Identities in Motion: Cyberspace and Myanmar Men having Sex with Men

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Abstract

This paper explores how Myanmar men-having-sex-with-men (MSM) create identity through lived and mediated realities, by using cyber social networks, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted through snowballing among MSM cyber social network members. Content analysis was guided by a social network analysis framework. Networking positively affected connectedness and social support however norms and values were challenged. Age, experience, sex-roles, and peer-relationships seem to influence self-efficacy. Interpersonal dynamics were driven by online-cruising, dating, cyber-sex and off-line encounters. In conclusion, access to social networking offers an outlet for socio-cultural and legal oppressed Myanmar MSM, however building life-skills among younger users' needs attention. Social networks could be appropriate channels for social and health programs targeting MSM.

Keywords: Southeast Asia, gay-men, internet, cyber social networks, health promotion

1. Introduction

The cyber networks stand main players of the social connections globally since the last decade. Most people become a component of cyber social networks regardless of age and sex (Ellison, 2007; Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010). Men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM) are also a part of the cyber social network culture mainly because the anonymity and less exposure to the stigma which they usually face in the offline society (Garofalo et al., 2007). Though MSM's identity is more acceptable in the Western context because a relative well defined MSM community, they remain hidden and fragmented in an Asian context because social and cultural constructions (amfAR, 2009).

The term MSM covers almost all gay, bisexual, and transgender persons including self-identified heterosexual men who have sex with other men and the idiom is free from focusing on sexual identification. The challenge of the term however is the variation of behaviors among MSM, variations in the purpose of standardization and comparability (Baral, 2007; Lombardo, 2009). In this article, the above mentioned definition has been applied not only to achieve a broad coverage, but especially to deal with the ill-defined construction in Asian context. As discussed by Green and Stiers (2002) the social construct of Asian MSM is different from Western societies, more stigmatized, more hidden, less united and more vulnerable. Often Asian MSM presumes themselves as a man and retains a sense of masculinity. However, features of MSM identities are variable such as: masculine acting, feminine acting, gay-identified men, transgender, and men who have situational sex with each other. According to their identity, the set of behaviors, interactions, social norms and meeting places vary among the various subgroups. However, external appearance and behavior often do not match sexual behavior e.g. penetrative or receptive roles in intercourse. Legal prohibition of men to men sex still exists in 11of 23 Asian countries including Myanmar. The legal punishment varies from 10 years to life in prison depending on the countries' penal code. Legal prohibition stigmatizes and harasses MSM and drives their activities underground. This invisibility makes it harder to protect them and easier to ignoring their problems. Most governments are silent to address MSM needs in many Asian countries.

During recent years internet mediated social network sites have attracted millions of users, integrating them into their daily life. Social networking sites can be defined by a web site based service where individuals can create their own profile within the bounded system, chat with other users who share connection, view the link of other users and contact them (Ellison, 2007).   In the past, MSM cruised partners in traditional venues such as gay bars and pubs, saunas, via friends, parks and so forth. In recent years, internet has become a popular meeting place for MSM to converse in chat rooms, exchange information, and dating (Benotsch, Kalichman, & Cage, 2002; Klein, 2009). Notwithstanding its relative isolation from the outside world, Myanmar has been no exception to the development of internet-based networking. Cyber social networks usually provide MSM security and anonymity, and often become main communication tools in MSM's social life. They can grow a sense of community and expand their horizon beyond geographic borders to learn the lives of their peers who live in different areas of the world under various social and political climates (Garofalo et al., 2007). However, engaging with social network sites brings both positive and negative effects (Burke, Marlow & Lento, 2010).

Globalization brought advanced technology and internet to Myanmar. As a result, internet has been available since 2000. However, the government limits and controls Internet access through software-based censorship, infrastructure and technical constraints, and laws and regulations. Also high charges apply for establishing a connection to the Internet. Notwithstanding these barriers Internet access facilitated social networking became popular among urban citizens especially in Yangon and Mandalay. This technological revolution also transmitted to the Myanmar MSM community and MSM social networking sites were developed. Though MSM cyber communities were until recent rather obscure in Myanmar, they grow steadily. To date there are three Myanmar MSM social network sites. The oldest, "Myanmar Homosexual Society" with 7,656 members, "Myanmar Gay Education" operating since 2009 with 1,514 members, and "Myanmar Homo Party" operating since 2010 with 720 members.

To date no study has been done about influences of MSM cyber networks on social interactions and subcultural social norms among the MSM community in Myanmar. Within the context of worrisome HIV/AIDS prevalence rates among MSM in Asia (UNAIDS, 2009), understanding the dynamics of MSM social networks in Myanmar will be useful for those committed to advocate for health and wellbeing of this socially neglected subculture in order to explore avenues to reach the MSM community in Myanmar.

2.   Objectives

To address the question: "how do the cyber social networks influence MSM in developing self-identity and shaping lifestyle?" main objectives for this study were to: (a) describe characteristics of Myanmar MSM interview participants, and (b) explore perceptions among Myanmar MSM participants on how MSM cyber networks influence their self-realization.

3.   Methods

In our study we used a case study design adopting a participatory approach to enter the Myanmar MSM cyber social network community and conduct a cross-sectional survey by employing in-depth interviews among its members. Within an estimated target population of 9,170 MSM social network members 30 participants were be purposively selected, based on inclusion criteria (men, Myanmar national, social network site member) and one exclusion criterion (age below 18 years), through internet assisted recruitment of MSM cyber network users by a snowball sampling technique.

Individual face-to-face interviews used a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire guided by a social network analysis framework (Bond, 2003) to explore aspects of the MSM cyber social network context, connectedness, social support, norms and values, self-efficacy, dynamics of interpersonal relationships, and dynamics of cyber mediated community. Construct validity was assured by participants' reviewing individual draft reports and the comparison of

responses across respondents. Ethical clearance was obtained from Thammasat University's Human Research Ethics Committee (approval project No. 044/2554). Informed consent of all participants was obtained. Personal identifiers were removed from interview reports to ensure confidentiality, whereas a passport protected electronic logbook was maintained. Participants showing signs of potential psycho-social challenges such as coping difficulties, anxiety disorder, or depression as well as those who revealed physical issues suspecting sexual transmitted infections were referred for professional care. Interview guides were translated from English into Myanmar language and reports translated back into English language by independent translators. On request of respondents audio-recording was omitted and replaced by jotted notes and full interview reports. Ethnograph (version 5.0) assisted a content analysis and Holsti (1969) inter-analyst reliability testing obtained a score of 90%; whereas triangulation across respondent groups (age, relationship status, living arrangement, and occupation) and pattern matching further enhanced validity and reliability.

4. Results

4.1 Socio-demographic characteristics

The total of 30 interview respondents' main socio-demographic characteristics, were as follows: The majority (60%) was between 26 and 35 years of age, whereas nearly 37% were between 18 and 25 years of age. Most (83%) resided in Yangon which was also the birthplace of 66% of the respondents whereas other main reasons for residing in Yangon were employment (17%) and study (7%). The majority (60%) of the respondents was single men and 37% were in an intimate relationship at the moment of the interview. Nearly 67% lived either with their family (60%) or with their boyfriend (7%), whereas 23% lived on their one. An overwhelming majority (97%) had a higher education, namely university level. This could be explained by the snowball selection strategy. Another possible explanation could be that those at the high end of the education level spectrum had better access to internet services, either in terms of literacy and or in terms of means. Finally, the majority (53%) was employed, whereas 37% were students, and 10% was without a job at the moment of the interview.

4.2 Context

Single students and unemployed respondents seem to discover MSM cyber networks from different sources whereas employed respondents especially those in a relationship relied mainly on friends. In terms of MSM cyber network usage most employed respondents used MSM chat room daily whereas unemployed respondents tended to use chat rooms once or two to three times per week. A rather unexpected similar pattern was seen when comparing those in relationship (daily usage) and those who were single (weekly usage). It might be that those in relationship did not live together with their boyfriends and used the chat room as a way of keeping in touch. Though personal agendas in dating differed among respondents whatever their socio-demographic characteristics most respondents met online friends in offline time.

4.3 Connectedness

Positive experiences in joining MSM cyber networks were quite similar across respondent groups such as making friends, exploring the MSM network, support in self-acceptance, building self-confidence, getting more knowledge about the MSM culture and social activities. Most of the respondents who lived alone stated to have more friends from MSM chat room community. Some respondents who lived with their family pointed to MSM chat rooms as their social outlet because of stigma and social control they had to hide their MSM identity for the family and the society.

Common negative experiences across groups were breaking confidentiality and misuse of information, the use of fake profiles, cyber bullying, hijacking boyfriends, and sex driven dating. However, misuse of information and cyber bullying was more common in the younger age group.

Table 1. Lived and mediated realities on connectedness

4.4 Social support

Frequently cited forms of social support included: sharing of information including information on health issues and MSM friendly service providers, sharing of feelings, finding job opportunities, finding shelter with roommates, and financial support. Financial support has to be understood as the common practice in Southeast Asia to share resources among friends in times of need. In addition, some also referred to occasional patron-client relations. When it came to learning about being a MSM similar themes surfaced across respondent subgroups such as discovering the subculture, getting acquainted with the lingo, finding out about cruising places, learning that one is not alone but that there is a whole MSM community out there, and realizing that the MSM cyber networks create access to information. As a result they could share their feelings, communicate with peers, learn to accept themselves, encounter groups they fit in, and find romantic partners.

Table 2. Lived and mediated realities on social support

4.5 Norms and values

Across respondents' subgroups, common factors adversely affecting the practice of safe sex were: condom availability, feeling ashamed to buy condoms, and the feeling that condoms adversely affect experiencing climax; being under influence of alcohol; and partner's preference to practice bareback (e.g. unprotected penetrative sex). Younger respondents particularly referred to a hot and painful sensation when using a condom, the sense of physical separation from their partner, and reduction of sensitivity leading to less pleasure as barriers to practicing safe sex. Furthermore safe sex practice was also challenged when in a romantic relationship. As pointed out by some respondents with a boyfriend, they didn't use condoms when they lived with their partner for reasons such as: clearance by medical check-up (testing negative for sexual transmitted infections), the intension to maintain a lifelong relationship, and mutual trust in the exclusiveness of the relationship. It was considered as insulting when one uses a condom with their boyfriend. At the same time most respondents across subgroups stated that it was not easy to develop exclusive committed relationships. This was explained as follows: because of the nature of MSM to engage in undiscriminating casual sex with multiple partners, a less restrained sex drive, the excitement involved in engaging in sex with new partners, difficulties in finding a like-minded partner, difficulties in negotiating an exclusive committed relationship between two men, the absence of legal binding systems, cultural and religious non-acceptance of MSM in Myanmar society, availability of dating partners facilitated by internet mediated networks, and the easy going nature of dating among men to men as compared to dating girls.

As for awareness about and use of recreational drugs, common recreational drugs listed among all respondents were alcohol and Viagra. Whereas poppers (alkyl nitrites), Yama (Amphetamine), cough suppressant (Dextomethaphan) and Sedora (an herbal formulation to induce and increase orgasm, and assist with lack of sexual desire) where mainly known among the more mature (age >26). Most of the younger respondents (18-25 years) were not aware about these recreational drugs.

Table 3. Lived and mediated realities on norms and values

4.6 Self-efficacy

Across respondents' subgroups it was felt that age difference does affect self-efficacy in relationships, however the direction of affects differed. For example some agreed that older partners have to follow younger partners because older partners were perceived to be disadvantaged and have to give-in to please the younger. Others disagreed and thought that the younger has to follow the older partner because of their ability to influence and act as role model and because of the local culture where younger friends respect older ones. Few discarded these views on age and explained that all depends on who is more dependent in nature in a relationship. Experience was seen across respondents' subgroups as more important in affecting self-efficacy in casual encounters and relationships. Most respondents believed that experienced partners can convince and lead the un-experienced partner using their

influence to persuade the other because their acquaintance with situations, feeling more confident and being familiar with the sequence of events, they can skillfully pass signals and messages or develop a convincing reasoning.

As to what extend sex role preferences among MSM may affect one's self-efficacy opinions varied proportionate across respondents >25.   Some believed that bottoms (receptive partners) are more likely to follow the wishes of their top partners (penetrative partners), whereas others joined the younger respondents (18-25 years) thinking this was not the case, explaining other conditions determining negotiation power in sexual encounters such as: perceived risk or the misconceptions on sex role preferences and distribution of power among partners. Like most aspects of human sexuality, it's not quite that simple to classify sex partners into tops and bottoms. Many gay men actually self-identify as "versatile," which means that they have no strong preference for either the penetrative or the receptive role, whereas for few the distinction does not even apply, because they lack any interest in anal sex and instead prefer different sexual activities.

As an old saying goes "money talks" is also applicable to Myanmar where large sections of the population remain economically vulnerable. Most respondents across subgroups explained that friends with little money always do whatever pleases their friends with plenty of money. Literally and metaphorically one "does not bite the hand that feeds you" because "baggers cannot be choosers" is until today common norm in Myanmar including its MSM community. Depending on the norms, values and preferences of those who have money this inequality might undermine self-efficacy among the economically vulnerable partner.

Table 4. Lived and mediated realities on self-efficacy

4.7 Interpersonal dynamics

Not surprisingly older respondents (>25 years) were more likely employed and tended to have a longer history of having close friends in addition to their exclusive intimate relationship with a boyfriend. Whereas the MSM cyber networks provide opportunities to explore and establish initial contacts, close friendships were developed during offline time and were not necessarily preceded by online initiation. The latter was clear among those with a job (likely older), single and living with their family, whereas unemployed (likely younger) respondents found their close friends more online. Occasionally however, forces of social control do hinder the development of close MSM friendships.

Most respondents, across subgroups, shared personal and intimate information with their close friends. However some respondents >25 years stated not to share everything to their close friends because some information did not fit to be shared or did not fit the views of their close friends or their close friend was considered too young to understand. Nearly all respondents from the younger group (18-25 years) shared all personal and intimate information with their close friends. In addition to discovering the community as a whole, these interpersonal encounters seem to stimulate a more positive self-esteem. Sexuality although important, is a rather narrow base to unite people. Therefore conflicting norms and values are inherent to be experienced when engaging in interpersonal encounters, which became clear throughout the interviews when respondents elaborated on disappointing experiences. In general, across respondents' subgroups joint activities were similar such as: hanging out, visiting entertainment places, sharing information, participating in events, and engaging in casual sex including group sex. Clubbing and hanging out were more common in the older group (>25 years). Those with a job (and likely >25years) reported more to engage in group sex activities.

Table 5. Lived and mediated realities on interpersonal dynamics

4.8 Community dynamics

As expected those above 25 years of age and employed showed a longer history of using MSM chat rooms. The main purposes of using MSM chat rooms across all respondents were exploring member profiles, cruising for dates, findings friends, and occasionally use cyber networks to promote their business. Access to MSM cyber networks did

impact the lives of its members. As for the younger respondents (18-25 years) key impacts were: breaking out of isolation, learning to accept oneself, growing confidence about ones' own worth, become aware of the existence of a local and global MSM community, develop a circle of likeminded friends, being able to disclose ones feelings and worries with peers, and learning MSM sub-cultural norms, values, behaviors, and appearances. As members grow older the initial excitement in discovering the MSM cyber community made place for disappointment and frustration. Widespread promiscuity undermines trust in longing for and developing a stable relationship. MSM cyber networks start to be perceived as a threat to ones' exclusive intimate relationship. For some the cyber learned distrust created a shadow of looming loneliness as age progresses.

Dealing with conflict in cyberspace is guarded by website rules and procedures. Whereas most respondents reported to skip reading website rules and procedures, those who lived alone seemed to be more aware about it. Those MSM cyber network respondents without a job (and likely 18-25 years) seemed to make more use of the procedure to block certain members in case of conflict; whereas older respondents (> 25 years) tended to be more diplomatic by recognizing potential conflicts and or preventing conflicting situations.

In terms of sharing information, the younger group focused on exchanging profiles and social activities whereas the older and employed respondents moved beyond this by sharing information on education, health, human right issues, and gay detainment issues in Myanmar. Perceptions on interactions in cyber space can be broadly classified into positive and negative views. Whereas younger users were more positive and the older group (> 25 years) was more negative. Older respondents often with a job perceived interactions as mainly sex driven. Those respondents, who were single, perceived interactions as positive; whereas those in a relationship had mixed feelings. Webcam assisted sex and group sex activities were only found in the older age group (> 25 years) and living with others, whether family or friends.

Table 6. Lived and mediated realities on community dynamics

5. Discussion

In the era of globalization Internet created a whole new world. The introduction of cyber social networking expands the lives and activities of people all over the world including those of the marginalized such as MSM. In this new world there is no geographical separation and there are no borders, and MSM across cultures are encouraged to participate and contribute drawing on their experiences and resources. In cyberspace, actions and reactions are essentially instantaneous, which makes Internet mediated social networks gratifying and attractive. In this article we touched on both the positive and negative aspects of the influence of cyber social networks on MSM in an otherwise isolated society such as Myanmar.

Participatory observation (Atkinson, 1998) contributed greatly to exploring how cyber social networks influence Myanmar MSM in developing self-identity and shaping their lifestyles. Especially for strongly stigmatized sub-cultures in Asian societies such as MSM in Myanmar, it is crucial to get to know the sub-culture and establish trust. In absence appropriate insights about subculture norms and values it is impossible not only to establish that trust but it also becomes unattainable to explore personal and intimate feelings, experiences, and perceptions. It would be of interest to further explore identity of self and how that develops. Future study on these would provide a welcome addition.

Selection of participants attracted mainly higher educated respondents. As discussed by Warf (2001) this might be because of lack of access because of limitations in internet service coverage, computer illiteracy, or economic factors among lower educated MSM in Myanmar? The fact that most of the respondents had a tertiary education level might have affected findings for example in terms of lifestyle, interpersonal and group interactions, and or life-skills. Therefore caution needs to be observed in the interpretation of findings. Finally, it is recognized that findings cannot be generalized to the Myanmar MSM cyber community as a whole however outcomes can provide useful inputs for further study.

Although it could be argued that the use of a theoretical framework might restrict richness of data, as discussed by Mays and Pope (1995), we believe that data collection and analysis guided by a social network analysis framework (Bond, 2003) proved to be instrumental and contributes to scientific rigor and reproducibility. An important observation was the anxiety and reservations among respondents towards audio-recording of interviews. The uneasy feelings were clearly rooted in the obscurity surrounding the MSM community in a repressive socio-political and legal context in Myanmar. Hence, as discussed by Halcomb and Davidson (2006) traditional note-taking had to be applied to respect respondents' feelings.

Internet has become a popular meeting platform (Benotsch, Kalichman & Cage, 2002; Klein, 2009). This was illustrated by our findings indicating that many respondents also used non-specific cyber social utilities such as "Facebook", "Tagged" or "Friendster". The use of international sites brought exposure to new concepts, values, cultures and lifestyles for them. Online dating and offline mating is common practice among MSM (Benotsch, Kalichman & Cage, 2002; Bull et al., 2004; Garofalo et al., 2007), generally our findings were in line with this inference, but in addition our study indicated a clear sense of being in search of identity and community in the context of Myanmar. This is in agreement with Pujazon-Zazik and Park's (2010) conclusion that social networks offer a social outlet for MSM by feeling less isolated, feeling more confident in self acceptance and coming out, and learning about MSM subcultures. However, along comes the risk introduced by a promiscuous lifestyle and unsafe sex practices.

Perceptions on patron-client relationships among Myanmar participants in our study were also discussed by Jackson (1995) and Murray (1999) among Thai MSM. In Southeast Asia, these patron-client relationships can be found across intra-generational and inter-generational relationships. Sometimes, patron-client relations become corrupted so called 'Chu Sar' in Myanmar language (a phrase for which no literally translation exists), in which the client takes opportunity to become the claim holder in the arrangement. Practical support seems to play a role to maintain intimate relationship. Some respondents in this study indicated that sufficient support can provide the glue to sticking together even with straight guys (clients). Economic hardship does seem to play a role for straight guys seeking support from MSM. The patron-client arrangement then becomes a bridge between MSM and heterosexual communities. Our findings did not support the argument that more masculine or older partners play often a dominant role more than the feminine or younger partners (amfAR, 2009). However, patron-client relationships are complex and therefore should be viewed with care. A common perception is that patrons (the powerful) have the upper hand in the power-balance more than clients (the often vulnerable dependent) in MSM. Indeed patrons represent besides power, social status and wealth also desire and need for affection; whereas clients commonly represent the attractive qualities of youth besides wants and need for protection and support. Besides the 'haves' at both sides in the relationship there is also the degree of balance between desires, wants and needs. This complex interplay drives the power balance between the young (clients) and the older (patrons) in MSM relationships.

As discussed in earlier work (Ogilvie et al., 2008), promiscuity seemed also quite common among Myanmar MSM cyber network members. Our findings indicated that safe sex practice was regularly challenged by multiple factors e.g. life skills, power in relationships, exclusiveness of the relationship, and substance use such as alcohol, alkyl nitrites (poppers) and amphetamines (Yama), which confirmed earlier findings (Amirkhanian et al., 2009; Garofalo, 2007; Rosser et al., 2009; Schnarrs et al., 2010)

Finally, as argued by the World Health Organization (2011), our findings illustrated that MSM cyber social networks could be appropriate channels for MSM social and health intervention programs. The key question is 'how'? Social workers and public health professionals need to get acquainted with the subculture and learn to think outside the box.

6. **Conclusion**

In a society were cultural, social and legal oppression of MSM is still powerful prevalent, cyber social networking offers an outlet to discover sexual identity, learn self-acceptance, build confidence in coming-out, reduce isolation,

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seek peer support, and addressing needs for intimate relationships. Furthermore internet mediated MSM networks open a window to the world beyond national boundaries and imposed embargoes, fostering discovery of unfamiliar norms and values, subcultures, and lifestyles. At the same time cyber social networking seems to step up the practice of promiscuity and the risks associated with casual sex encounters with multiple partners. There is also the exposure to recreational substances previously unfamiliar with. Although MSM social cyber network users were aware of risks for HIV and STI there is a need for building life-skills especially among the younger users. Understanding the Myanmar MSM community is crucial in developing internet-based health promotion interventions. Such interventions might enhance not only accessibility of Myanmar MSM to health information and self-realization but also access to MSM friendly health services delivery points.

Our study yielded various hypotheses and further study is required to address following questions: Do the higher educated and economically less vulnerable Myanmar MSM mainly benefit from access to social networking utilities? Does cyber social networking offer an outlet for powerful cultural, social and legal oppression among Myanmar MSM? What is the impact of access to international cyber MSM social networks on norms, values, and lifestyles among Myanmar MSM? Finally, what are the needs for building life-skills and health information among Myanmar MSM social cyber networks users?

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Table 1. Lived and mediated realities on connectedness

Dimensions	Illustrations
Positive	" . . . MSM networks broaden up our lives especially for the hidden MSM. I accept myself more and learn MSM terms. I got new experience and I can share knowledge with them . . . " (ID18)[a]
	" . . . I have learned more about human nature. My language becomes more fluent as I used the international chat room rather than the local one. My life style, dress style and thinking change into the international style. I became braver because I knew my way forward . . . " (ID3)
Negative	" . . . I am disappointed that people mainly focus on sex. Some are interested in nothing apart from sex. Some have weak morality. Even though someone is a friend's boyfriend, they try to chase the guy. It is complicated . . . " (ID15)
	" . . . I experienced cyber bullying. I showed my private parts in a video. Some guy recorded it and uploaded it on his profile site. Though it didn't contain my face, I knew that it was me. It made me embarrassed and annoyed . . . " (ID26)

Table-1 offers a selection of verbatim statements on lived and mediated realities of connectedness.
[a] ID: refers to respondents' identification number

Table 2. Lived and mediated realities on social support

Dimensions	Illustrations
Emotional support	" . . . The nature of support comes from friendship. When I visit to my friend he treats me with food because he likes cooking. This is very warmly we are as brothers . . . " (ID 2)
Informational support	" . . . Gayromeo website support free downloads for members from restricted countries. There is a program about homophobia. You can know MSM activities around the world and gay friendly places around the world . . . " (ID21)
Instrumental support	" . . . If someone leaves home, his friends find a place for temporary stay. Sometimes, they lend money or give clothes . . . " (ID 10)
	" . . . I heard that some cute guys are "chu sar"[a]. I met that kind of guy. He is an experienced one. He treated me skillfully and asked what he wanted. This happened when I started to use the website, so I like him very much. I didn't support my next two boyfriends . . . " (ID11)
Appraisal	" . . . We can share our feelings such as being heartbroken which one cannot talk about in the family. We can learn that we are not alone . . . " (ID19)
	" . . . For me, my friends gave me psychological support when I was in trouble . . . " (ID7)

Table-2 offers a selection of verbatim statements on lived and mediated realities of social support.
[a] Patron client relationship: a mutually obligatory arrangement between an individual who has authority, social status, wealth, or some other personal resource (the patron) and another person who benefits from his or her support or influence (the client). "Chu sar" is the Myanmar term referring to a client who skillfully turns the power-balance to maximize benefit from the relationship.

Table 3. Lived and mediated realities on norms and values

Dimensions	Illustrations
Normative	" . . . I think it is easy (to apply safe sex). Many people know about how disease is transmitted when having sex. I think most of them accept it . . . " (ID11)
	" . . . I have no experience with drugs. One should not get involved with this practice . . . " (ID17)
Actual	" . . . But, I think some serious people do not like condom because they feel condom separates them from their partner. If they are aroused and eager to have sex and a condom is not at hand, they do not use it . . . " (ID16)
	" . . . There is slogan in the local MSM community, the heart is faithful, but an anus is not . . . " (ID5)
	" . . . Finding and maintaining an exclusive intimate relation is difficult. There are many websites to chat and date. If you chat with five people, you can get three to date . . . " (ID22)
	" . . . I have tried poppers once, given by a man who came back from Singapore. I didn't like it. I also heard about a drug that prolongs the intercourse . . . " (ID12)
	" . . . If you are drunk and horny and you have no condom, it is not easy to maintain safe sex. It is easy to practice safe sex at day time. It is not easy at night for example when going to the club . . . " (ID23)

Table-3 offers a selection of verbatim statements on lived and mediated realities of norms and values.

Table 4. Lived and mediated realities on self-efficacy

Dimension	Illustrations
Interpersonal power balances	" . . . According to the culture, we respect older persons. More senior friends can also spend more money and or support the younger ones . . . " (ID10)
	" . . . Experienced persons can persuade. For example, if an experienced person said condom is not good and it can reduce the sensation, an inexperienced person might believe it and follow . . . " (ID19)
	" . . . I do not think that age or experiences are everything. Even though inexperienced, if a person has read about things and gained knowledge, he can manage not to be influenced . . . " (ID6)

Table-4 offers a selection of verbatim statements on lived and mediated realities of self-efficacy.

Table 5. Lived and mediated realities on interpersonal dynamics

Dimensions	Illustrations
Context	" . . . We know each other since we were at the university . . . " (ID7)
	" . . . I know my closest gay friends from the MSM websites . . . " (ID4)
	" . . . I do not have close gay friends. Most of them look like feminine. I am afraid my family knows if I go with them. I cannot spend much time with them. My family is very strict. I have to do many things against my interest to maintain peace at home even to make straight friends . . . " (ID11)
Connection	" . . . What I share depend on the type of friend. It is impossible to share everything to one person . . . " (ID20)
	" . . . We share most of our experiences including boyfriend issues, but we do not have sex . . . " (ID15)
Communication	" . . . I'm looking for partners, viewing profiles, reading updates, news and forum discussions, share g-mail addresses . . . " (ID28)
Support	" . . . I became more open. I got a more positive view on MSM. The traditional social views I accepted earlier reduced. I learned to accept MSM as a natural behavior. In the past, I was confused about myself, but now I accept myself . . . " (ID30)
Norms/value conflicts	" . . . One of my ex-partner posted our couple photo in the website without my permission. I informed the website admin and they deleted it. When I face someone who chats rudely, I block them . . . " (ID7)
	" . . . Gossiping is not good. They criticize on people's sex role like he was bottom with me, and now he is top with you like that. Some are proud to make others broken-heart. There are no real values in the MSM community. They do not search for it. Sometimes, if you change friends with the expectation to build friendship based on good values, the new friends again show the same behaviors . . . " (ID5)
Joint activities	" . . . We join social activities such as going to the self-help MSM club. They gave the MSM training and I attended." (ID4)
	"We love online chatting, drinking together, hunting boys and have 3-some sex . . . " (ID13)

Table-5 offers a selection of verbatim statements on lived and mediated realities of interpersonal dynamics.

Table 6. Lived and mediated realities on community dynamics

Dimensions	Illustrations
Characteristics	" . . . It has been six years since I discovered MSM internet networks. I used Friendster. I joined Myanmar Homo Society in 2008. I also used Myanmar Gay Education, and I have a Facebook account which is only for my MSM friends . . . " (ID4)
	" . . . I saw the website used by the user who sat beside me. I memorized the website name and used it . . . " (ID26)
Context	" . . . I use inter MSM sites daily. I mainly use the g-talk in which I add MSM friends. I also use other websites if there is privacy . . . " (ID26)
	" . . . I visit MSM websites about three times a week. I also used Facebook. I add friends from Myanmar Homosexual Society to my Facebook account and g-talk . . . " (ID 8)
Connection	" . . . We share our profiles, gossip news, and other information such as human rights and health information such as condom usage, better positions of intercourse, HIV, or friendly health services . . . " (ID4)
Support and exchange	" . . . We can get the up-to-date information and share experience with other MSM. We can learn about acceptance MSM in the community. They can also discover reasons why people deny their identity or why persons cannot accept themselves such as afraid of being rejected by family, employees or colleagues . . . " (ID13)
Communication	" . . . I explain my viewpoints well. If people disagree and continue to argue, I block them . . . " (ID5)
	" . . . If I get into conflict with a member I call them and discuss. Sometimes, I meet them and solve the problem face to face . . . " (ID4)
Policies and norms	" . . . There are common chat room rules, but I do not know exactly what these entail . . . " (ID22)
	" . . . I think there is no real common rule. I saw some under 18 even though it was announced that those below 18 are prohibited. There is no one to check if they are actually under 18 or not. They can pretend to be more than 18 and use the website. I saw a 14 year old boy in the website . . . " (ID7)
Activities	" . . . Online we are dating, chatting, upload photos, gossip, join forums, blogs and debate, follow beauty contests, and counsel each other. Offline we do mostly clubbing, attend events, or visit bars . . . " (ID2)
	" . . . Online we are gossiping, sharing life experiences, sex experiences, and partner experiences. Offline we are chatting, changing partners, and having group sex . . . " (ID26)

Table-6 offers a selection of verbatim statements on lived and mediated realities of community dynamics.