# Deliberative Communication in the Electronic Age: A Rhetorical Approach to ICTs in post-apartheid South Africa

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## Abstract

South Africa as a newcomer to e-communication provides a test to evaluate ICTs (information and communication technologies) as communicative instruments in a consolidating democracy with a reasonably good set of e-readiness technologies as defined by the United Nations 2005 Report on the matter. The article tests governmental legal commitment to e-democracy, by looking at three sites, those of the South African Independent Electoral Commission, the African National Congress, the South African Government Communication and Information System, as well as examples of commercial online forums.

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## Introduction[1]

An optimistic generalization regarding e-democracy would say that, with the public consolidation of the internet, democracies have gone online, public spheres have expanded into cyber space and electronic networks are contributing to a more informed and politically active citizenry[2]. Rhetoricians take the long view, however, and mindful of what Aristotle calls the prudential value of public deliberation and of choices made in formulating policies through an open contest of opinions, they tend to view ICTs (information and communication technologies) as communicative instruments too often detached from what democratic life ought to be: dissent by argument, and the effectiveness of dissent in effectuating policy changes.

The question addressed in this paper concerns the sort of deliberative intervention ICTs accommodate in the life of a specific democracy, South Africa, and whether they provide the kind of information and tools necessary to understand and formulate critical arguments and opinions. South Africa, as a newcomer to e-governance, e-communication and, as it is called, e-democracy, provides a test of choice. Our contention is that the results proposed here are by and large valid for similar democracies in Africa, in order to assess the deliberative value of ICTs, and not merely their communicational means and effects.

But first, let us turn to the main tenets of current literature on the subject. One of the main challenges posed by ICTs in the context of e-democracy is their potential to provide a massive volume of information which has to be structured, managed and be made accessible to "everyone".[3] This thinking is best exemplified by Anna Malina who contends that "ICTs can provide a utopian ideal, offering new possibilities for decentralised participation, democracy and citizenship." Moreover, ICTs can "support extreme decentralisation of power."[4]

Coleman ascertains in turn that "the way in which citizens in society deliberate is as significant for a functioning democracy as the way in which they cast votes."[5] He lists a number of interactive communication technologies that do "possess the potential capacity to facilitate direct deliberation in ways that can connect citizens" to otherwise remote institutions, such as Parliament, Government departments and services. Among these are "virtual policy space," online policy proposals, online consultation, public involvement in Select Committees, online conferences, interactive information, online evaluation, reliable online information, inclusive public deliberation, education for democratic citizenship and links between citizens and their representatives. For Coleman, the most important question to answer is "what kind of political channels need to be created to enable ICTs to become sources of public empowerment" in order to achieve the goal of direct public deliberation.

Indeed, both Dahlberg and Dean concur that a concept of the public sphere is the most significant starting point to the study of online deliberation. Recognising that research focusing on the question whether online communicative practices "actually constitute the public sphere" are still exploratory and lack a normative model of a public sphere, Dahlberg systematically groups together methodological work conducted and refers to it as "phase one". His research aims at leading the way toward the next phase. In order to do so, he conceives of six "normative conditions of the public sphere": "thematisation and reasoned critique of problematic validity claims", "reflexivity", "ideal role taking", "sincerity", "inclusion and discursive equality" and "autonomy from state and economic power."[6]

Dean's definition, taken from Habermas, reads as follows: "[...] the public sphere is the site of liberal democratic practice. It is the space within which people deliberate over matters of

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common concern, matters that are contested and about which it seems necessary to reach a consensus."[7] Norms guiding the public sphere are "equality, transparency, inclusivity, rationality" and the actors making "public use of reason" meet "face to face according to legal or rational deliberative procedures in order to come to agreement on a matter of national interest."[8] And while disagreement is inevitable, agreement on the manner in which issues ought to be deliberated and that they should be subjected to rational scrutiny is what holds the public sphere together. Although access to information has certain democratising and egalitarian aspects, Dean maintains that "[...] precisely those technologies that materialise a promise of full political access and inclusion drive an economic formation whose brutalities render democracy worthless for the majority of people".[9] Consequently, "the technologies, the concentrations of corporate power, the demands of financial markets, the seductions of the society of the spectacle that rule in and as the name of the public have created conditions anathema to democratic governance."[10] Exploring the potential contribution ICTs can make to strengthen democracy, Hague's and Loader's hypothesis is that "if ICTs are to play a significant role in the achievement of strong democracy, then they must be grounded in community networks."[11]

In keeping with this accepted wisdom, and tensions, truly a stock of rhetorical commonplaces on the role, pertinence, effectiveness and the efficiency of the ICTs and the possible effects of unregulated ICTs, the South African government drafted the *Electronic and Communications Bill* in 2002. Its purpose is to "provide for the facilitation and regulation of electronic communications and transactions; to provide for the development of a national e-strategy for the Republic; to promote *universal access* to electronic communications and transactions; to prevent abuse of information systems; to encourage the use of *e-government* services; and to provide for matters connected therewith[12] **[our emphasis].** Furthermore, the Bill states its objects as "to enable and facilitate electronic transactions in the public interest, and for that purpose to- […] promote universal access, promote e-government services and electronic transactions with public and private bodies and institutions."[13] The catch phrase in the government's rhetoric about internet services is "universal access." It is estimated that there are around 1.5 to 2 million Internet users in South Africa. The number is paltry, hence the urgency with which the government preaches universal access, especially among the disadvantaged communities. This then begs the question: How can the South African government advocate the use of electronic communication to disseminate information and encourage public deliberation given that only a very few have access to this equipment? Indeed, the goal to achieve what in the West is referred to as "citizen-to-citizen deliberation"[14] still remains elusive in South Africa. Democratic communication is at stake in this debate.

We propose to test these assertions against four examples: the South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) website; the African National Congress (ANC) website; the South African Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) website; online forums in South Africa.

## The South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) Website.

The first link that one finds when opening the home page is that which details the nature of the IEC, what it is. The vision and mission of the IEC are stated. This is a rhetorical moment. The vision statement is stated as follows: "to strengthen constitutional democracy through the delivery of free and fair elections in which every voter is able to record his or her informed choice."[15] The IEC perceives constitutional democracy as something virtuous and worth strengthening and it is of the view that without its (the IEC) existence, this noble goal cannot be achieved.

The term "delivery" is not accidental in the South Africa context. In effect, there has been efforts to treat democracy as a commodity whose efficient delivery is as crucial as delivering a service to a customer. The next words that stand out in the Mission Statement are "to promote and safeguard democracy." Promotion means positive action, proactive action. The IEC sets its task of preserving democracy through doing acts which are deemed to be essential to the promotion of democracy. Voter literacy, access to key information and registration campaigns can be seen as endeavours to promote democracy. In "safeguarding" democracy, the IEC posits itself as a custodian of constitutional democracy. The very assumed independence of the IEC is a step enough in safeguarding democracy. The tasks that the IEC discharges, including running the website, can be seen as part of safeguarding democracy. Safeguarding pertains to protecting some thing from external danger. The danger may be posed by the public or by the government itself. It is not clear from what or whom the IEC is safeguarding democracy.

Apart from the rhetoric contained in IEC's statements about itself, there is also a link to the news which deals with the registration and voting process. The author of the statement, Advocate Pansy Tlakula, assumes the task of explaining how a "true democracy" works. She is thus making or "creating" a distinction between a "true democracy" and a "false democracy." A "true democracy" is defined as when the people in it make contributions. The opening of the statement has promises of a radical democracy or even that of a participatory democracy. It is only when voting is referred to that it becomes clear what "playing an active part," making oneself "heard" and "making a contribution" mean, registering and voting. The statement has thus a misleading opening. It is also pedagogic because the author assumes that she is addressing herself to an ignorant public which does not know what a "true democracy" is.[16]

The shortcomings of the IEC website stem from the fact that IEC sticks with the status quo, as formatted by the constitution. This simply means that the extent to which it can promote democracy is limited to what already exists. The IEC is not the panacea for more radical democracy or direct participation. ICTs are seen as agents which will bring to life a more participatory society where real deliberative discourse is feasible. The IEC website does not take advantage of the possibilities brought about by ICTs. The website does not create a deliberative forum for the citizenry. Thus, the IEC falls short of its goal of promoting democracy. The idea of the public forum currently dominates the discourse around ICTs. Consequently, it would have been even more ideal if the IEC brought the institutions of democracy to an accessible public forum, using the internet as the medium. What is lacking in the IEC website is interaction between the public and the institutions of governance.

## The African National Congress Website.

The ANC considers itself as both the entity that heads a democratic government and a democratic political party in its day to day intra-party operations. This claim finds some substance in the response given us by the ANC's Communications Coordinator in charge of the ANC website, Mr Steyn Speed. To the question: "How crucial to the ANC is the use of online media?" Mr Speed gave an interestingly earnest and reflective answer. Instead of jumping into the bandwagon and hail the internet without further consideration, he reflected on the contingency in which the internet exists for the ANC and the general public in Africa:

> The ANC has always seen online media as complementing its other forms of communication. Although the internet has grown dramatically over the last decade, it is still only accessed by a minority of South Africans, especially those with greater resources.
> The ANC therefore relies on online media to provide a "back-up" to other media- such as printed journals, public meetings, word of mouth, the mainstream press and- at election time- radio, print and outdoor advertising. It can also be used to "facilitate" broader communication by providing those with internet access information and resources which are then distributed in other forms.[17]

An impression given by the above response is that rather than being the main catalyst of new democratization, the internet is just one among many other important forms of communication. The reason given for the lack of primacy of the internet is the issue of access. Thus, in the ANC context, the internet has not yet occupied the central role it is supposed to occupy. Mr Speed lists other equally competent forms of communication which have their merits. The internet at this stage plays a "complementing" role. It has not yet assumed primacy. The realities, as it were, harbour the wide spread and optimum use of the internet. Its full potential is still to be realized. It also seems that the non-reliance on the internet by the ANC is also ideological. The internet is still identified with a certain category of people and the ANC's non reliance on it reflects this. But how true is this? It is anybody's guess!

That aside, a quick glance in the ANC website reveals some continuity with the pre-1999 era. However, upon careful scrutiny one uncovers not the continuation with the past, but, as Marx holds in *Eighteen Brumaire*, its caricature. Some of the contents in the website are rather nostalgic of old times long gone. For instance, there is a link called *Umrabulo*.[18] The website offers the historical origin of this vernacular term:

> Umrabulo was used as a term to inspire political discussion and debate on Robben Island. In the true spirit of the ANC, this concept is being *revived* to assert our fundamental adherence to the necessity for enriched discussion at all levels of organization. In this way, the programmes that we implement will be based on solid understanding of options and our principles **[our emphasis].[19]**

Be that as it may, one can hardly see it at work in the ANC's website. There is, indeed, deliberation however interactive discussion is nowhere present. Can this statement, the *revival* of the culture of discussion, be construed as the acknowledgement on the part of the ANC that the halcyon era of robust discussion has withered and will have to be revived? This tempts one to think of the recent assertions by the ANC partners in the alliance, namely the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), that robust discussion and consultation which once existed in the ANC are now a thing of the past.

Upon opening the site, the first thing one sees is not the ANC paraphernalia watch celebrating ten years of ANC rule, but a link to the Act Against Abuse, 16 Days of Activism Campaign. Here, party interest and state programme overlap. The state-backed 16 Days of Activism is also endorsed by the party.[20] On the same home page, there is a mug shot of the President of the country and the ANC, Thabo Mbeki. The link on the mug shot directs one to the Letter from the President. This is the most significant link in the entire website, the most topical. There are also some links to ANC publications and a union- affiliate, COSATU, celebrating 50 years of existence. The site thus focuses on current and topical matters. There is however a rich array of archival documents, ranging from ceremonial addresses to policy

documents.

The site also serves as a trouble shooter to current conjectures. The most divisive issue to date has been the succession battle to the ANC presidency. The issue has been so divisive to the extent that the ANC had to undertake steps to maintain cohesion in the party. Accordingly, there is a featured short message which reads: "There is one ANC." The browser is then directed to the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) statement on the matter. The content list in the *Umrabulo* link is quite exhaustive, from "Unity and diversity in the ANC" to "Micro-finance for poverty alleviation" or "The relevance of Pan-Africanism today".

In this respect, the Readers' Forum is not the only platform for the public to vent their opinion. The home page of the site has a link named Feed back where readers are encouraged to send commentary to the movement. In the link, there is what is called the African National Congress Comment form which enables the reader to send commentary ranging from views about the website to the ANC as a movement, its policies etc. This is, indeed, an interactive intervention. The leadership gets to know what the readers think about the movement. The downside of this Feed back link is that the commentaries are not displayed on the website. Despite this, the link encourages interactivity and perhaps some of the comments are given consideration. As we have seen, *Mayibuye's* Readers" forum by far had a better mechanism for interactivity between the readers and the leaders.

*Umrabulo*, with documents made available on the site, including Readers" forum, can be subscribed to. However, there are statements and documents accessible to all users. Here, the most pressing issues are discussed. This is the home of deliberation. The number of documents kept here are substantial. Thus the website has an edge over hardcopy medium. *Umrabulo* encourages reader participation: "*Umrabulo* welcomes contributions from readers. Contributions may be in response to previous article or may raise new issues. Contributions may be sent to the address below (www.anc.org.za)."

The failure of the website to have interactive content owes mainly to the fact that very few people have access to ICTs in South Africa. Otherwise, the platforms provided on the website would have been fully exploited. Another reason for failure is the fact that a culture of earnest and robust debate has withered in the ANC due to the new politics of governance, administration and bourgeois eclecticism. There is less and less criticism, dissuasion and exhortation. The purport of *Umrabulo*, as it were, is to revive robust discussion in the ANC. Revivals are often half measures and they never really succeed in conjuring the past. The past gets caricatured.[21]

## The South African Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) Website.

In GCIS's own words, its vision is to help "to meet the communication and information needs of government and the people, to ensure a better life for all."[22] Further objectives of GCIS are "to provide leadership in government communications and ensure that the public is informed of government's implementation of its mandate." It also ascribes itself a role in the effort of nation-building as it contributes "to the process of further consolidating our democracy and taking the country onto a higher growth and development path." The government communicator renders services to government itself, the media, the international community as well as the public. "These services are based on the GCIS" strategic objectives of ensuring that the voice of government is heard, fostering a more positive communication environment, having a clear understanding of the public's information needs and

government's communication needs, setting standards for government communication."[23]

In order to describe the GCIS web site, it is useful to look at the site"s spatial arrangement, the use of its visual features and the language used and how these three elements interact with each other. On top of each page is a beam with the coat of arms, "GCIS" "Government Communication and Information System" as well as set below, in smaller letters, "*Bua* - the right to know." In the centre of the page are three images, on the left half of the page set in a half circle, seven small circles, arranged like moons around a planet, each with a subject which can be clicked on (About GCIS; Services; Documents and publications; Speeches and statements; News and events; Links; FAQs).

In line with the three visuals at the centre of the page are links to "BuaNews online" and the "Contact directory" (top of the images) and four links to "Multi-purpose Community Centres", "South African Government Online", "International Marketing Council" and "South Africa.info" (bottom). Finally on the right side of the page under the topic "What's New" varying number of items are listed, bringing together policy documents, tenders and vacancies, government announcements. These are listed according to date and can go back up to seven months. Above the "What's New" section is a "Search" field option.

Although they do not dominate the site in terms of proportionality, the images clearly draw attention. In the first one are three teenage boys, standing close together, one leaning over his friend, who is paging a book. In the background is a building that looks like a school. On the far right of this triptych is a photograph of President Mbeki surrounded by children. He is dressed casually in a polo shirt, his left hand is above the children's heads, his right is joined with the hands of a number of kids all looking up to him. Besides Mbeki and the children, there are several officials in the background, overlooking this jovial scene. In between these people images is a shot of a modern building, the GCIS headquarter in Pretoria. The images featured in the small icons predominantly contain symbols of means of communication (book covers, camera and radio).

The two images with learners and children visually argue for education and communication. What is important to note, however, is that the image of the GCIS building is in the middle, it frames this argument or spatially controls it. This creates a tension with the fact that the Internet debunks notions of territoriality and space. The dominance of children and absence of "the people" furthermore begs the question as to who is "the public"? The imagery of Mbeki, surrounded by children and his officials (disciples?) resembles murals in former Eastern Germany, promoting fraternity and solidarity with their overrepresentation of youth and children, or some religious cult leader.

The site is easy to navigate, plain and consistent in terms of layout (the green beam on top, index, Site map, Feedback and Vacancies set small below and a "Search" box on every page).

Following the hyperlink "Corporate strategy", a strategy spanning over three years (April 2004 to March 2007) can be found. It repeats the vision, mission and strategic objectives listed on the "About GCIS" page. A distinction is made between "the people" and "the public" as the vision aims to provide help in meeting "the communication and information needs of government and the people, to ensure a better life for all."[24] Government and the people are set equal, paraphrasing the well-known government slogan "building a people's contract". The notion of contract and partnership as well as unity outlined in the vision differs starkly from the mission. Here the key words are "leadership", which is to be assumed by the GCIS and "ensure that the public is informed of government's implementation of its mandate."[25]

Overall, objectives that foresee a broadening of information channels communicating government's vision and policies dominate and a concern with "packaging information". These range from "promoting awareness of the opportunities that democracy has brought and how to access them" to "providing leadership to government communication and better communication performance by the state". It is under this latter category, featured under "key issues" that a few bullet points cover the role of the "public", as "more effective tools of interaction with the public" are sought. Given that the "*Imbizo* approach of interactive governance" as well as "peer assessment by communicators and the public" are listed, it remains unclear what role is allocated to ICTs in this process of broadening and innovating the existing communication platforms. "The public" as it is sketched here, is an entity defined, conceptualised and framed by government communicators, comparable to an expert voice, which can be included but does not exist autonomously and act on its own accord. It is hardly a citizenry allotted a duty of deliberation, of agonistic deliberation.

The GCIS website is an overall informative site, as it comprises of a great variety of documents, publications, presentations, speeches, statements and interviews. But the way in which the GCIS site is structured and given its bias on providing and managing information leads to it not being conducive to deliberation taking place. In order to examine in how far it strengthens democracy, it would be necessary to analyse the MPCCs, their *imbizos* and what kind of dialogical and interactive space they offer. Dialogical space is limited and although users are able to give feedback, search the site and follow some links, the opportunities offered by ICTs are not fully and consistently utilised. The site has no language options (site only in English) and there is no apparent input from communities or citizens, which could have been made possible by an online forum or "online *imbizos*." Which leads us to out last case study.

## Online Forums in South Africa

It seems the best way to draw a ICTs-aware audience to governance websites is not only to provide e-mail hosting but to also provide content that will entice the reader to browse longer. This does not only involve entertainment - serious content such as news, political and social commentary does equally draw readership. Blogs, a recent deliberative phenomenon, were not considered as they were still underdeveloped at the time of conducting research. Three sites, mweb.co.za, ananzi.co.za and iafrica.com provide a varied set of services which complement e-mail hosting. For our purposes, what is of interest is the socio-political content of these three websites, in full awareness that such sites are designed to draw revenue and have to reflect the interests of users, mainly white, but growingly less so, predominantly male, middle class professionals. The most readily available services are news and political commentary. Like all media, the news content on the websites consists of topical issues which are deemed to be sensational. Other considerations of the users influence the content. Such consideration may involve, race class or gender. For instance the Jacob Zuma judicial tangles (then deputy-president of South Africa, laden with corruption and rape charges) drew interest from middle class professionals who are concerned with certain issues like the rule of law and moral decay.

In a nutshell, the study of online forums demonstrates that race, class and gender are matters which determine the content of the website, the topics, the forums and the user feedback. This is visible in the discourse used by the users and in the content or services provided by the sites.

## Mweb.co.za

There is a variation in how the three website are designed.  However the content is more or less the same.  The focus is on shopping, news, gambling and search engines.  Mweb, which is accessed at http://www.mweb.co.za has two lists of the kinds of features it provides, one list is for content and another is for services. The content list, listed alphabetically, consists of Afrikaans (where the site is in Afrikaans), Ancestry, Auctions, Blogs, Careers, Cartoons, Encarta, Entertainment, Finance, Gambling, Game Zones, Health, Learning and Library, Lottery, Motoring, News, Property, Sport, Travel, Weather, and Win.  This list of content contains most of the needs a middle class professional would like to indulge in.

The variety, of content is superior to that of magazines as it is frequently updated, is interactive and has more data.  The site also offers services, substantive services pertaining to the optimum use of the website.  Banking online is provided for and so is fax mailing and Broadband.  There is a variety of uses.  All these detain a user longer and this, in turn, generates revenue for the site from advertisers. There is an omnibus page on the news section that offers news on entertainment, sport movies etc.  The news, section, on the day the site was visited consisted of current affairs – the elections, floods, and the power outage in the Western Cape.

## Ananzi.co.za

Ananzi.co.za primarily serves as a search engine for local and international content.  It also offers e-mail services, available for free, and for pay upon upgrading.  It also offers services such as online gambling, online dating, entertainment news, online auctions and items for sale.  The news component thereof is outsourced to News 24.com.  The news content in all the three websites is outsourced.  This ensures proficiency and expediency.  mweb sources articles from the *Mail and Guardian* news group.  There is actually a direct link from mweb to the online version of *Mail and Guardian*.  Ananzi.co.za hosts a direct link to News 24.com. News 24.com is a leading news group in terms of scales, on the other hand *Mail and Guardian* is well esteemed by the intelligentsia. What is put as a feature in the three websites is determined by the needs of the users who fit a certain social profile.

## Iafrica.com

Political news in South Africa, apart from parochial events, is dominated by topics which focus on proficiency in government.  Upon coming to power, the African National Congress (ANC) has come to the spotlight, as far as efficiency is concerned. Prior to the collapse of the apartheid regime, there was a perception in the white right wing movement and in the general white population that a rule by a black government would see the country become a "Banana Republic."  A "Banana Republic" is a most degenerate and caricatured form of political rule or misrule imaginable.  The "Banana" phrase also had anthropological undertones. The main points of dispute and grievance have been issues such as corruption, crime, affirmative action, poor services, office incompetence etc.   These are genuine concerns and more of these should be raised. Yet, references to racial traits and attitude flow so often. This is a South African way of giving account of the issues. As Dubow tells us, this propensity shapes "a folkloric amalgam of popular beliefs and traditions in which the idea of human difference has been accepted as natural and incontestable".[26]

One chat-room forum illustrate this point. In an interesting exchange a user who identifies himself as "white" and the one who identifies himself as "black," the discourse of insult is

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reversed- the "black" user adopts the old South African discourse of insult whilst the "white" respondent assumes a pseudo-logical explanation of the power outages in Cape Town.[27] A contributor named Vusi made a commentary on iafrica.com defending the government and lambasting "white racists". This is a response to statements by, apparently, white users who put the blame of power cuts on black mismanagement.

The website invites users to comment on power outages and this turns into a series of racial slurs. In open forums all forms of comments abound, but the old stereotypes and the pessimistic "pub talk" is invoked as a rational explanation of politics in South Africa. One user named *Banana* sums up what he thinks of the power outages: "Just another sorry manifestation of our banana republic..."[28] The themes of scientific racism, as understood by Saul Dubow, are replayed again and again. These include notions about Blacks being "dumb," criminal and closer to animals and thus incompetent. This is the epitome of online forums discourse. The theme of the idiocy of the current government and thus of all black people in general as compared to Europeans is visited quite frequently - as the following one-liner suggests: "Germany? France? Anyone? Please invade us and deliver us from these idiots!!!"[29]

## Conclusion

The obvious fact is that South Africa's communication sphere witnesses a rapid change as, for the first time, citizens are able to hold some dialogue over a number of issues. In stark contrast with the culture of secrecy and censorship, and what we would call "limited information technology for the few in charge" that marked the pre-democratic public sphere (up to 1990), ICTs have played the role of an accelerator for democratization. As it happened, South Africa stepped at the same time in the traditional, press media-bound, democratic public sphere and the electronic public sphere. This simultaneity is rarely noted. It is worth, however, pondering.

Nonetheless, this advancement has an element of uneven development.[30] If we refer back to the 2005 United Nations report on government e-readiness which highlights a new way of thinking in the evaluation of e-democracy, by emphasizing the importance of e-inclusion, and e-empowerment of the citizens, which themselves rest on an "ability to utilize information and knowledge to broaden individual and collective choice" [31], the fact remains that South Africa ranks 58 in terms of e-readiness (191 countries were evaluated). These data, supported by other data,[32] show that South Africa's main problem is the lack of infrastructure and the relative low number of internet users. This is reflective not only of a quantitative difference between similar emerging democracies in their second phase of consolidation (such as Hungary, for instance),  but of a qualitative one – internet users are still in majority non-black. This is something to factor in, in terms of political campaigning, governance deliberation, and general access to virtual face-to-face online debate, a situation partially alleviated by "digital villages".  It is well-known that radio reaches deep in the rural areas and in the impoverished townships as well, while the internet does not. As Dean observes, "neo-democracy emphasises the importance of affecting outcomes"[33].

In sum, South Africa offers, as if under a magnifying glass, an excellent picture of the conflict between communication and deliberation in a consolidating democracy, whereby a managerial belief in releasing information about governance temporarily impedes the development of adversarial public deliberation. However, a second phase in the development of e-democracy, and of a credible, deliberative, public sphere utilizing ICTs, is likely to be that of agonistic blogging, in keeping with most recent developments in the USA and the

EU – provided that improved infrastructure, deregulation of service providers, lowering of access costs, and e-literacy are indeed made matters for public policy.

## Notes

[1] This paper is an outcome of a research project between the South African NRF and the research foundation of Hungary (project on e-democracy, 2004-2006). Projects leaders: Philippe-Joseph Salazar and Ildiko Kovats.

[2] Jankowski, Nicholas W. Introduction, *Javnost/The Public* 9/2 (issue on E- networks and Democratic Life), 2002, 5-6.

[3] See John Cavanaugh, "E-Democracy: Thinking About the Impact of Technology on Civic Life", *National Civic Review* 89/3, 2000, 229-234.

[4] Anna Malina, "Perspectives on Citizen Democratisation and Alienation in the Virtual Public Sphere", in B. N. Hague and B. D. Loader (eds.), *Digital Democracy*, Routledge, London, 1999, 24.

[5] Stephen Coleman, "Cutting out the Middle Man: From Virtual Representation to Direct Deliberation," in B. N. Hague and B. D. Loader (eds.), op. cit., 199.

[6] Lincoln Dahlberg, "Net-Public Sphere Research: Beyond the 'First Phase'", *Javnost-The Public* 11/1 (issue on Electronic Networks and Democracy), 2004, 27-44.

[7] Jodi Dean, " Why the Net is not a Public Sphere", *Constellations* 10/1, 2003, 95.

[8] Dean, op. cit., 96.

[9] Dean, op. cit., 102 and 103.

[10] Dean, op. cit., 104.

[11] Hague & Loader, *Digital Democracy*, xv.

[12] South African Government, Electronic Communications and Transactions Bill, http://www.info.gov.za/gazette/bills/2002/b8-02.pdf

[13] South African Government, ibid.

[14] Hague and Loader, op. cit., xv.

[15] Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa, http://www.elections.org.za/Vision.asp

[16] Ibid.

[17] Steyn Speed's response transcript [response to this investigator].

[18] *Umrabulo* is a Nguni word signifying the sipping of beverage, preferably communally. The egalitarian undertones are obvious. But the visual representation of it, a figure of a hand placed on the ear to emphasize listening, suggests the promotion of listening over talking: passive dialogue.

[19] See http://www.anc.org.za/

[20] The website was accessed in the December 2005 period and had not been updated at time of writing (March 2006).

[21] In this regard, see Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1926.

[22] See www.gcis.gov.za/about/strategy.html (accessed 15 March 2006)

[23] See http://www.gcis.gov.za/services/index.html (accessed 15 March 2006).

[24] See http://www.gcis.gov.za/about/strategy.html (accessed 26 February 2006).

[25] See http://www.gcis.gov.za/about/strategy.html (accessed 20 February 2006).

[26] *Saul Dubow, The Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1995, 5.*

[27] *There had been frequent power cut offs in the Western Cape due to the malfunctioning of the power suppliers. Some commentators blamed light failures on the incompetence of the black government and*

*its lack of foresight. Others blamed them on apartheid's exclusivist supply of power.*
[28] *Posted by Banana on February 23, 2006 at 10:20.* http://www.iafrica.com/news/forum/
forum10/915893.htm *(accessed 25 March 2005).*
[29] Posted by ANYONE on February 28, 2006 at 09:18. http://www.iafrica.com/news/
forum/forum10/929827.htm (accessed 25 March 2006).
[30] See Arnold De Beer and Hannelie Otto, An E-volution: Will African democracy go digital? – A South African case study baserv.uci.kun.nl/~jankow/Euricom/papers/
Beer%20&%20Otto.pdf
[31] http://www.unpan.org/egovernment5.asp
[32] Especially Péjout, "*Batho Pele* - Putting people first. A critical look at e-government in South Africa", paper delivered at the International Workshop on e-government, Centro Internazionale per la Cultura Scientifica, Anacapri (Naples), 20-22 May 2004. In press. And his, "The Communication of Communication. An Illustration: the South African Rhetorical Promotion of ICTs as Tools for Radical Democratisation", *Politikon - South African Journal of Political Studies*, 31/2, 2004, pp.185-199.
[33] Dean, op. cit., p. 110.

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