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Teledemocracy in South Africa

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND, AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

Mostly based on the introduction of new information communication technologies (ICTs), societies are now confronted by the task of inventing and adapting political structures, social norms and institutional arrangements to cope with transnational flows of capital, people, goods, environmental resources, ideas and images.

The eradication of physical borders and the transnationalisation of communication and social processes have also impacted on the political sphere. It has created the opportunity for people to mobilise easier and to form alliances around issues of common interest, i.e. environmental issues, gender issues, etc. In some cases these alliances form strong pressure groups, eventually influencing decision-making.

Scholars have opposing views regarding the potential of information communication technologies. On the one hand the "utopian" perspective propagates that the information age heralds global access to information for all people on an unprecedented scale. This global access is expected to open opportunities to citizens that will "empower people, enable them to lobby, monitor policy, learn, collaborate, campaign and react" (UNRISD, 1997). This perspective fathers the idea that in the political sphere, the internet will increasingly be utilised for purposes of communication and information provision by political institutions and role players. People and organisations will ultimately be empowered to participate in public decision-making.

On the other hand, the "dystopian" perspective holds that a pseudo-democracy will emerge, allowing participation in marginal decisions only. It also holds that the proliferation of the Internet in the home will individualise information consumption to a degree that makes the formation of democratic public opinion no more than an illusion (UNRISD, 1997). The sceptics are concerned about the imbalance of power, the potential threat of misinformation and propaganda, the possibility of creating/strengthening pseudo-democracies and the possibility of non-political pressure groups forming strong alliances.

Not only do theorists differ in terms of the effect of ICTs on populations, they also differ in terms of their perceptions about the degrees to which ICT can influence individuals or societies. Critics have made a distinction between "hard" (or strong) and "soft" (or weak) technological determinism.

Hard technological determinism refers to the extreme stance that a particular ICT is either a sufficient condition determining social thought, organisation and development, or at least a necessary condition. Soft technological determinism claims that the presence of a particular ICT is an enabling or facilitating factor leading to potential opportunities, which may or may not be taken up in particular societies or periods. Other mediating factors are thus involved and the mere existence of an ICT does not inevitably lead to its use (Finnegan, 1988).

1.2 Problem statement

Given the opposing perspectives regarding the influence of technology on democratic processes, there is a need in South Africa for research that will address the following questions:

- ◆ To what extent do political parties and other institutions in South Africa make use of the internet?
- ◆ What circumstances/variables contribute to the increased use of the Internet by parties/institutions?
- ◆ What are the political implications of increased Internet usage by political organisations and institutions? Will increased Internet usage lead to a transformation of representative democracies into participatory democracies?

1.3 Defining the concept "teledemocracy"

Because this study concentrates on the use of Internet applications in the political sphere the term "teledemocracy" was adopted. This term, applied in many ways, essentially describes the electronic mediation of political dialogue. Other terms for this concept are "electronic democracy" (Doherty, 1999), "wired democracy" (Mc Tavish, 1996), and "democracy at a distance" (London, 1995). For the purpose of this

study, the term "teledemocracy" will be used to refer to the facilitation of communication about political issues by means of the Internet.

1.4 Aims of the project

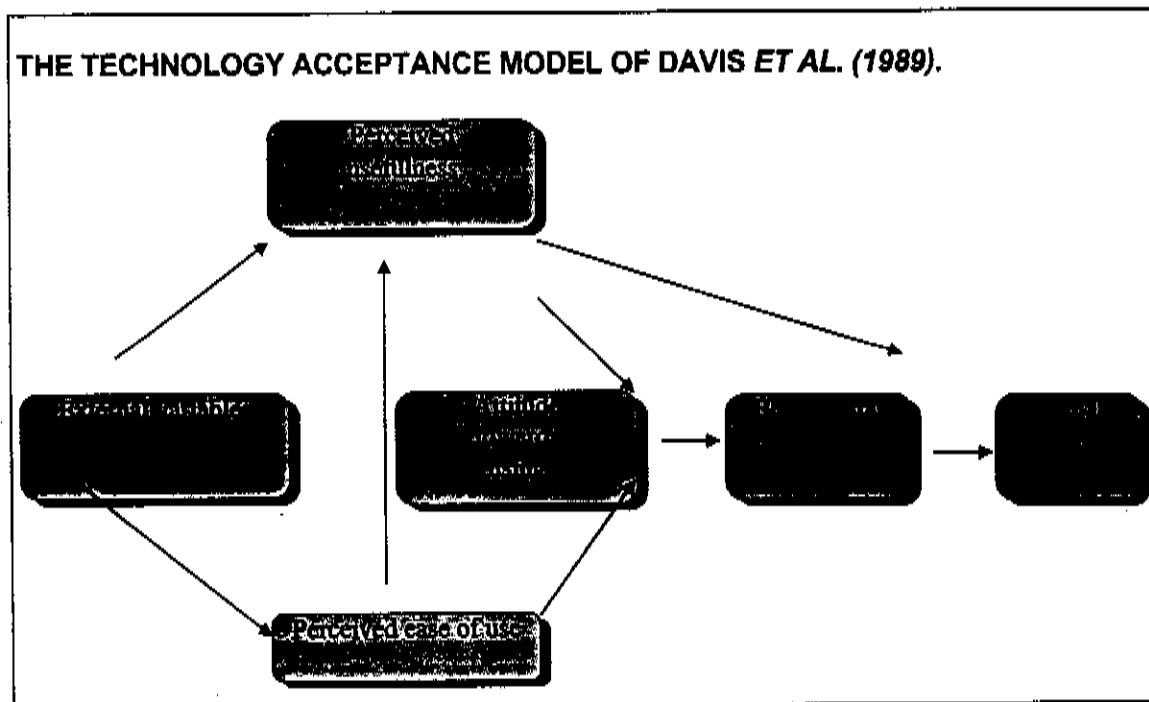
With this study an attempt will be made to determine (a) to what extent political parties and also politically orientated pressure groups/organisations/institutions in South Africa make use of the internet; (b) to determine what circumstances/variables contribute to the increased use of the internet; and (c) to determine the implications of increased Internet usage by political organisations and institutions.

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 Measuring instrument

The technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, Bagozzi. & Warshaw (1989)) was applied as a basis for drawing up the measuring instrument (questionnaire) to assist in determining the circumstances/variables that contribute to the increased use of the Internet by parties and institutions.

Figure 1.1



1.5.2 Data collection

The HSRC commissioned All Africa Consultants to conduct interviews with politically active pressure groups and political organisations concerning the use of Internet. The interviews were conducted during the period October - November 2000. Interviewers were trained by a professional trainer. The interviewers were informed about the purpose of the interview, familiarised with the questionnaire and trained in conducting the interview.

The HSRC and AAC compiled a list of qualifying representative organisations. The main criteria for selection were that the organisation should be:

- a) South African;
- b) functioning as a political group or pressure group; and
- c) reasonably renowned and likely to have Internet facilities.

These organisations were therefore not selected randomly but rather on the basis of convenience. All organisations were approached by telephone with the request to participate. The research was introduced according to the introduction on the front page of the questionnaire. The organisations were asked whether AAC could send someone to conduct the interview. Fourteen organisations indicated that they would rather have the questionnaire sent to them by e-mail and this was done. The other organisations were physically visited by fieldworkers. In some cases, where a representative of the visited organisation insisted on filling out the questionnaire by him or herself, the interviewer assisted in filling out the questionnaire. A few, however, indicated that they had no time and would fill out the questionnaire at a spare moment. After completion the questionnaires were collected by the fieldworkers. A total of 28 questionnaires were completed.

1.6 Organisations involved in this study

United Democratic Movement (UDM), Afrikanervryheidstigting (AVS), Freedom Front (FF), New National Party and Democratic Alliance (NNP & DA), Gay and Lesbian Organisation-Pretoria (GLOP), Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA x2), COSATU, South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), Housing department – government, National Union of Mineworkers (NUM x2), Transport User Group (TUG),

Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR x2), Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA X2), SA Housing Trust, Human Rights Institute of South Africa (HURISA), South African Environmental Project, Mamelodi Heritage Forum (MAHEFO), SaNGONet, National Institute for Crime Prevention and Re-integration of Offenders (NICRO x2), South African Gunners Association (SAGA), Centre for Democratic Communications (CDC) and SANCO.

CHAPTER TWO

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

The results of the questionnaire survey are presented in this part of the report. With regard to the graphical representation of the results, the percentages do not in all cases add up to 100%, which is due to the presence of missing values.

2.1 Internet usage patterns at the institutions

This section deals with the actual Internet usage patterns at the various institutions.

Figure 2.1

Has anything significantly changed in your party/organisation due to the installation of the internet connection?

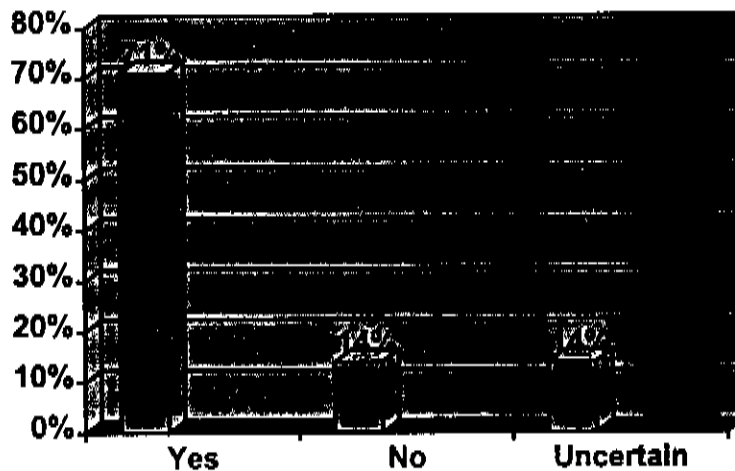
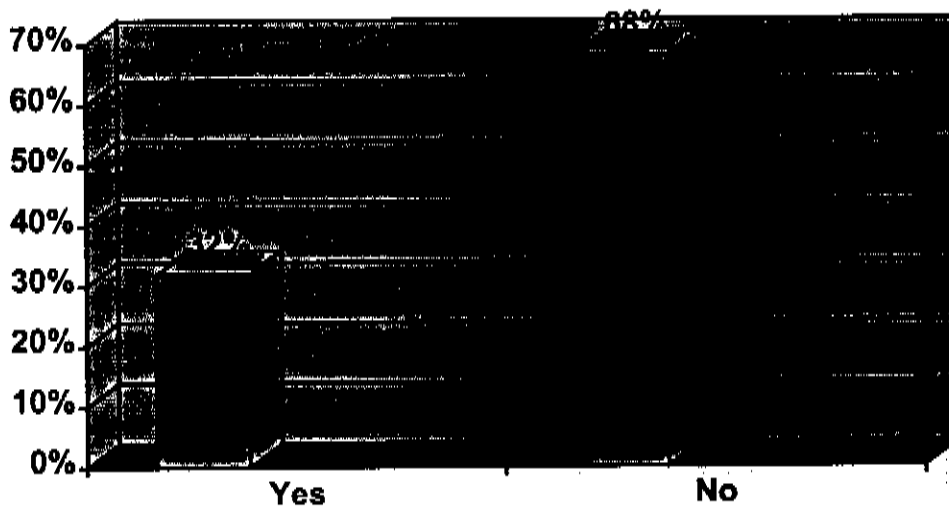


Figure 2.1 shows that 71% of the respondents experienced some sort of significant change in their organisations due to the installation of the internet. These changes were mostly attributed to the better, faster and more effective modes of communication. This applied to both internal and external communication. Some respondents also mentioned that the Internet made it possible to search, receive and provide information much faster, which was seen as a positive contribution.

Figure 2.2

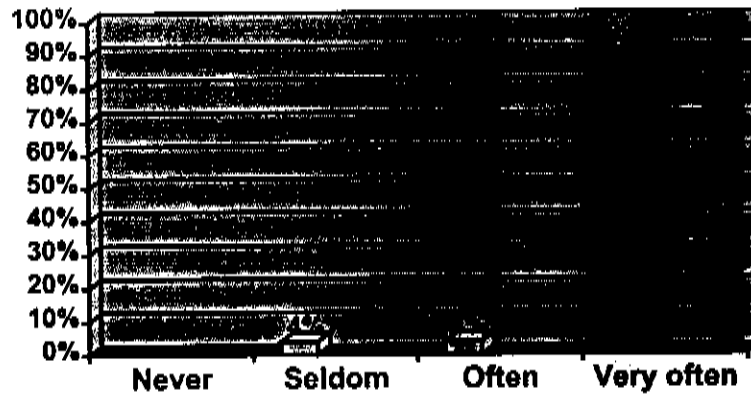
Are there any problems/concerns that you have encountered regarding the use of the internet?



Thirty two percent of the respondents indicated that they encountered some problems regarding the use of the Internet. Most of the problems centred around the issue of affordability, lack of suitable training, and software and hardware problems. It was mentioned that the costs of maintaining the systems were high, that telephone costs were high and that general administrative costs in companies have escalated since the introduction of the Internet. The lack of training and the lack of technical skills in operating these systems were also frequently mentioned as problems. The possible misuse (for private purposes) of the internet and the consequent decrease in productivity were also mentioned. Concerns regarding the accessibility were also raised. It was stated that some areas/organisations did not have the infrastructure or financial means of obtaining the Internet and would therefore automatically be excluded from this communication technology.

Figure 2.3

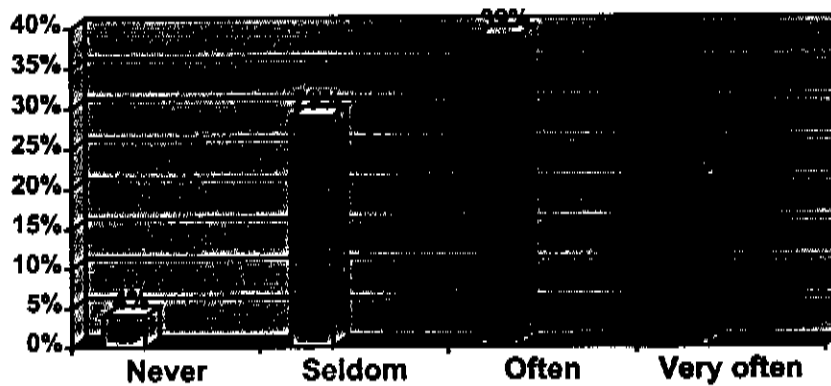
How often do you make use of the e-mail Internet facility?



From the graph it is evident that the e-mail facility was utilised very frequently. Almost all (92%) of the respondents stated that they used the e-mail facility very often for communication purposes both within the organisation and externally. Changes that were suggested that would result in more beneficial use of the e-mail facility essentially centred around better training of users and wider access to e-mail facilities. Other issues that were also mentioned were the slow pace of downloading, the information overload and the high financial costs.

Figure 2.4

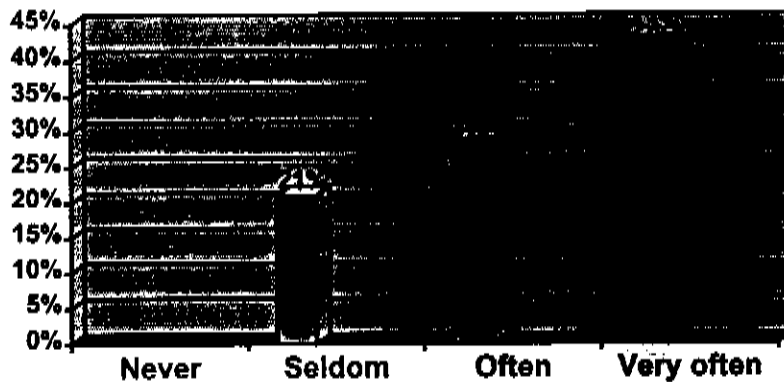
How often do you make use of the web-surfing Internet facility?



With regard to web surfing, approximately 4% indicated that they never surfed the web, 29% indicated that they seldom surfed the web, whilst 39% stated that they often surfed the web and 21% very often surfed the web. Asked which types of sites they visited, a large variety of sites were mentioned, but these corresponded closely with the field of interest of the organisation. The purpose of these visits was mostly to gather and update information, to do networking and marketing and to share information with appropriate role players. Asked what could be changed to better the facility the following suggestions were made: Partners should update their web page more regularly, a list of "favourites" should be compiled in order to avoid searching through non-applicable information, main indexes should be created on important themes such as HIV/AIDS, and people should be trained better.

Figure 2.5

How often do you make use of the search and download Internet facility?



Seventy two percent of the respondents stated that they often or very often used the internet for searching and downloading of information. The type of information downloaded varied and incorporated a wide variety of topics which mainly related to core organizational activities. Suggestions towards enhancing the functioning of this facility were better training, better hard and software, and subscriptions to other databases. Some respondents also wanted the software to be more user-friendly in order for a wider audience to be able to operate this Internet function.

From the above figures and descriptions it is clear that the information and communication ability/facility of the internet was regarded as the most important facet of the internet. This is also highlighted in the table below where it is clear that the respondents regarded the function of providing information and facilitating two-way communication as the most important function of the Internet. The ability of the Internet to mobilise popular support and to influence public opinion was not regarded as important as was its ability to provide information.

The first section of the report dealt with the Internet usage patterns of the various organizations. The second section of the report will deal with the issue of enhanced public participation.

2.2 Enhanced public participation

Table 2.1

How important are the following internet capabilities for your organisation?

	Very important	Important	Not important	Not important at all
Ability to mobilise popular support	50%	21%	18%	4%
Ability to provide information	82%	14%		
Ability to communicate (two-way)	79%	14%		
Ability to influence public opinion	43%	32%	11%	4%

Asked what **other benefits associated** with the Internet would also be desired by the organisations, it was mentioned that the Internet was beneficial in terms of educational, economic and social issues. The Internet provided information on a variety of issues very timeously, which assisted in decision-making processes. Communication was easier and internal organisational procedures and policies could be applied much easier due to the introduction of the Internet. It was also mentioned that previously marginalised communities could now also participate as they were less isolated.

When asked if the organisation had a **website**, 82% of the organisations answered that they did have a website and 57% indicated that the website was actively visited. Asked if they thought that the Internet facility had in any way broadened their base of public support, 64% of the organisations indicated that the Internet did broaden their public base support. Suggestions on how the Internet could be used to gain more support essentially revolved around the issue of accessibility and marketing. The

respondents felt that the Internet should be accessible to more people, especially expanding those in under-resourced rural communities. Strong emphasis was placed on an effective marketing strategy for the Internet, using web pages, creating more links, lobbying and campaigning. A few respondents also mentioned the issue of better and more effective training.

Table 2.2 presents the respondents' opinion on the best ways of giving information through to people.

Table 2.2

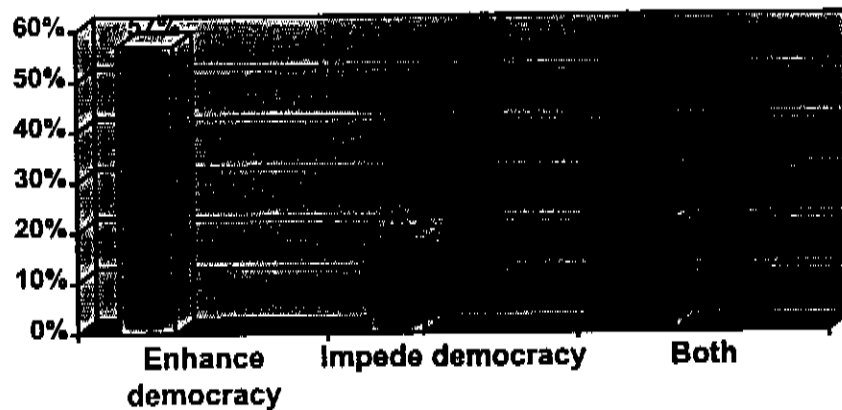
What is the best way of giving political information through to people?

	Very effective	Effective	Not effective	Not effective at all
Word of mouth	61%	25%	4%	7%
Internet	18%	64%	7%	4%
Newspapers	43%	43%	4%	4%
Political meetings	40%	40%	4%	11%
Television	50%	43%		
Radio	79%	14%		
Other	7%	21%	4%	

The results in table 2.2 indicate that the respondents held the opinion that radio was the most effective way of passing political information to people. The respondents also felt that word-of-mouth communities was a very effective way of passing political information to people. Television, newspapers and political meetings were to a lesser extent regarded as very effective ways of passing information. The majority of the respondents did not regard the Internet as a very effective way of passing political information to the people, but regarded it as an effective way.

Figure 2.6

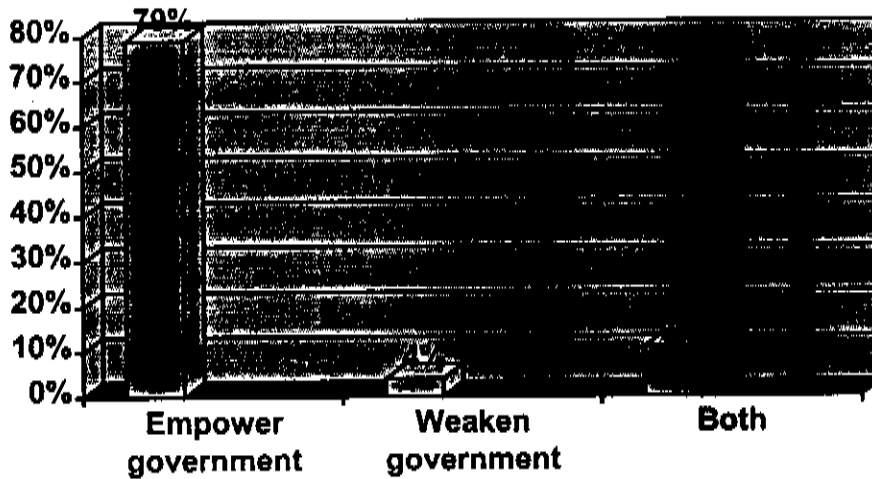
Will the use of the Internet enhance or impede democracy?



The majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the Internet would enhance democracy. They did not dispute the fact that the Internet was an important tool for information delivery and for influencing decision-making. However, the majority of these respondents were extremely concerned about the issue of access. They were adamant that the marginalisation of the poor as a result of their lack of access to the internet should urgently be reversed. It was suggested that the government should commit itself to a clear plan to expand electronic communication to peri-urban and rural areas. The respondents were rather sure that if the issue of access was not addressed, the Internet would not be able to ensure a more representative democracy. Those respondents who answered in the negative or agreed with both statements reflected negativity and uncertainty about the issue of access.

Figure 2.7

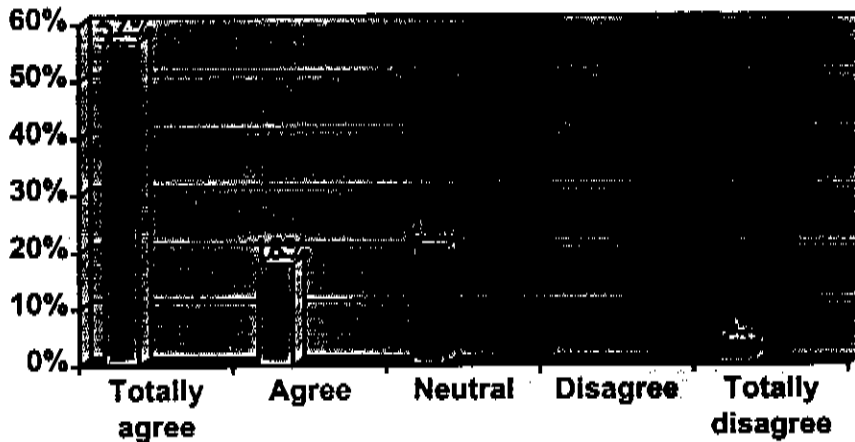
Will the Internet empower or weaken government?



From the point of view of information sharing, communication and transparency the majority of the respondents felt that the Internet would empower government. Access to better and faster information had great potential for improving the performance of government, as information could be distributed much more rapidly and cheaply. Even in the inter-governmental sphere, access to databanks would improve efficiency. The respondents did however mention that government would only be empowered in this regard if its employees were well trained with regard to the usage and usefulness of the Internet. Those who had reservations about this issue (answered in the negative or indicated both options) stated that although government might enhance its image, it might also alienate those who did not have access.

Figure 2.8

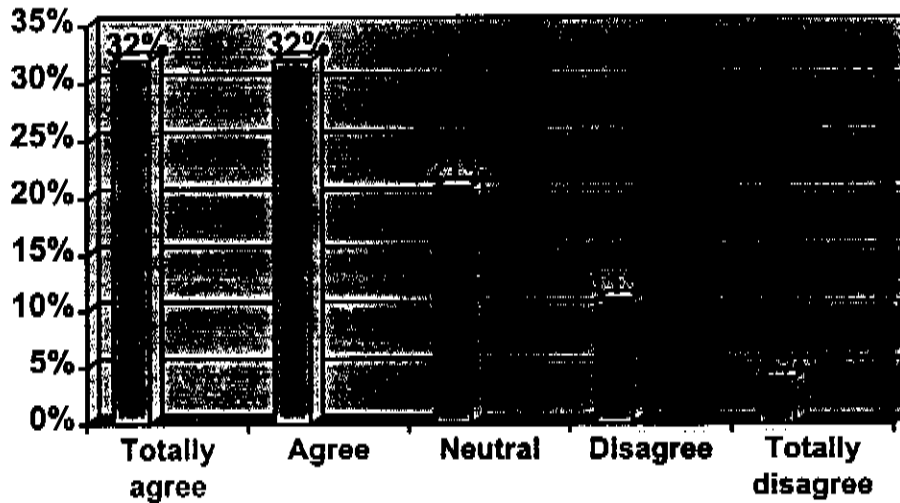
Access to Information via the Internet will make people in South Africa better Informed.



More than 75% of the respondents felt that access to information via the Internet would make people better informed. They qualified this by stating that access to information would enhance public opinion, people would be better informed about global issues and communication would be direct. The respondents who disagreed with the statement were of the opinion that some people might not have the resources or might be illiterate and therefore unable to utilise this technology. Respondents suggested that information about the functionality of the Internet and training in the operations of the Internet might ensure that people become better informed. Respondents also recommended that marginalised communities should be given access and entry points to the Internet and that appreciation of information should be fostered.

Figure 2.9

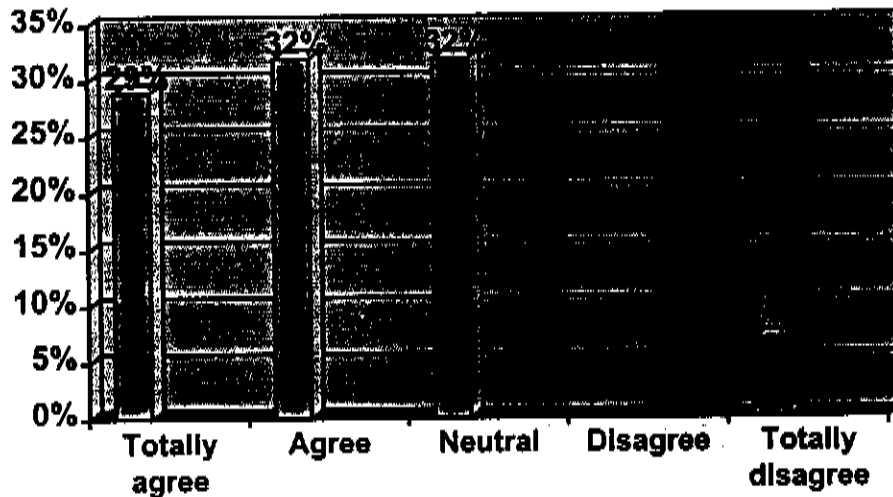
Communication via the internet will facilitate broader participation in political policy discussion and decision-making in South Africa.



The majority of the respondents (64%) agreed that the internet would facilitate broader participation in political policy discussions and decision-making in South Africa. It was stated that this mode of communication was a constructive problem-solving method that flattened hierarchical structures. Respondents who were sceptical about the influence of the internet on political policy discussions and decision-making mainly attributed their scepticism to the lack of access in some communities and little interest in party-political discussions. One respondent also mentioned that South Africans still believed in "visible participation" in politics. Suggestions to facilitate broader participation in political policy discussions and decision-making in South Africa again centred around the issues of broader access, better education and awareness programmes.

Figure 2.10

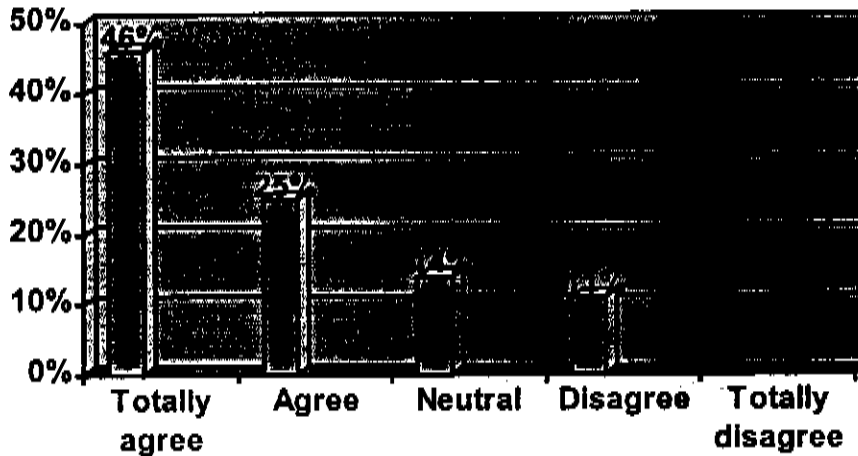
The Internet will facilitate direct public participation in governance through direct communication between citizens and policy makers.



Approximately 61% agreed that the Internet would facilitate direct public participation in governance through direct communication between citizens and policy makers. Twenty one percent of the respondents were not sure about this issue, while 14% disagreed with the statement. Those respondents who agreed with the statement thought that the nature of this technology made it possible to bring governance closer to people and that it was a very convenient method of communication. Global problems could be identified and communicated easier. Issues that would ensure that the Internet would enhance public participation in governance included access, education, training, awareness and costs.

Figure 2.11

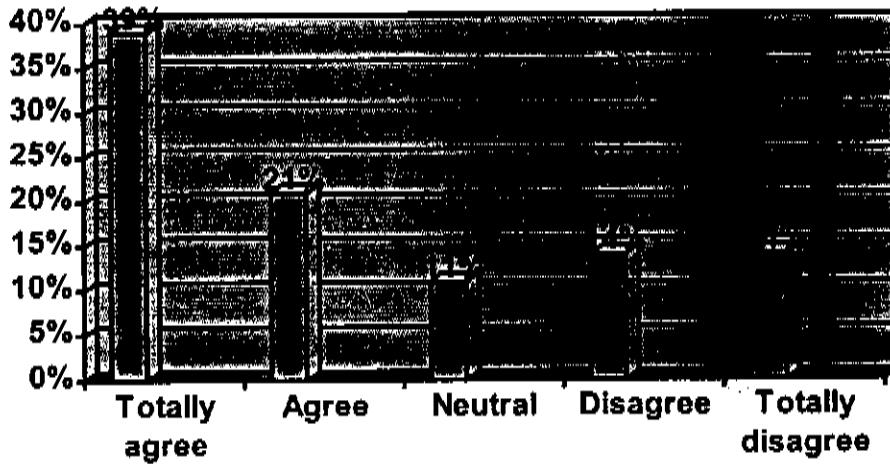
The Internet will create innovative ways of informing and educating the electorate on key public issues.



The question on whether the Internet would create innovative ways of informing and educating the electorate elicited the following responses: Seventy one percent argued that the Internet would definitely create innovative ways of informing and educating the electorate on key issues. They stated that the Internet was a powerful and "effortless" medium of getting information. The way in which the Internet engaged with the public was also novel and different, i.e. through competitions, polls, forms, bulletin boards, calendars, sounds, images, etc. It was also stated that even children could access this medium. Fourteen percent of the respondents were unsure about this issue and the main reasons given were again lack of access, lack of education and lack of training. These reasons were also given by the 11% who did not think that the Internet would create innovative ways of informing and educating the electorate. Respondents suggested that better education and training, wider access, lower costs and greater awareness would help ensure that the Internet inform and educate the electorate.

Figure 2.12

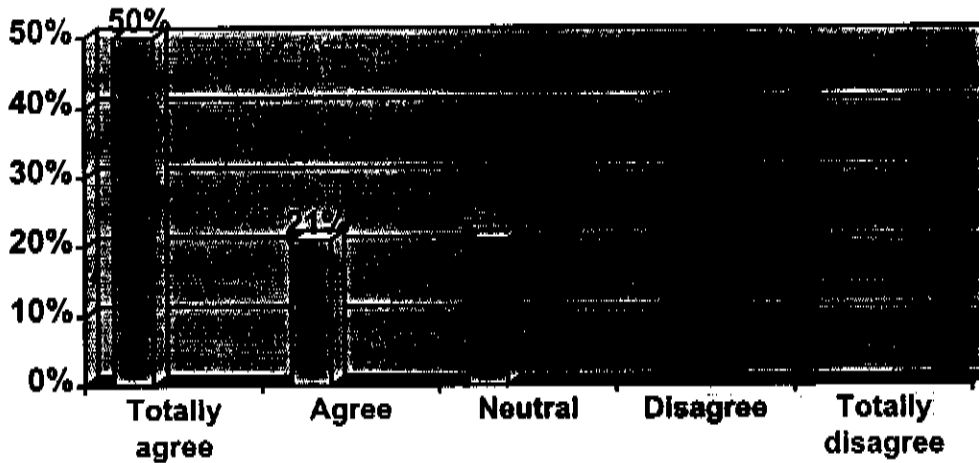
The Internet will help guarantee equal access to information to a large number of citizens.



The responses varied with regard to the issue of whether the Internet would help guarantee equal access to information to large numbers of citizens. The respondents seemed to agree that the Internet would help guarantee equal access to information if certain conditions applied. These conditions included access to the Internet, basic literacy, educated and trained people and lower costs. One respondent did however feel that even if the masses did not have Internet connections, the information and messages would "trickle down" from those who had. If these criteria were met, the Internet would help guarantee equal access to information to large numbers of citizens.

Figure 2.13

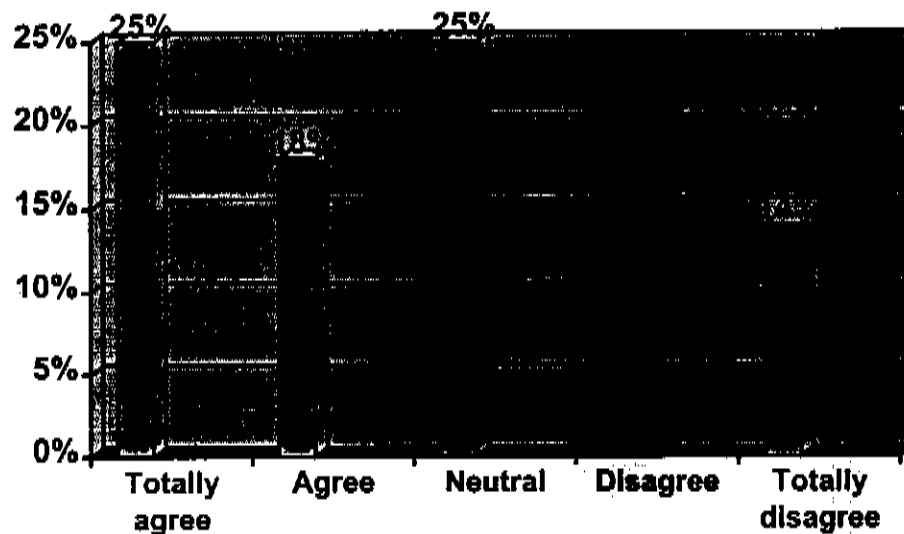
The internet will provide improved access to government information services.



The majority (71%) of the respondents were of the opinion that the Internet would provide improved access to government information and services. They argued that the Internet would reduce bureaucracy and red tape and even suggested touch-type public information terminals. This method of disseminating information was simple, fast and easy. Those respondents who were undecided on the issue (21%) were mainly concerned about the commitment from the side of government – the so-called information provider. The respondents felt that for access to government information to be successful, government had to be committed and regularly update its websites and the information content. The respondents suggested that more Internet facilities should be made available through Internet cafes, schools, universities and post offices. It was stated that government should start to recognise the value and cost effectiveness of using PCs at information kiosks or help desks. It was suggested that government should establish Internet facilities for different communities.

Figure 2.14

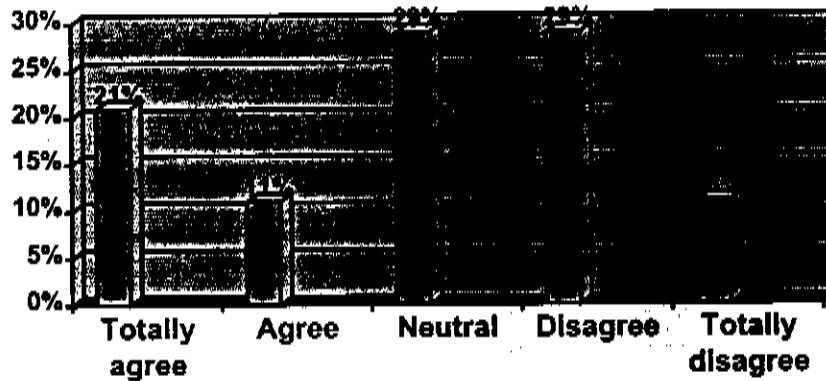
The internet can create an imbalance of power in South Africa.



The respondents were divided on the issue of whether the Internet would create an imbalance of power in South Africa. Those who agreed that the Internet would create an imbalance of power stated that access to information was a critical component of power and without equal access there could be no balance of power. These respondents agreed that the wealthy and educated would have the advantage and the poorer and illiterate part of the nation would be most disadvantaged. It was suggested that the government facilitate access and make the Internet and other information tools more affordable. Those respondents who indicated that the Internet would not create an imbalance of power argued that the Internet was only a medium of spreading information and not a power tool. It was also stated that people had a choice could make their own decisions and that the internet could educate and empower all people. Asked what should be done in order to ensure that the Internet did not create an imbalance of power, the suggestions revolved around the issues of equal access, basic literacy education, and education and training in general. The respondents were also concerned about the high financial costs involved in upkeeping an Internet connection and argued for a cheaper roll-out. The respondents suggested that the issue of access could be addressed by government and the private sector installing Internet connections in schools and community centres. Strong emphasis was also placed on basic literacy courses, better education and training for people in general.

Figure 2.15

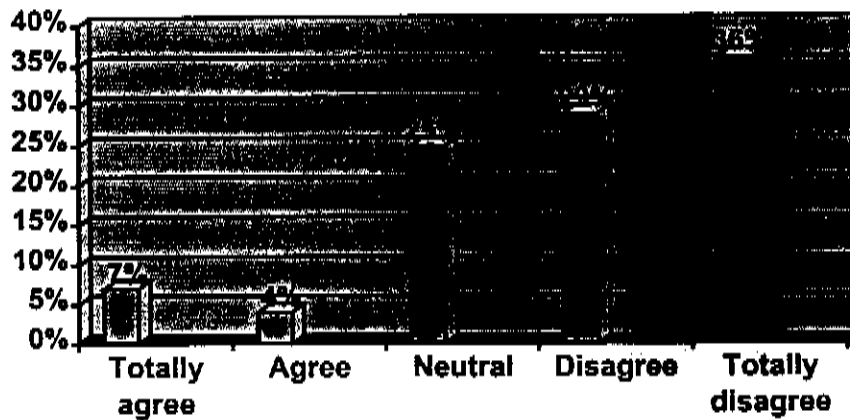
The potential for propaganda and misinformation is great when the internet is used by political parties/institutions in South Africa.



Thirty two percent of the respondents agreed that the potential for propaganda and misinformation was great when the Internet was used by political parties/institutions in South Africa, while 29% felt neutral on this issue and 40% disagreed with the statement. Those who said that the Internet would enhance propaganda and misinformation gave the following reasons: There were no "checks and balances" with regard to the type of information that was provided on the Internet; information was free and accessible to everyone; and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between facts and opinions. The respondents who disagreed with this statement were of the opinion that the Internet was no different from any other information medium, i.e. radio, television and newspapers. The media also had the potential to misinform people, and propaganda and information via the Internet would not significantly change anything. One respondent also stated that the internet was subject to the same type of criticism and challenges as other media and therefore this medium would also somehow strike a balance. Those people who were undecided on this issue said a fair balance of information could be struck as information would come from different sources and sectors. Organisations would therefore "battle" against each other and in this process a balance of information would be reached. Respondents varied in their opinion with regard to how this situation could be resolved. Some respondents aired the view that people had a right to all information while other respondents felt that the public should be protected against propaganda and that information should be regulated. The responses essentially centred around striking a balance between the right to access to information, the right to freedom of expression and association, and a need to regulate a medium that has the potential to be abused.

Figure 2.16

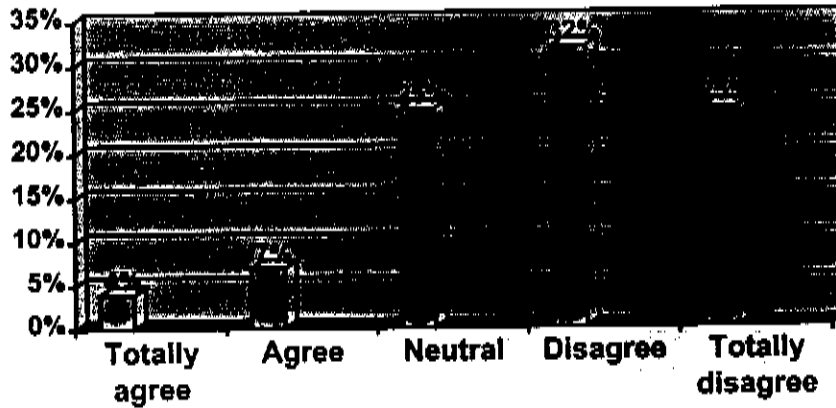
Bringing citizens into political discussion via the Internet can confuse political issues.



The respondents were to a large extent convinced that political discussion via the Internet would not confuse political issues. According to them, the Internet would rather add more dimensions to political issues, would afford citizens the right to raise their own opinions and participate in public discussion, and serve to enlighten and educate people. The respondents who disagreed to this statement were mostly concerned with the subjectivity of the content of the information and the lack of accountability. When asked what needed to be done or changed in South Africa so that the Internet would not confuse political issues, the respondents stated that the authenticity of information and the sources had to be verified, reporting had to be objective and people had to be educated and trained in order to ensure that they do not become confused or derailed. Their political intelligence also had to be developed.

Figure 2.17

New forms of direct democracy via the internet may short-circuit representative government in South Africa.



The respondents in this study were mostly of the opinion that new forms of democracy via the Internet would not short-circuit representative government in South Africa. They mainly based their opinions on the facts that (a) a small percentage of South Africans were connected and therefore the impact would be minimal; (b) participation of people in politics was part of the South African culture and would not be replaced by a virtual political world; and (c) the information that the Internet provided would complement representative government.

How would you describe a worst-case scenario with regard to using the Internet for political purposes in South Africa?

The "worst-case scenario" refers to the internet remaining the exclusive preserve of those with political and economic power, and access to information and communication continuing to be denied to the masses, who have neither the education nor access to the technology required to benefit from it. This might result in a situation where those who are politically naïve become subject to propaganda. Also, only those political parties with financial resources will have effective websites, while those with no access will be left out in the cold.

The digital divide might worsen and allow the creation of an anti-Internet attitude in government and among people involved in governance. Hence an integrated government internet strategy will become a pipe dream and government sites will become inaccurate. In the meantime those on the wealthy side of the digital divide will turn the South African internet space into a purely private and commercial realm, making the threat of a digital divide a de facto situation.

Respondents stated that the government should have a clear, coordinated (between departments, local government and provincial government and coherent internet strategy that streamlines information and avoids duplication and mixed messages. This will ensure that some of the negativities mentioned do not occur.

The respondents were also concerned about racketeering and internet hacking and cracking, which are dangerous, especially on the political front. One respondent even viewed the opinion that the internet might be instrumental in plotting a coup and civil war.

How would you describe a best-case scenario with regard to using the Internet for political purposes in South Africa?

Access to the Internet is broadened through education and through making the technology more widely available in poorer schools and communities, with

government willing to subsidise these facilities. Citizens can be better informed, have the opportunity to do their own research, and communicate their views to and seek information from a wide range of political parties and government officials. They can join or establish organisations using the Internet to mobilise public opinion and political pressure with respect to general and specific social and economic issues.

Government and those involved in government should recognise both the dangers and limitations of the Internet, but also its strengths. Access points should be provided in a sustainable and realistic way, making use, as much as possible, of civil society initiatives and existing community-based structures, with assistance devolved to the local level to allow "dirty" solutions appropriate to the situation to develop naturally. Public participation through the Internet by means of voting and comments on policy would be desirable; so would more transparency and accountability with regard to government issues.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was (a) to determine to what extent political parties and also politically orientated pressure groups/organisations/institutions in South Africa made use of the internet; (b) to determine what circumstances/variables contributed to the increased use of the Internet by parties/institutions; (c) to determine the implications of increased Internet usage by political organisations and institutions.

With regard to the issue of actual use of the Internet, it was clear from the study that the majority of the organisations involved in this study made frequent use of the Internet. The e-mail facility was very popular, as 92% of the respondents indicated that they utilised this facility very often. The surfing and downloading facility of the Internet was also utilised frequently but not as often as the e-mail facility. From the responses it became evident that the main advantage of the Internet was its communication function and ability to provide information. It seemed from the responses that the respondents relied on these functions and would have difficulty operating without the internet, as it was invaluable for communication (both internally and externally), for international communication, advocacy and research. The problems that the respondents had with regard to the use of the Internet centred around affordability, lack of suitable training, and software and hardware problems.

From the results it became apparent that the technology acceptance model (TAM) (see chapter 1.3) was not suitable for this research, as the technology had already been accepted and was being utilised by the organisations. The respondents were, according to the TAM, at the actual usage stage and it was therefore futile to look at factors that would influence actual usage. Circumstances/variables identified by the organisations that would lead to increased use of the internet were thus more related to the external environment and repeatedly focussed on the issues of access, training, basic literacy, education and cost implications.

The impact of the Internet on political issues was not regarded as the most relevant and important aspect of the Internet. The ability of the Internet to communicate and the ability to provide information were seen as much more important than the ability to mobilise popular support and to influence public opinion. According to the

respondents, radio, word-of-mouth communication and television were much better ways of getting political information through to people than was the Internet.

In terms of the implications of increased use of the Internet by political organisations and institutions the following were noted: The main function of the Internet was to provide information; the respondents saw the Internet as a very powerful and creative medium of informing the electorate. They stated that the internet could increasingly be utilised for purposes of communication and information provision by political institutions and role players. They also regarded the Internet as a very powerful tool for government to get information to the people. They generally did not think that the Internet would confuse political issues, would lead to propaganda or misinformation, or would short-circuit representative government in South Africa.

The respondents were however concerned that lack of access might marginalise certain groupings even further. They pleaded that the government, business and NGOs should work together and look at creative ways of making the Internet more accessible to the general public. They suggested installing Internet connections at schools and community centres. Access points should be provided in a sustainable and realistic manner, making use of civil society initiatives and existing community-based structures. It was suggested that government should subsidise poorer communities and schools in order to ensure wider access. There was thus a general plea for commitment from government's side, as ensuring the beneficial impact of the internet on the wider South Africa primarily lay in the hands of government.

In conclusion, the respondents felt that the Internet had a significant role to play with regard to political and democratic issues in South Africa. It was however realised that if certain conditions, i.e access, basic literacy and training, were not met, the internet would not succeed in expanding democracy in South Africa and that the divide between the rich and poor would become even more prominent.

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HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

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Internet applications in the political sphere

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THE AIM OF THIS EVALUATION

The aim of this study is to (a) determine to what extent political parties and also politically orientated pressure groups/organisations/institutions in South Africa make use of the internet and (b) to determine what circumstances/variables contribute to the increased use of the internet by parties/institutions and (c) to determine what the implications of increased internet usage by political organisations and institutions would be.

The term teledemocracy will be used to refer to the facilitation of political issues by means of the internet. Please be as honest and thorough as possible when answering the questions as your opinions form the basis of this study.

Thank you kindly for your participation in this study.

Teledemocracy in South Africa

Benefits/implications of Internet usage for political parties and pressure groups

1 Background information

1(a) Name and type of institution

.....
.....
.....

--	--

1(b) Contact details

.....
.....

--	--

1(c) How many people working for your party/organisation have Internet connections at the office?

.....
.....

--	--

Internet usage patterns at the institution

2(a) How long has your party/organisation had access to the Internet?

.....
.....

--	--

2(b) Has anything significantly changed in your party/organisation due to the installation of the Internet connection?

.....
.....

--	--

2(c) Are there any problems/concerns that you have encountered regarding the use of the Internet?

.....
.....

--	--

3 For what purpose do you mainly use the Internet?

.....

.....

4(a) Which Internet facility do you make use of most often? (Please indicate your preference with an "x" in the appropriate box.)

	Never	Seldom	Often	Very often
E-mail				
Web surfing				
Searching for or downloading information				
Other				

4(b) If you ever use the e-mail facility, please indicate what you use it for (i.e. communicating to colleagues, communicating to voters/interested people, etc.).

.....

.....

4(c) Can you think of any change(s) that, if made, would result in a more beneficial usage of e-mail at the offices of your party/organisation?

.....

.....

5 If you ever use the Internet for web surfing, please indicate which types of sites you visit and for what purpose.

(a) Type of sites visited?

.....

.....

(b) Purpose of visits?

.....

.....

5(c) Can you think of any change(s) that, if made, would result in a more beneficial usage of the www for web browsing at the offices of your party/organisation?

.....

[] []

6 If you ever use the Internet for searching and downloading, please indicate what type of information you download the most and for what purpose you use it.

(a) Type of information?

.....

[] []

(b) Use information for?

.....

[] []

6(c) Can you think of any change(s) that, if made, would result in a more beneficial searching and downloading of information at the offices of your party/organisation?

.....

[] []

7. How important are the following Internet capabilities/facilities for your organisation/party? (Please indicate your preference with an "x" in the appropriate box.)

	Very important	Important	Not important	Not important at all
Ability to mobilise popular support				
Ability to provide information				
Ability to communicate (two way)				
Ability to influence public opinion				

8 What other (non-political) benefits associated with internet usage would also be desirable for your party/organisation (e.g. educational, economic or social benefits)?

.....
[] []

[] []

[] []

Enhanced public participation

9 Does your party/organisation have a website?

Yes	
No	
Uncertain	

10(a) Is your website actively visited?

Yes	
No	
Uncertain	

10(b) Please give details/reasons/statistics.

.....

.....

--	--

11(a) Do you think the Internet facility has in any way broadened the base of public support for your party/organisation?

Yes	
No	
Uncertain	

11(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

--	--

12 Do you have any suggestions on how the Internet can be used to gain more support?

.....

.....

--	--

13(a) According to you, what is the best way of giving political information through to people? (Please indicate your preference with an "x" in the appropriate box.)

	Very effective	Effective	Not effective	Not effective at all
Word of mouth				
Internet				
Newspapers				
Political meetings				
Television				
Radio				
Other				

13(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

--	--

14(a) Are you of the opinion that the use of the Internet would enhance democracy (i.e. more people being able to mobilise, participate, etc.) or would you say that the Internet might impede democracy (e.g. by marginalising more people)?

Enhance democracy	
Impede democracy	

14(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

--	--

15(a) Do you think that the Internet will empower government more (e.g. by providing more and better government information), or do you think that it might ultimately weaken government (e.g. in terms of new alliances being formed, etc.).

Empower government	
Weaken government	

15(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

--	--

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

16(a) Access to information via the Internet will make people in South Africa better informed.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally agree

Totally disagree

--

16(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

--	--

16(c) What needs to be done or changed in South Africa so that the Internet will make people better informed?

.....
.....

--	--

17(a) Communication via the Internet will facilitate broader participation in political policy discussions and decision making in South Africa.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Totally agree Totally disagree

--

17(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

--	--

17(c) What needs to be done or changed in South Africa so that the Internet will facilitate broader participation in political policy discussions and decision making in South Africa?

.....
.....

--	--

18(a) The Internet will facilitate direct public participation in governance through direct communication between citizens and policy makers.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Totally agree Totally disagree

--

18(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

18(c) What needs to be done or changed in South Africa so that the Internet will better facilitate public participation in governance through direct communication between citizens and policy makers?

.....

.....

19(a) The Internet will create innovative ways of informing and educating the electorate on key public issues.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally agree

Totally disagree

19(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

19(c) What needs to be done or changed in South Africa so that the Internet will create more innovative ways of informing and educating the electorate on key public issues?

.....

.....

20(a) The Internet will help guarantee equal access to information to large numbers of citizens.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally agree

Totally disagree

20(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

20(c) What needs to be done or changed in South Africa so that the Internet will help guarantee equal access to information to large numbers of citizens.

.....

.....

21(a) The Internet will provide improved access to government information and services.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally agree

Totally disagree

21(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....

.....

21(c) What needs to be done or changed in South Africa so that the Internet will provide improved access to government information and services.

.....

.....

22(a) The Internet can create imbalance of power in South Africa.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally agree

Totally disagree

22(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

--	--

22(c) What needs to be done or changed in South Africa so that the Internet will not create an imbalance of power in South Africa.

.....
.....

--	--

23(a) The potential for propaganda and misinformation is great when the Internet is used by political parties/institutions in South Africa.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally agree

Totally disagree

--	--

23(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

--	--

23(c) What needs to be done or changed in South Africa so that the Internet is not a potential tool for propaganda and misinformation?

.....
.....

--	--

24(a) Bringing citizens into political discussion via the Internet can confuse political issues.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally agree

Totally disagree

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24(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

.....
.....

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