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**A Rhetorical Analysis of the South African Government Communication and Information System
(GCIS) Website**

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Key words: online deliberation; e-democracy; e-governance; Government Communication & Information System (GCIS);

Aim of this Study

With the emergence of the Internet, bureaucracies and democracies have gone online, public spheres expanded into cyber space and rhetoricians examining e-democracy seek to establish in what manner cyberspace has impacted on democratic life and to what degree electronic networks can contribute to a more informed and politically active citizenry¹. The primary aim of this analysis seeks to establish what kind of deliberative intervention the GCIS web site accommodates and whether it provides the kind of information and tools necessary to understand and formulate critical arguments and opinions. Bearing in mind that access to the Internet in South Africa is limited and that politically South Africa is undergoing a process of transformation, of nation-building, an analysis of the GCIS provides insight into government's vision and how it intends to achieve this.

Introduction

The Government Communication and Information System (thereafter GCIS), was launched on 18 May 1998. It followed the recommendations of the Comtask report, released in 1996 by an independent task team, which had been set up to study the communication challenges facing South Africa. Constitutionally,

¹ Jankowski, Nicholas W. 2002. Introduction, In *Javnost/The Public*, Vol.8, 5 & 6.

it is bound in to the Freedom of expression, which guaranties the '(a) freedom of the press and other media; (b) freedom to receive or impart information or ideas [...]'² and Access to Information:

- (1) everyone has the right of access to -
 - (a) any information held by the state; and
 - (b) any information that is held by another person that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights.
- (2) National legislation must be enacted to give effect to this right, and may provide for reasonable measures to alleviate the administrative and financial burden on the state.³

Both these rights are enshrined in the Constitution's Bill of Rights. In the GCIS' own word, its vision is to help 'to meet the communication and information needs of government and the people, to ensure a better life for all' (www.gcis.gov.za/about/strategy.html accessed:15.3.2006). Further objectives of the 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' (<http://www.gcis.gov.za/services/index.html> accessed: 15.3.2006).

At a workshop held in Tanzania in 2003, Joel Netshitenzhe, CEO of GCIS, gave insight into the challenges GCIS had to face at its inception: 'In South Africa, the establishment of our current communication system, including its structures and practices, took place against the backdrop of a legacy of government communications having been conceptualised and utilised to help institutionalise, perpetuate and deepen the ideology of apartheid' (www.gcis.gov.za/media/ceo/030318.htm accessed 15.3.2006). Besides the legacy of apartheid and the Constitution's Bill of Rights, he also cites the experience of 'the struggle' and 'the masses':

A core element of that history and culture, which derives from the struggles that we waged for our freedom on the continent, is that the masses are the primary motive forces of change; they should be active participants in changing their lives for the better. This was the principle in struggle, and so it should be in the phase of reconstruction and development (ibid.).

Netshitenzhe urged that there was 'a fundamental need to reach out to the majority of the population, especially the disadvantaged' (ibid.) and went on to specify that

² Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, Chapter 2: Bill of Rights, 16. (1) (a) & (b), p. 9.

³ op. cit. 32.(1) & (2), p. 15.

we proceed from the understanding that without information, there can be no popular participation; without popular participation there can be no lasting legitimacy - powerful interest groups will succeed in determining the national agenda, and real freedom will in truth be a pipe-dream for the majority (ibid.).

Netshitenzhe insists that 'Development Communication should be at the core of any government communication system' (ibid.). In this context, it is important to ask, how GCIS has tackled these challenges structurally and how does it carry out its mandate? Led from the Office of the Presidency, it has a 'Head who maintains close links with Cabinet, and yet with day-to-day communication taking place at departmental level, the centres where actual implementation takes place; and more so at provincial and local level, the spheres of government closest to the people' (ibid.). In addition to this, there are

regular imbizo (direct two-way interactions between the President and other leaders with communities); interviews by the principals especially on radio in languages understood by the people (so the measure of success is not just a Minister's appearance on the evening TV news bulletin); production of material by GCIS and government departments; and establishment of Multi-Purpose Community Centres in districts across the country with one-stop government service provision backed by ICT (ibid.).

Netshitenzhe underlines that 'government work is essentially public activity' and suggests that 'we should continually challenge the paradigm that government work is secret activity which unfortunately goes public from time to time'. In his opinion, 'the approach should be how to manage the flow of information in the interest of the country' (ibid.). If, as Netshitenzhe puts it, 'the core of a developmental communication agenda, [...]' 'should be the understanding that the people, who were their own liberators, should be the active agents in changing their lives for the better', the question begs itself, whether the GCIS as it presents itself online (www.gcis.gov.za) does indeed achieve this. At its inception, questions relating to the tension between providing information and becoming a propaganda machine were raised. Concerns and doubts were voiced in the media, whether it would succeed in rising above party political considerations. In a radio interview, Edward Baird from the Media Monitoring Project put it as follows: 'our concern is not so much with the intentions for communities and that kinds of information, but the kind of central planning strategising [sic] corporate image work they are going to do at cabinet level which is going to lean, I think towards a slightly more propagandistic style of information and worry about media portrayals of government' (www.gcis.gov.za/media/interviews/980518.htm accessed 15.3.2006).

Methodology

One of the main challenges posed by information and communication technologies (thereafter ICTs) in the context of e-democracy is their potential in providing a massive volume of information which has to be structured, managed and be made accessible to "everyone". Malina states that 'ICTs can provide a

utopian ideal, offering new possibilities for decentralised participation, democracy and citizenship, they can also support extreme decentralisation of power'⁴

Coleman ascertains 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. Although he established his list with Britain's parliament in mind, given the aims of this paper, they will serve as a guideline to evaluate the GCIS site with regard to its expressed aim of furthering democracy and the government's developmental goals.

Although there are differing views on the benefits for and the challenges to democracy posed by ICTs, both Dahlberg and Dean agree 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': 'thematization 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 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. Subjected to criticism which predominantly regarded the public

⁴Anna Malina, Perspectives on citizen democratisation and alienation in the virtual public sphere, in B. N. Hague & B. D. Loader (eds.), *Digital democracy*. Routledge, London, 1999, p. 24.

⁵ Stephen Coleman, Cutting out the middle man: from virtual representation to direct deliberation, in B. N. Hague & B. D. Loader (eds.), *Digital democracy*. Routledge, London, 1999, p.199.

⁶ Lincoln Dahlberg, Net-Public Sphere Research: Beyond the 'First Phase', Draft paper, p. 3.

⁷ Dean, Jodi. 2003. Why the Net is not a Public Sphere. In *Constellations*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 95.

⁸ Dean, op. cit. p. 96.

sphere as elitist and exclusive, the theory has nevertheless been applied to the 'emergence of new communication technologies'⁹. Although the access to information has certain democratising and egalitarian aspects, Dean rejects the idea that the Net is a public sphere mainly on the grounds that although it has an inclusive ethos, access is limited to a certain user profile and that it serves the interests of 'communicative capitalism'¹⁰. 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'¹¹. As a result, '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'¹². Although he states that the way in which state and economic power 'impact upon deliberation cannot be measured by simply observing the level of their explicit presence, Dahlberg underlines that participants of online deliberative spaces should be free when engaging in communicative action'¹³.

Janssen and Kies state that online spaces provide more open access as 'each participant is normally equally entitled to make comment or raise new question'.¹⁴ Exploring the potential contribution ICTs can make to strengthen democracy, Hague 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' (Hague & Loader 1999, xv).

Analysis of GCIS Website

Description of Site

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

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Dean, *op. cit.*, p.100.

¹¹ Dean *op. cit.*, pp. 102 & 103.

¹² Dean, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹³ Dahlberg, *op. cit.* p. 8.

¹⁴ Davy Janssen & Raphael Kies, *Online Forums and Deliberative Democracy: Hypotheses, Variables and Methodologies*, e-Working Papers 2004/01

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.



Fig. 1 GCIS Home Page: www.gcis.gov.za

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, radio).

One of the political buzz words that dominated the recently held Local Government election campaign was service delivery, which even parties such as the IFP which refused to make promises, assured their voters. As if to suggest that 'Services' offered online by the GCIS web site are the same as offline, the image in the icon for 'Services' is a black and a white hand, holding each other. Do online services have the same personal touch as offline interaction? Can the mouse-click build the same kind of partnership, convey a feeling of togetherness as the President shaking hands with excited children? It seems that this is what the images want to portray and Public Services and Administration Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi spells out the goal of government is 'that every South African is only five to ten minutes away from government services, either physically or electronically, within the next ten years'¹⁵.

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, once the viewer does move beyond the home page, 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). It only uses text, hypertext and tables (Functions), and pictures of the heads of various departments within GCIS. These departments and their functions, as well as the overall vision of GCIS, its mission and objectives are spelt out under 'About GCIS' (the terms used are 'ensure, foster, promote and set'). The legislative mandate is included with a hyperlink (a proof) to the Public Service Act. On the left of the page is a column with nine hyperlinks regarding organisational aspects, encompassing 'Minister', 'Contact us' as well as 'Vacancies' and 'Representivity'. By the time this page was viewed, it had not been updated for more than two years (Last updated: 1 July 2003).

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' (www.gcis.gov.za/about/strategy.html accessed 26 February 2006). 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' (www.gcis.gov.za/about/strategy.html accessed 20 February 2006).



Fig.2 About GCIS: www.gcis.gov.za/about.html

Not only does the GCIS at this stage rule out a dialogical mode of interaction or partnership as it had suggested previously, it also shifts the onus from sharing and providing information to meet 'needs'. By doing so, its aim is to prove that government takes its developmental agenda serious and is delivering (services). This means, however, that information flows one-way, serves ends. A bias toward corporate concepts and language can, not surprisingly, also be found on this page. 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 ICT's 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.

Although it is underlined that the opportunities that a democratic system encapsulate are 'not just economic', besides a call to build 'on the campaign on economic opportunities' no further areas of 'special

attention' are pointed toward. The language is and remains corporate ('quality control'), English with a few vernacular terms interspersed regarding campaigns that resemble any other marketing ad campaign. A centralised structure must be in place, ensuring that partnerships built are 'informed by the common vision' and unmediated communication is strengthened. The seven 'themes' at the end of the corporate strategy is dominated by five 'people's contracts' that centre around clusters (international, economic, social etc.) and under each cluster are a number of 'focus issues'. In light of the fact that these programmes and campaigns are well-known and are 'people' centred, links and hyperlinks as well as input sections would be useful as not all were listed under previous sections.



Fig. 3 GCIS Services: www.gcis.gov.za/services.index.html

The page for 'Services' is structured in the same way as the previous one, it does in fact repeat the above almost verbatim. There are no input options but when following the hyperlinks on the left, it is possible to 'request services', 'register as service' or gain insight into the type of services that GCIS is offering the government, media, international users of the site and 'the public'.

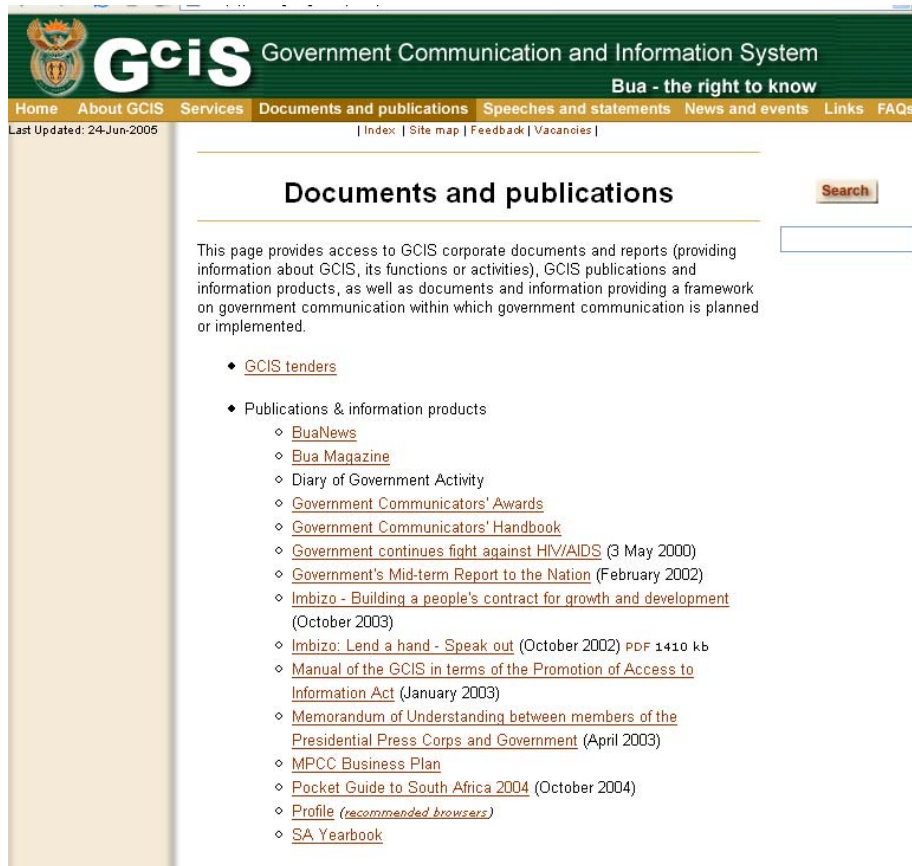


Fig. 4 GCIS Links www.gcis.gov.za/links/index.html

Under 'Documents and publications' the term 'corporate' is used again, broadening the vision and identity of GCIS as a corporate entity. Consequently, the semantic field of this page is affected, as 'publication and information products' are listed, substituting the hyperlink option that was available previously, on the left side of the page. Furthermore, the first hyperlink listed under 'documents and information relating to government communication' is leading to a page of 'tenders', the second link is repeating the 'publication and information products'. A vast amount of documents can be found under 'Contact directory' which offers search options for databases, browsing the contact database as well as printing or downloading contact directories or lists. In order to make these searches easier, 'recommended browsers' are added and behind each hyperlink follows in brackets detailed description regarding content covered, i.e. 'Directory of Contacts (contact information for organisations such as political parties, embassies and foreign representatives in South Africa)' (www.gcis.gov.za/docs/directories/index.html accessed 28.3.2006). Besides the small feedback option at the top, below the menu bar, a person to contact is listed at the bottom of the page.



Fig. 5 GCIS Speeches and media statements www.gcis.gov.za/media/index.html

Following a few explanatory lines regarding this 'section', the web site user can choose from a number of hyperlinks gathering media statements by GCIS, Ministers and Cabinet, speeches and interviews and also presentations. The hyperlink section that had previously been featuring to the left of the main body of the page is now incorporated, reducing the size of the page.

GCIS Government Communication and Information System
 Bua - the right to know

Home About GCIS Services Documents and publications Speeches and statements News and events Links FAQs

Last Updated: 15-Feb-2006 | Index | Site map | Feedback | Vacancies |

News and events

This page announces and provides information on events that GCIS are involved in, and on events within the government communication spectrum. Forthcoming events as well as past events are presented.

Events

February 2006

5 - 10 Feb [Parliamentary Media Briefings](#)

Past events

December 2005

2 Dec [Government Communicators' Awards](#)

November 2005

30 Oct - 3 Nov [Monitoring and Evaluation Media Briefings](#)

September 2005

6 - 8 Sept [Monitoring and Evaluation Media Briefings](#)

June 2005

27 - 29 Jun [Monitoring and Evaluation Media Briefings](#)

February 2005

14 - 18 Feb [GCIS Parliamentary Media Briefings](#)

11 Feb [Ten Year anniversary celebrations closing ceremony](#)

11 Feb [Opening of Parliament/ State of the Nation Address \(outside link\)](#)

9 Feb [Screening of the State of the Nation Address via MPCCs PDF 411 kb](#)

Fig. 6 GCIS News and events: www.gcis.gov.za/news/index.html

Even though this page announces and provides information on events in which the GCIS is involved in, that lie within the government's communication spectrum and are forthcoming, the amount of events featured are few in numbers and updates only done irregularly. There had been no new item added to the page for more than one month, by the time it was viewed and the average of events posted was less than one event per month. This is a section which by definition should be altered very frequently. Relevant events such as the Information Technology Summit held in Tunis does not feature and reveal that this page is dormant.

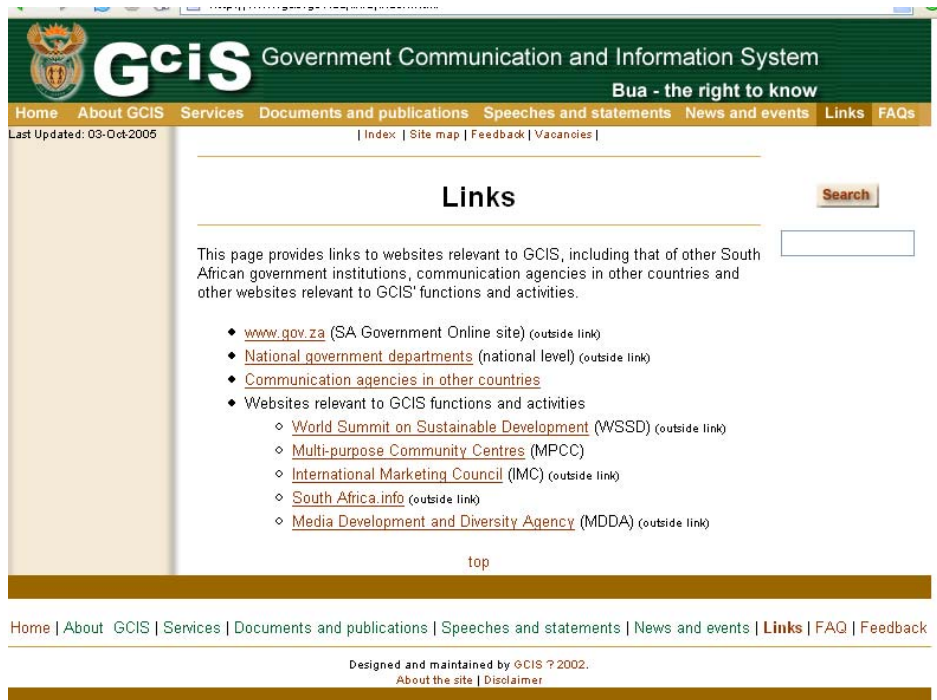


Fig. 7 GCIS Links: www.gcis.gov.za/links/index.html

This page is very broad and covers many areas, ranging from South African government institutions, international communications agencies, sites relevant to the GCIS' functions and activity. Encompassed in the last category are also links to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Multi-purpose Community Centres (MPCC), the International Marketing Council (IMC), South Africa.info and lastly the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA). Although this page does provide a broad range of useful links, it is unstructured and not userfriendly.

GCIS Government Communication and Information System
Bua - the right to know

Home About GCIS Services Documents and publications Speeches and statements News and events Links FAQs

Last Updated: 14-Sep-2005 | Index | Site map | Feedback | Vacancies |

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This section provides answers to questions frequently asked about GCIS, its products, services and functions.

For more information about GCIS, contact the Director: Marketing, Advertising and Distribution, tel: (012) 314 2399, fax: (012) 323 5524, e-mail: marketing@gcis.gov.za.

FAQs are currently available for the following categories:

- Government and government-related information
- GCIS publications & information products
- GCIS services
- Training for government communicators
- Multi-purpose Community Centres (MPCCs)

Government and government-related information

Q: Where do I find information on government and government-related issues?

A:

1. Contact the GCIS Information Centre, which will provide you with the required information or refer you to the relevant government institution. Tel: (012) 314 2211; Fax: (012) 325 6898; e-mail: information@gcis.gov.za
2. The [SA Government Online](#) (outside link) website provides government information, as well as access to government websites
3. [FAQs](#) (outside link) on government and government-related issues are available on the [SA Government Online](#) (outside link) website.

Fig. 8 GCIS FAQs: www.gcis.gov.za/faq/index.html

FAQs are generally useful but also known to be a way to avoid engaging with a web site user. One could argue that the contact details of the Director of Marketing, Advertising and Distribution posted on the page immediately after the purpose of the page is explained (...answers to question frequently asked about GCIS, its products, services and functions), is evidence of this. They may also reveal what kind of questions users tend to raise, what their expectations are, what kind of resource they regard it to be. In order to stream-line queries, FAQs are arranged into five categories, which are 'Government and government-related information' (4), 'GCIS publications & information products' (3), 'GCIS services' (3), 'Training for government communicators' (3), and 'Multi-purpose Community Centres (MPCCs)' (9). The numbers in brackets indicate the amount of model questions posted for each category. Within each category, there are vast disparities in terms of topics covered, particularly so however with regard to 'Government and government-related information'. The first question is extremely broad ('Where do I find information on government and government-related issues?') and broken down into three answers bringing together phone and fax numbers of the GCIS in Pretoria and an email address, an outside link to be followed leading to the South African Government Online, and another link to the FAQs posted on the latter web site. Not only does this way of dealing with questions make finding answers unlikely, it also seems to discourage asking them and engaging with the GCIS site. Unlike the first FAQ, the second and third does not concern government and its institutions, policies or structures but picks up the visual line of argumentation of the home page and deals with iconography. The questions deal with demands for

photographs of the President or Cabinet members and the coat of arms. As the image of the President is set on the home page and the coat of arms is prominent on each page, it seems that the argument made online, this visual frame should be extended offline. It also feeds into a personality cult and a redefinition of the office of the president and posted where it is, creates a demand. This very demand should have been met with links where the user can download these photographs, without having to request them via email, a way to deter requests being made. Although it is useful to provide an extensive list of the various communication clusters, this information would be much more valuable if the user of the site was able to click on links, access the departments grouped within one cluster and also follow the programmes underway. The lack of links provided under the FAQs is its greatest weakness. One of the few exceptions notably is the link to *Bua News*, the government's own news service. Immediately after this question comes a question concerning 'development and poverty alleviation programmes such as brick-making, baking, dress-making, feeding schemes and SMMEs'. It is at this stage that the technology gap between the site and the potential user is the biggest. An attempt to bridge it is made by the answer provided but no links, contact details whatsoever are added to 'local governments, provincial departments of economic development, and agencies such as Khula Enterprises, the National Development Agency, SMME support centres and the Land Bank' (www.gcis.gov.za/faq/index.html accessed 20 February 2006).

Featuring as the first of four links placed under the images on the GCIS' home page, the Multi-purpose Community Centres are a relatively novel institution and of great significance to providing services as 'eventually each district and metropolitan municipality will have at least one MPCC' (ibid.). Most importantly, 'two-way communication between government and citizens' is to be facilitated in these 'one-stop centres' (ibid.). All FAQs relating to the MPCCs taken together provide a fairly comprehensive insight into their activities, a link to follow to the MPCC web page, details on how the centres are run and by whom they are financed and even some of the lessons learnt so far (page last updated 14 September 2005).

Conclusion

Evaluating the GCIS website according to the aims it expected to achieve, namely providing information, strengthening democracy and supporting critical arguments and opinions to be formed, leads to the following, admittedly tentative, conclusion:

The GCIS website is an overall informative site, as it comprises of a great variety of documents, publications, presentations, speeches, statements and interviews. In addition to these documents, a number of links to other relevant sites, provide ample information about the history of GCIS, its role and goals. There are therefore a number of ethical arguments brought forward. Visuals, such as the photographs, the coat of arms and the icons on the home page serve as reference points and at the same time establish a parallel structure of argumentation based on associations and providing proofs which are

also linked to the presidential realm. Given that the coat of arms features on every page and its colours are used consistently reveals that the communicative arm of government is overarching. It is significant in this regard that among all the pages viewed, Bua News is the only one updated on a daily basis. Many of the other pages fall short of even being updated on a weekly basis. This then is also one of the greatest weaknesses of the site.

One of the areas for further research to be conducted would be to explore the 'difference in attention cycles between issues on the Web and news in the media'¹⁶ as described by Dean. 'Bua News' is a combination of vernacular and English and aims at providing 'unmediated news'. In the same way as the language used throughout the site is often dominated by corporate terminology, a great amount of documents serve the purpose of providing insight into government activities and service delivery. Whereas the norms prevalent in the public sphere are inclusivity, equality, transparency and rationality in what Dean labels 'neodemocracy' the nation as a site of deliberation makes way to the Web as a zero-institution and the normative void is filled by duration, hegemony, decisiveness and credibility. Dean observes that 'neodemocracy emphasises the importance of affecting outcomes'¹⁷.

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".

¹⁶ Dean, op. cit. p. 108.

¹⁷ Dean, op. cit. p. 110.

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