *"to show the photos I take, make myself visible and get money for my studies... word of mouth and the rapid expansion of the Internet opens doors where we are only judged by our professionalism"*. EN9, for her part, says that having a private account allows her to feel more free and natural: *"I have a public account with many followers in which everything I post (poses, accessories...) is scrutinised, ... the content has to be socially correct... respond to expectations so as not to lose followers.... I decided to create a second, more natural profile to 'enjoy' myself in some way with those I care about, to be calm and to say what I think"*. EN22 argues that having several accounts on Twitter allows him to enjoy separate spaces to express himself: *"an account with which I can let off steam or share information that doesn't even occur to me on my usual account, or like posts without anyone asking me what's wrong with me"*.

In the same vein, although some young people indicate that they do not have a second profile, they recognise that they have considered the idea for the same purpose: *"I have contemplated the idea of having a second Facebook account. I think that, on a social level, there are topics that are better not to touch publicly [politics, religion, ...] because they are controversial, but they are related to our experiences of discrimination... Sometimes, I see information that I would like to share or comment on and I don't do it for fear of causing a stir or being pigeonholed into one type of thinking... so yes... I have thought about it"* (EN12).

Secondly, some trans people maintain open profiles on different OSNs because of the audience they are targeting. EN14, who includes a wider audience (family or general public) on his Facebook, feels that Twitter or Instagram give him *"more freedom to post personal information... thoughts or pictures that I want my friends to see exclusively and not some guy from Santander that I haven't seen for 10 years"*. Something similar comments EN29, who says he feels more relaxed and is more sincere and open in media where he does not have classmates among his followers: *"In class we use Twitter and we follow each other, it is like something normative that, whether you like it or not, you have to do it to pass... we don't know each other yet and I don't want anyone to know on Monday if I have had a special meal or have gone on a weekend getaway with my colleagues. An argument also reinforced by other interviewees, who have Facebook with "everyone"* (EN18), and who extol as a determining factor when choosing an OSN the control and privacy of: *"Twitter or Instagram... I have handpicked my network of contacts to feel more comfortable and not worry about what they know about me"* (EN26).

The audience has even limited some of the participants' virtual movements when posting content about trans reality. EN1 explains that *"when I post something I do it because it makes me feel good, it's something positive for me. My family, for example, has archaic thoughts, too traditional, 'old-fashioned' I would say, and it is difficult for them to understand my process... as I don't feel like having to constantly explain my identity or my way of living, instead of posting on Twitter I prefer to make myself visible on other apps such as Instagram"*. For this reason, thirdly, trans users decide both to create several profiles and to use different accounts on different social networking sites in order to have selected spaces where they can present their identity. EN17 says: *"I like to share my transition on YouTube because I know that my followers understand the process, share my achievements and encourage me"*. And EN3 adds that *"for me Instagram represents a virtual space where I can tell my peers about the stages of my transition, complaints about the health or education system... or simply a place to go for support and understanding"*. There are even participants who explicitly differentiate between cis and trans audiences in their discourse. EN20 explains: *"I have very nice and respectful cis partners and friends, but there are topics that I feel more comfortable talking about openly in front of people who understand me, and this is not the case"*. Therefore, *"I prefer to talk to friends I have made in virtual groups who have not transitioned and live a gender fluid life like me... hearing similar stories or experiences... makes me feel more understood"* (EN4).

Fourth, some young people, in order to have a more rewarding and productive online experience, carefully consider the type of online spaces and their possibilities when sharing content associated with trans identity (transit, medical treatments, name, etc.). EN3 *"likes that Facebook offers gender options that go beyond male and female... Instagram also feels safe to me because it has evolved and has a variety of pronouns"*. Other platforms they use, such as Tiktok or Snapchat, *"do not allow changes and have many limitations...I have been forced to make a new profile so that my friends or colleagues will add me because of who I am and not what they said I was going to be...or so that I don't have to explain my past to who I am meeting"* (EN17). EN17, however, has not been the only one who has created a new account during his transition,

other people too, because in the initial stages *"I was looking to learn and express myself freely, but I was trying to avoid anyone at school or in the family finding out about my 'coming out'"* (EN24) or, in relation to the perspective on networking, because *"I was trying to feel good about my activity on Twitter and to avoid people who are not 'TransFriendly', do not know my reality or do not support my process ... I have lost more than 200 followers but I have gained happiness"* (EN11).

Another possible solution to avoid having to be visible on a social level has been to differentiate on Instagram between the general public and 'best friends': *"The good thing about Instagram is that it allows you to share stories with a small group of 'best friends'. When there are special moments of public interest, such as LGTBQ+ Pride Day, Trans Visibility Day or the day the Trans Law was presented, I share it with everyone. But when it is something more personal, like the stages of my transition and my progress, I only make it public with my people"* (EN21). Although other users prefer to participate exclusively in private groups with a trans or related audience earlier. EN4 was much more active on certain Facebook pages: *"On Instagram or Tiktok I just live a routine life, I do the same as anyone else in my class ... on Facebook I let loose. It's where I have groups of friends who share my identity, with whom I express myself freely and to whom I don't explain myself"*. An important factor repeated among those involved in trans or similar communities was experience (EN4 and EN20); in particular, it is more comfortable to openly share experiences and processes with groups of people who *"understand you or have gone through something similar"* (EN4), than *"having to teach, explain or publicly defend something that should not even be debated because it goes against the freedom of each person"* (EN10).

Alternative profiling is also a positive factor for many people, although it brings with it a number of difficulties or problems. For EN19 *"it was a big dilemma...I had a lot of stress and anxiety...my head was telling me that I had to protect myself from bad influences, but it was sad, even horrible, to have to hide or block contacts...when I tried to understand and accept that what I was experiencing and feeling was not bad, I was inviting them to treat me with a name or a gender, which does not represent me...my head was asking me to shout out loud who I am"*. For this reason, EN5 has been forced to create an exclusive profile to meet the demands of a university technology subject, denoting that the education system is not yet ready to respond to the needs of the trans community: *"I have said publicly that I am trans... to free myself, my friends and family know it, they support me... but in the class lists I appear with a name that is not mine and I have been forced to create a profile on Twitter because the teacher does not understand my situation, ... a setback that has generated anguish for me during the course"*.

Social networking: a space for healing and positive development

In addition, as can be seen in the previous analysis, transgender youth have made strategic decisions or established a series of guidelines to personalise their online experiences, habits and practices in order to encourage them to be positive, productive and rewarding, avoiding platforms, information or situations that negatively influence their health.

Firstly, in order to get the most out of their experiences on OSN, many young people have carefully mapped out a safety plan around the content they will consume, post and share. EN21 says: *"I have ten basic commandments that I apply when I use Instagram or other networks because, although I can't avoid content that bothers me, I have to stop it from hurting me emotionally"* including *"not getting into arguments that get me nowhere when I read or see*

something I don't like... it's better to move on because it comes from people who are intolerant of diversity who are really the ones who have a problem". Other participants, similarly, choose to dodge the attacks. EN6 explains it this way: "When I get a mean comment, I just send it straight to the 'bin' or I log off... I have always believed in that popular saying that 'there is no greater contempt than not appreciating'... many times you can't help it hurts, but so far it has served me well so that the positive experiences are more than the negative ones."

A large group looks to messages and publications by public or close LGBTQ+ references who are exposed to transphobia or LGTBphobia on a daily basis, because, sometimes, *"as there are no references in the real world, you are forced to take references such as LGTB influencers and youtubers who show you that this reality exists and is possible"* (EN2), that is, who transmit confidence and positivity. For EN23 *"having references is what has made this process more welcoming, more positive"* as they *"have been essential for self-acceptance... especially transgender boys with whom I can identify"* (EN16). EN29 even follows accounts on other topics that increase her positive emotions and avoids anything that detracts from her online experience: *"I like groups and accounts about art or video games... it has nothing to do with my trans identity, but they are hobbies to which I dedicate many hours because they help me to inhibit myself, disconnect, get energised and feel better... on the other hand, I try to dedicate less time to the profiles that gather negative news. Every day there is talk of wars, illnesses, aggressions... situations that as citizens we should not ignore, but it is content that we have to distance ourselves from because it adds more negative emotions to a backpack that is already full... in the end it's all about the online experience being positive, right?"*

The study also revealed that transgender youth make decisions and apply certain filters around the network of contacts they establish or the audience they interact with in order to create a virtual sphere that favours enriching experiences. Several (EN1, EN14 or EN16) acknowledged unfollowing, blocking or avoiding interactions with harmful or detrimental people and groups. EN1 reports that *"if I don't like a person or if they have made a hurtful comment on my posts or stories, I quickly block them, my pulse does not tremble..."*. EN13 confesses to having removed accounts from her contacts that have been 'blacklisted' for publishing *"content that goes against my ideology"*, while acknowledging that *"I have followed accounts that, in my opinion, publish positive content"*. Conversely, EN25 is selective about the audience she accepts: *"on Instagram, before accepting any request, if it is from someone I don't know, I investigate their profile to check that they are not a conflictive person. If they have a private profile, I discard it... I also check my contacts from time to time and remove anyone who has unfollowed me"*. They also recognise that they choose the groups or communities in which they participate strategically. EN27 notices and finds important on Facebook *"the rules that the group has, for example, if only people from the trans community are allowed, ... the reaction of the moderators to infringements or the type of messages posted and how well they are received"*.

Discussion and conclusions

The main objective of this study was first to analyse transgender people's OSR preferences and then to study how they manage and handle their minority identity on these platforms. In line with the results obtained in studies with the general population (Araña, 2022; Kemp, 2021, 2022), it has been found that the most trusted platforms used by trans youth aged 18-24 are, in addition to Whatsapp (100%), Instagram (97%) and Youtube (90%), which are generally accessed via mobile phones.

Regarding the second objective, it has been observed that in order to make their virtual experiences safe, positive and rewarding, trans people make resourceful and strategic choices about the type of presentation they make, the content they interact with, the websites they rely on and the network of contacts that accompany them (Carrasco and Kerne, 2018; Haimson et al., 2021).

An important factor that determines how an individual presents their identity online is their network of contacts. Previous studies (Cavalcante, 2016; DeVito et al., 2018) recognise that trans people, during the process of development and transition they go through, create multiple accounts to differentiate their networks and make different identity presentations to heterogeneous groups of contacts. In this case, although few young people have created a specific profile to explicitly present on a specific platform their true 'self' (using gender markers or specific names/pronouns), the results show that most of them care about the networks they connect to and carefully assess the type of trans content they become familiar with (which they share or 'like') based on the perception of their contacts. For example, taking into account that the type of content interacted with can give a glimpse of personal identity (who you are, what your interests are, etc.) in RSOs, when they have among their network distant relatives, strangers or people from academia and even followers who do not know, tolerate or support the trans reality, they are more cautious in handling and disseminating it. However, when the group of followers is made up solely and exclusively of friends or people who have experienced similar realities, they are more willing to share information about their thoughts and identity concerns.

Second, in contrast to research to date that has captured trans users' concerns about the possibilities and limitations of platforms to make their identity visible (DeVito et al., 2018; Haimson et al., 2021; Tuah and Mazlan, 2020), this paper, in line with Buss et al. (2022), did not find that a website's features and services were a major source of concern. Possibly, a logical explanation is that platforms have been updating and improving their services (Tuah and Mazlan, 2020) and that trans users have been responding to these limitations through strategic solutions at the same time (Buss et al., 2022). Future studies could look closely at this issue to learn first-hand why the number of perceived difficulties for transgender youth has been decreasing, including whether factors associated with the use and management of OSR in the particular geographical area where the study is being conducted have an impact on the results.

However, the process of identity development is not all bright spots. Several participants have recognised that the creation of alternative accounts, both to protect themselves from transphobia and to respond to socio-educational demands (EN5), has caused them some discomfort. In this scenario, the case of EN5 is noteworthy, as García-Berbén et al. (2018) point out that one of the current challenges facing the education system is the training of teachers in sexual and gender diversity, in particular, their lack of knowledge about the keys to integrating OSR in the classroom while respecting their needs.

However, the analysis of the movements and decisions that the trans population considers in multiple RSOs in order to protect and safeguard their identity has allowed us to detect the implementation of two techniques or responses that the American literature considers healing (Hanckel et al., 2019) and that, in our case, are protective. Trans users, in order to achieve positive, affirming and rewarding experiences, not only establish a safety plan in relation to the content they consume, post and share or the bookmarks they use publicly, but they also carefully choose and apply certain filters to their network of contacts

(the audience), that is, both in relation to the people who follow them and those they choose to follow. In this way, trans people use OSN, the resources and contacts they provide, as a source of affirmation and support to enhance their satisfaction.

This research therefore adds to the knowledge about the management and management of trans identity in OSNs (Buss et al., 2022; Cavalcante, 2016; Farber, 2017; McInroy et al., 2019). Specifically, it confirms that trans people make different decisions regarding the management of their minority identity on OSNs, for example, they use a variety of accounts or platforms separately and complementarily based on certain purposes or objectives, including setting a strategic plan around the content they interact with. These practices not only have multiple benefits in terms of publicising their trans status online but offline as well. Moreover, they are very useful in the face of LGTBphobia (harassment, negative judgments, rejection, etc.) and its impact on health and identity development (Bradley, 2020) for both trans and other minority sexual identities (Hanckel et al., 2019; Tuah and Mazlan, 2020).

In conclusion, the results obtained on the OSNs used and their benefits allow us to confirm that OSNs are a significant support for the management and development of trans identity due to their numerous alternatives for connection, interaction and self-education. This multiplicity of services, which differ in a number of aspects and characteristics, forces the trans user to strategically select the most appropriate movements, platforms, contacts and content in order to ensure that their virtual experience meets their needs in an optimal, constructive and rewarding way, especially when dealing explicitly with content linked to their identity. These decisions sometimes lead them to present their virtual identity in different ways, depending on the moment, the platform and the type of contacts - family, friends, etc. - and, as a result, to make a socio-digital presentation that does not always correspond to their real identity, for example, in the classroom. In this regard, the results allow us to recognise specific training needs, above all, among teachers in relation to the trans reality and in relation to the educational practices that, using OER, are best suited to the needs of this group. It is known that they are a learning resource that favours interaction (communication, exchange of material, collaborative work, etc.) in the classroom, but educational intervention should work to ensure that this integration is beneficial for all students. For example, including content on how to deal with sexual and gender diversity in the classroom in future teacher training programmes, or including the perspective of sexual and gender diversity in current protocols on the added value of new technologies and social networks in education. However, it should be remembered that the research has certain limitations and therefore the results cannot be generalised.

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