

# **Generation X people's development of cyberspace culture: a psychological perspective**

by

**Amelia Celeste Richards**

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
Philosophiae Doctor**

**In the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria**

**Date: May 2006**

**Opgedra aan my Hemelse Vader -  
wat my geleer het om nooit my talente onder 'n maatemmer weg te steek nie**

**Baie dankie aan:**

- **Rudi Richards, wat my altyd die reënboog kan wys na 'n donderstorm ...**
- **Prof Piet, my mentor, vir jou geduld, leiding, hulp en bystand**

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Amelia Celeste Richards

Supervisor: Prof R.P. de la Rey

Department: Psychology

Degree: Philosophiae Doctor

**SUMMARY**

The 21st century can be defined as the fast paced information age wherein people establish another dimension to living; existing and interacting as multiple pseudopersonalities in cyberspace. The main aim of the study is to provide a description of a group of people known as 'Generation Xers', who develop cyberspace culture whilst interacting in chat-rooms. It is a two-fold process; firstly they create on-line 'pseudopersonalities' different from their off-line 'normal' personalities, and secondly they share unique values that characterise cyberspace culture globally.

The research process starts at the microlevel where individuals interact with each other in chat-rooms. On the mesolevel unique interaction patterns develop in chat-rooms that differ from traditional face-to-face interaction patters. On the macrolevel, cyberspace culture and specific values develop that Generation Xers share on a global basis. During the research process quantitative and qualitative methods were combined in order to compliment the limitations imbedded in each methodology.

Summarising relevant theories, on a microlevel the developmental process of pseudopersonalities is described by starting with its manifestation in the off-line world. The Johari-window and Roger's person-centred approach are used to describe the same process in the on-line world. On a mesolevel, differences between computer-mediated communication and face-to-face communication are discussed within the Cyber Psychology paradigm. On the macrolevel, the Internet experience is described by means of the Symbolic Action Theory.

The All Media and Product Survey (AMPS) database forms the basis of the longitudinal, statistical profile of the South African Internet-user population. Currently Internet access figures remain low at around 7-8% of the total population. South African Generation Xers, aged 16-49, are the richer and more affluent part of South African society, living in major metropolitan areas, earning R12 000+.

A qualitative content analysis of chat room behaviour in 384 chat-rooms sheds light on the dynamics behind their usage patterns. The .co.za-dictionary reflects the creative way in which .co.za-emotion and memory are expressed and negotiated. Pseudopersonalities that are at play in the borderless world of cyberspace continuously reflect issues, problems and struggles of everyday life in South Africa such as racial tension, political struggles and sexual interaction governed by the following cultural values:

- Respect
- An openness to the unknown
- Looking towards to the self (not governing bodies) for direction, resulting in;
- Liberty with responsibility towards the common good, the core of every society across the globe.

Finally the applicability of the Internet chat-room as a psychological research tool is explored within the South African context. It seems that although an effective tool for international surveys on sensitive topics, the South African research market is not ready for this tool to be implemented. South African Generation Xers perceive themselves as part of a global cyberspace culture and any distinction between the virtual and the real, does not imply a privilege to either, but rather a connection between the two. In this digital era, cyberspace is an electronic reflection of the way people communicate, interact, share and live life.

#### **LIST OF KEY TERMS**

Chat-room	Generation X
Computer-mediated communication	Internet
Content analysis	On-line
Culture	Pseudopersonality
Cyberspace	World Wide Web

**Generasie X mense en hul ontwikkeling van kuberruimtekultuur: 'n sielkundige perspektief**

deur

Amelia Celeste Richards

Studieleier: Prof R.P. de la Rey

Departement: Sielkunde

Graad: Philosophiae Doctor

**OPSOMMING**

Die 21ste eeu kan gedefinieer word as die blitsnelle inligtingsera waarbinne mense 'n ander dimensie van leef ontwikkel; die bestaan van en interaksie met meervoudige pseudopersonlikhede binne kuberruimtes. Die studie poog om 'n beskrywing te gee van 'n spesifieke groep mense, bekend as 'Generasie X' wat 'n 'kuberruimtekultuur' ontwikkel as gevolg van interaksie in kubergeselskamers. Dit geskied volgens 'n tweeledige proses: eerstens word kuber- of pseudopersonlikhede ontwikkel wat verskil van hul 'normale' persoonlikhede, en tweedens deel hulle unieke waardes binne die kuberruimtekultuur op 'n globale basis.

Die navorsingsproses begin op die mikrovlak waar individue met mekaar in interaksie tree in kubergeselskamers. Op die mesovlak ontwikkel unieke interaksiepatrone in hierdie kubergeselskamers wat verskil van tradisionele, aangesig-tot-aangesig interaksiepatrone. Op die makrovlak ontwikkel die kuberruimtekultuur asook gepaardgaande waardes wat Generasie Xers deel op 'n globale basis. In die navorsingsprojek is kwantitatiewe sowel as kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodes gekombineer om die leemtes eie aan elke metode te komplementeer.

Relevante teorieë kan as volg opgesom word. Op die mikrovlak word die ontwikkelingsproses van pseudopersonlikhede beskryf deur te begin by die manifestasies in die aflyn-wêreld. Die Johari-venster en Rogers se persoongesentreerde benadering word gebruik om dieselfde proses in die aanlyn-wêreld te beskryf. Op die mesovlak word die verskille tussen rekenaarondersteunde kommunikasie en aangesig-tot-aangesig kommunikasie beskryf binne die Kuber-Sielkunde paradigma. Op die makrovlak word die Internet ervaring beskryf by wyse van die Simboliese Aksie Teorie.

Die 'All Media and Product Survey' (AMPS) databasis vorm die basis vir die longitudinale, statistiese profiel van die Suid-Afrikaanse Internet gebruiker populasie. Huidiglik is Internet toegang syfers laag rondom 7-8% van die totale populasie. Suid-Afrikaanse Generasie Xers, 16-49 jaar oud, is die ryker, meer welvarende deel van die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing wat in die groter metropolitaanse areas bly en R12 000+ verdien.

'n Kwalitatiewe inhoudsanalise van kubergeselskamergedrag in 384 kubergeselskamers het lig gewerp op die dinamika agter hul gebruikspatrone. Die .co.za-woordeboek reflekteer die kreatiewe wyse waarin .co.za-emosie en gedagtes uitgedruk en onderhandel word. Pseudopersonlikhede aktief in die grenslose wêreld van kuberruimtes reflekteer kwessies, probleme en worstelinge van die alledaagse lewe in Suid-Afrika byvoorbeeld rasse spanning, politieke worstelinge en seksuele interaksie. Dit word beheer deur die volgende kulturele waardes:

- Respek
- 'n Openheid vir die onbekende
- Verwysing na die self (nie regeringsligame) vir rigting wat kulmineer in 'n;
- Vryheid met 'n verantwoordelikheid teenoor 'n algemene goedheid, die kern van elke samelewing wêreldwyd.

Laastens is die toepaslikheid van die Internetgeselskamer as sielkundige navorsingsinstrument ondersoek binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks. Al is dit 'n effektiewe instrument vir internasionale opnames oor sensitiewe onderwerpe, is die Suid-Afrikaanse mark nog nie gereed vir die implimentering van hierdie instrument nie. Suid-Afrikaanse Generasie Xers beleef hulself as deel van die globale kuberruimtekultuur en enige onderskeid tussen die virtuele en die werklike, impliseer nie 'n voorkeur vir een van die twee konsepte nie, maar eerder 'n verband tussen die twee. In hierdie digitale era, is kuberruimtes elektroniese weerkaatsings van die wyse waarop mense kommunikeer, in interaksie is met mekaar, die lewe deel en leef.

### **LYS VAN SLEUTELTERME**

Kubergeselskamer	Generasie X
Rekenaarondersteunde kommunikasie	Internet
Inhoudsanalise	Aanlyn
Kultuur	Pseudopersonlikheid
Kuberruimte	Wêreldwye Web

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*"Life's a journey... Enjoy the ride..."*

## 1.1 Introduction

The Internet began in 1969 as an USA Department of Defence project called ARPANET. By the end of that year, the first four 'host' computers were attached to the network. Since its inception the Internet has included provisions for person-to-person electronic communication, for example by e-mail. Technological development resulted in the design of hypermedia products that ordinary people can *interact* with. What started out as a Defence research project, now covers the whole universe and has had a huge impact on civilian populations throughout the world.

Everyday use of the Internet as communication medium contributed to renewed thinking in both civilian and research environments about personality as a phenomenon of multiplicity. A **chat-room** is an artificial environment that is created by some variation of computer software in which the user can interact with fellow users without ever meeting them face-to-face. The experiences people share in these chat-rooms connect them to each other in a borderless world. Here unique virtual interaction patterns develop that lead to the emergence of a cyberspace culture. During on-line interaction where the individuals cannot see each other "people are able to build a self by cycling through many selves" (Turkle 1995: 79). "The Internet has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with constructions and reconstructions of the self that characterise postmodern life" (Turkle 1995: 180). Construction and reconstruction imply deconstruction. These developments in turn have affected existing cultures. On-line interaction provides people with endless opportunities to shape and reshape their personalities.

**Culture** can be defined as "a set of beliefs or standards, shared by a group of people, which helps the individual decide what is, what can be, how to feel, what to do and how to go about doing it..." (Johnston & Johal 1999: 183). Furthermore the Internet provided a new variation on human reality i.e. virtual reality. According to Chambers' Dictionary of the 21st Century **virtual reality** can be defined as: "... a computer simulation of a real or artificial environment that gives the user the impression of actually being within the environment and interacting with it ..."Virtual reality is synonymous with the term cyberspace. According to Bishop, Taylor and Froy (2000) the cyberpunk writer William Gibson first coined the term **cyberspace** in 1984 to refer to the 'alternative' universe he felt would develop

through the globalisation and integration of computer-mediated communication. Once the two terms are combined **cyberspace culture** is "a set of beliefs or standards, shared by a group of people, which helps the individual decide what is, what can be, how to feel, what to do and how to go about doing it *when using the Internet*" (Johnston & Johal 1999: 183).

Cyberspace plays an active role in the information era during the process of transforming traditional and conservative cultures to new and modern technology driven cultures. The research results of this study attempt to illustrate how Internet chat-rooms are constructive creative products used by South Africans as communication tools to:

- *Adapt to a rapidly changing technological environment on a global basis:*  
Computers can be found in the home, school and office and new digital technologies are being developed on a daily basis connecting people with each other across the globe. This innovation has an impact on societies all over the world that has to adapt as quickly as possible (Tapscott 1998).
- *Keep abreast with the world and its totality:*  
Living in this global world implies keeping in contact with it in its totality, being constantly aware of changes on a global basis and how it affects living within a specific local culture. The Internet ensured that no specific culture or society are viewed in isolation any more, making the impact of a tragedy such as the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in the United States of America, be felt and experienced throughout the world on a global basis (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004).
- *Close the gap between virtual and real spaces / lifestyles:*  
The Internet is used by ordinary people on a daily basis for example to interact and communicate with friends or to discuss important projects and work related issues with international colleagues in different continents, making it an effective tool to narrow the gap between virtual and real life. It is not just a 'nice to have' technology anymore but an important tool to communicate and live by from day to day whether it is via e-mail communication, chat-room interaction, virtual conferences or webcam interaction (Kiesler 1997).

- *Revisit traditional cultural value systems and replace them with new cyberspace cultural values:*  
The Internet has dramatically changed the views people hold about themselves and the cultural groups they live in. Global computerised networks connect even the most remote cultural groups with each other and with the constant flow of new information from around the world into one particular system makes it possible to relook and assess traditional belief systems on a continuing basis.

Based on the title of a novel by Canadian author Douglas Coupland, the term **Generation Xers** has been applied to a section of the society born between 1965 and 1976. This group of people felt themselves excluded from jobs in general and meaningful participation in society. "They were viewed as a bitter, disenfranchised, and negative group" (Tapscott 1998: 33). According to the 21st Century Dictionary of Slang the "term applied to those born after 1965 who have proven to be an indefinable block in many socio-economic sectors. Generation Xers had plenty of disposable income but no distinct preference patterns as consumers" (Watts 1994: 99). Johnston and Johal (1999) elaborated on the definition by combining demographics and psychological traits in a psychographic description of these individuals and described them as:

- Under the age of 30
- Technically more sophisticated
- Innovative
- Fashionable
- Stimulation-seeking individuals.

Codrington and Grant-Marshall did a lot of work around the Generation Theory within South Africa and they provided the following description on Generation X people. This group of people was born between 1970-1989 although other authors gave parameters of 1960-1980 (2004: 19). Personal computers arrived on office desks at about the same time Xers pitched up for work. Few Xers have used a manual typewriter or heard of a telex machine. Computers took care of all that and Xers took full advantage of modern technology for word processing and communication both in and outside of the office. The Internet, e-mail and Web pages have become commonplace during their lives" (2004:124). According to these two authors Generation Xers want to be able to communicate "24/7" anywhere in the world, making the Internet part and parcel of their everyday life. "Xers, the so called dot-com generation, is the first generation to seriously contemplate changing people's minds by means of technology (2004: 269).

## **1.2 Aim of the study**

The study aims to provide a description of a particular group of people, defined as the 'Generation Xers', who is believed to have and still is developing a new 'cyberspace culture' through interacting in cyberspace chat-rooms, by means of a twofold process of firstly developing cyberspace personalities or 'pseudopersonalities' that are different from their individual 'normal' personalities, and secondly by sharing unique values, opinions and attitudes. This study will analyse and interpret these and other related cyberspace phenomena in depth.

## **1.3 Research objectives**

The overall research objective of this study is an analysis, assessment and description of the specific cyberspace culture developed by Generation Xers. This objective will be pursued by a number of subsidiary objectives, namely by analysing and describing:

- a) Social interaction processes in chat-rooms by answering the following questions:
  - What type of individual decides to use the Internet for socialisation and other purposes?
  - Do these people differ from the general population in South Africa, in other words, are they a sub- or counterculture?
  - How does this form of interaction differ from traditional ways of socialising?
- b) The development of the on-line pseudopersonality as compared to the real or everyday-life personality.
- c) Aspects which interacting Internet users emphasise as important or necessary for transmission to other Internet users that eventually do lead or could lead to a new value system imbedded in a new cyberspace culture.
- d) The applicability of the Internet chat-room as a new psychological research tool.
- e) Ethical research standards applicable to Internet research, more specifically to on-line focus groups.

## 1.4 Key concepts

A number of key concepts were referred to in this introductory section. These are: the Internet, multiplicity of personality, on-line interaction, personality construction, reconstruction and deconstruction, general culture against cyberspace culture, virtual reality and Generation Xers. Three further concepts need to be clarified namely:

- *Personality in everyday-life, the so called real personality:*

The real personality can be described as the keeper or integrated host of our many selves (Van den Berg 1974). It is a construct used to describe the "combination of those relatively enduring characteristics of an individual which are expressed consistently across situations and over time" (Baron & Byrne 1991: 522).

- *Pseudopersonality:*

The word 'pseudo' comes from the Latin word for "false". The anonymity of cyberspace makes it possible for individuals to create cyberspace personalities or pseudopersonalities. For the purpose of this study the pseudopersonality is defined as a "temporary construction of the self without revealing the 'real me' during on-line interaction" (Wood & Smith 2001: 58).

- *Value systems:*

Schwartz in Seligman, Olson and Zanna has defined values as "desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance that serve as guiding principles in people's lives. Values are the standards that the self uses to judge and justify itself; and the stability of value systems is necessary to express the coherence of the self over time and situations" (1996: 2). "For each individual, the values are organized in a value system, which is an enduring organization of [values] along a continuum of relative importance". In the traditional approach the value system was seen as a relatively stable system that guides thought and action across a multitude of situations. From the multiple value-system perspective value systems are dynamic and the value system that is constructed in any given situation is very much dependent on the context in which the individual is asked to do so (Seligman, Olson & Zanna 1996: 55).

## **1.5 Overview of the envisaged research process**

Cyberspace culture is both a conceptual as well as a physical context, making it an unstable, ever changing prerequisite for modern communication in the 21st century. The question can be asked, how do one analyse an unstable context? The decision was made to place the focus on the *development process used by Generation Xers to develop cyberspace culture*. Figure 1.1 aims to provide a graphic illustration of the research process and different colours were used to distinguish between different levels and processes imbedded in the project.

The first challenge of any scientific investigation is to transform the researcher's abstract, creative ideas, hypotheses and questions into a practical, structured, executable research process. Within the broad framework of science, research projects are not executed in isolation, instead the researcher consults all available literature in order to:

- a) Determine the context within which the proposed investigation will occur and;
- b) Justify and motivate why a scientific investigation is needed.

Relevant literature and theories will contextualise the research project within a psychological paradigm. The CEMDA (Complimentary Explorative Multilevel Data Analysis) method will be applied to study the process of cyberspace culture development. During the research process quantitative and qualitative methods were combined in order to compliment the limitations imbedded in each methodology.

The research process starts at the microlevel where 384 chat-room protocols are selected in order to analyse the interaction that takes places between creative chat-room participants. These participants create defensive and constructive on-line 'pseudopersonalities' that are different from their individual off-line 'normal' personalities. On the mesolevel, the researcher will compare computer-mediated communication patterns with traditional face-to-face interaction patterns. Chat-room groups develop into long term sustainable virtual communities and on the macrolevel, cyberspace culture develops that Generation Xers share on a global basis. (The validity of the research results will be evaluated by identifying similarities between the sample of chat-room participants, the local Internet population and Generation Xers as cultural group). Culture develops and changes as a results of individual actions and interaction, but the opposite is also true; culture also influences behaviour. The research results will illustrate how existential cyber behaviour symbolise unique cyber values, morals and attitudes, ensuring strong group cohesion between Generation X'ers across the globe. In conclusion the chat-room will be evaluated in terms of its applicability and usefulness as a research tool within the South African context guided by ethical considerations applicable to Internet research methodologies.



## CHAPTER 2: MOTIVATION FOR A SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CYBERSPACE CULTURE

*“I believe that what fascinates me is the unstated question that lies behind much of our preoccupation with the computer’s capabilities. That question is not what will the computer be like in the future, but instead, what will we be like? What kind of people are we becoming?”*

(Finnegan, Salaman & Thompson 1987: 252).

### **2.1 Introduction**

Prior to 1993, Internet surveys were limited to scientists and US military personnel, who represented the majority of people with e-mail addresses (Sampson 1998). The August 2001 figures published by NUA Internet Surveys stated that the number of on-line Internet users worldwide was approximately 513.41 million. Going back in time, the Internet was introduced to the South African public around 1997. At that time only 1-2% of the South African population accessed the Internet but this figure increased to 7.5% in 2004 (<http://www.nua.com> 20 Jul. 2005). As Mark Shuttleworth, the first African and South African that entered space, puts it:

*“The Net is still on course to become the fundamental platform for all communications... from your cellphone to your fridge, they will all talk TCP/IP ...”* (National chat-room).

### **2.2 Web spaces as mediators between on- and off-line living**

The relationship between the human race and technology is not new and certainly not one that has only developed in the last two decades or so. In fact, it has been a longstanding and ongoing relationship that started with someone picking up a stone to break open a fruit. The relationship has, however, grown and in the 21st century the question is being asked: Is it humans that are making technology (tools) or are humans being shaped by technology? Technology, in this case the Internet, has become

a social and economic context or environment and not a fixed concept restricted to as having only one universal and standardised meaning. Therefore, in the context that modern people find themselves now, technology is far more pervasive and penetrating than technology was in the previous century. The human race uses technology to adapt to an ever changing environment. Interactive web spaces is one example of how Internet technology is used to create another dimension to living; existing and interacting making it possible to create multiple pseudopersonalities in cyberspace, a phenomenon something that is difficult in the off-line world.

These web spaces are not screen-based imitations of printed information but are unique in that their content cannot be exactly expressed in other forms, because the “medium is the message, and the web is a medium of interactivity” (McKelvey 1998: 6). For the purpose of this research project, Internet interactivity is defined as a response to albeit from another person or from the system. Visitors are connected through a carefully designed interfaces that adjust to their needs or specifications whenever they are communicating on-line. Traditional ways of socialising and communication mediums known to the off-line world has changed. Web spaces are created to:

- Provide access to a global audience, thereby gaining information about the world and its different cultures, through new ways of thinking about evolution, relationships, sexuality, politics and identity.
- Allow users to interact with information and information providers thereby co-producing new information that flows in both directions.
- Act as places where 'virtual' communities meet to share interests, ideas, values and interests (McKelvey 1998).

Web spaces creatively mediate communication between individuals, regardless of personality and other differences or geographical distance between communicating parties. They have the opportunity to interact with one another on a daily basis and express how they experience the changing world. More specifically in a chat-room being human is emphasised by telling the world, or an individual what one feels and what makes sense, whether this entails replaying personal events, asking questions or resorting to full out swearing. Visual artists of cyberspace create virtual spaces wherein physical bodies can interact without meeting each other physically (Richards & Small 2005: 7). Compared to traditional face-to-face socialising processes, in web spaces there is no need for all the limbs or senses to work, or to exist for that matter. People can simply connect to the Internet and trust the visual artists of cyberspace to bring them closer to other Generation Xers. They can be part of on-line conversations and virtual communities and on a macrolevel they can experience cyberspace culture.

### **2.3 Motivations for a scientific investigation**

Despite this changing social context, what aspects necessitate a scientific investigation, especially from a psychological perspective? The answer is threefold:

- Within the unique social setting of South Africa, foreign literature especially on research done in America does not help to describe the typical South African Internet user and the dynamics behind his or her usage patterns. However, due to lack of local research results and literature, work completed in other parts of the world especially in the USA were used to provide a solid theoretical foundation for this research project. The applicability of these theories and literature will be tested against the research results based on a qualitative content analysis of 384 South African chat-rooms protocols as well as South African data bases that provide an opportunity to develop a statistical valid and reliable profile of the South African Internet user.
- Furthermore there seems to be a gap within social scientific research when exploring the Internet. According to Coward (2002) “the niche that was not being addressed in our eyes was the impact of the Internet from a social science perspective – the Internet’s impact on societies throughout the world and the impact of the Internet on the social scientists themselves. From the social science perspective, the changes occurring because of the Internet are unprecedented – it enables new variations of human to human linkage that have not been encountered before” (<http://www.pinkerton.emeraldinsight.com> 20 June. 2002). To date, research on computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been localised within the communications and education fields (Gackenbach 1998). “The Internet explosion happened so rapidly that we have not had much time to step back from the medium and look at it more systematically, as a new environment that can have potent effects on our behavior” (Wallace 1999: 1). Research about actual on-line behaviour is still sparse. As a human environment the Internet is relatively new and much can be learned from how it affects humans but looking closely at what is going on from a psychological perspective. Wallace continues by stating that “we need not start from scratch; we know a great deal about the factors that affect behavior in other settings and meaningful parallels could be drawn” (1999:3). Therefore theories and books produced on the topic of Cyber Psychology are limited but draw valuable insight from social, personality, abnormal and clinical subspecialties and secondarily on cognitive, sensation/perception and developmental perspectives (Gackenbach 1998).

- The third part of the answer lies in the need for new research methods especially within the South African context. “The dramatic changes in the global environment, coupled with technological advances in data collection analysis and dissemination, imply that researchers will need to broaden their capabilities in order to design, implement and interpret research in the 21st century. New tools incorporating the latest technology will need to be mastered and creative approaches to understanding behaviour in differing cultural contexts developed” (Graig & Douglas 2001: 82).

In response to the above comments this project will address the issues as follows:

- By combining results from various local data bases a statistical valid profile will be provided of the South African Internet population. A detailed qualitative analysis of chat-room behaviour will shed light on the dynamics behind their usage patterns linked with their pseudopersonalities and the values imbedded in the cyberspace culture.
- The research results will show that websites, more specifically chat-rooms, can be seen as cultural mediators.
- In response to the comment of Graig and Douglas (2001) the applicability of the Internet chat-room as a new psychological research tool will be explored. Against this backdrop, psychological researchers have to look at new but ethical ways to explore thoughts, feelings, perceptions and behaviour of the Internet society. The current set of ethical standards for research has to be evaluated by the actual users of the standards. Currently the South African guidelines are adapted to incorporate guidelines set out by the European Society of Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) for Internet research. Whilst focusing on Internet research methods, the researcher aims to briefly deal with the ethical standards protecting individuals’ rights and privacy, that can be applied to Internet based research projects, especially on-line focus groups.

## **2.4 Concluding summary**

Before ethical research processes and methods are described it is important to observe the spontaneous and uninterrupted on-line interaction processes between individuals. Chat-room interaction will provide a platform to describe the values underlying the cyberspace culture. Once the human-Internet transaction processes are understood through the eyes of South African Generation X members, only then can researchers start to generate regulations to ensure an ethical research process when observing and analysing individual Internet behaviour within the South African context.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*“Things should be made as simple as possible, but not any simpler”*

**(Albert Einstein)**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The project was contextualised in the previous chapter by providing background information on the social context of cyberspace culture and gaps within the existing literature to describe the Internet experience from a South African perspective. These questions pave the way for a thorough scientific investigation into:

- The development of the cyberspace culture
- A description of the typical Generation X member living in South Africa
- Ethical research methods that can be applied in the South African context to investigate thought processes and interaction patterns of the Generation Xer.

The Internet is not only a piece of technology but also an engine of social change, one that has an influence on work habits, education systems, the global economy, politics and ultimately, research processes. In order to understand the Internet as communication environment it has to be seen as part of people's socio-cultural networks that maintain their communities. Cyber Psychology enables one to think and theorise about how people make connections between cyberspace and the rest of their off-line lives. This process implies the following:

- The Internet can be experienced in different ways by individuals
- The Internet is both social and cognitive space
- The Internet experience is always situated in a specific context, even if one is alone in front of one's computer chatting to others in a chat-room
- Interaction, more specifically chat-room interaction can only be fully understood by means of an analysis of the social context in which it takes place.

During this study chat-room behaviour will be analysed by applying qualitative content analysis techniques in order to focus on simple and complex language constructions that can be used to analyse the social context of chat-room interaction. Words are units with individual meanings, but when these are placed in relationship with each other, a specific context is created for unique reasoning patterns. Choices of words and themes reveal a lot about personality, self-image, world views, value systems and use of psychological defence mechanisms that individuals resort to on a daily basis. By means of qualitative content analysis the linguistic context as well as the broader shared meaning context arise.

The content of chat-room protocols will be analysed on different levels namely:

- Figure interpretation since many individuals use figures to describe their pseudopersonalities.
- Word interpretation will be needed for the analyses of the unique .co.za-dictionary that developed during chat-room interaction.
- Sentence analysis is important since many of the online conversations is short and to the point.
- Paragraph analysis in order to identify overall trends and patterns that characterise the chat-room interaction on a broader level.

### ***3.2 Units of analysis for Internet research***

In order to analyse social interaction within this changing context, the **three-level (domain) model** of social context was used (Mantovani in Guiseppi & Galimberti 2001: 22). The basis of this model is the relationship between cultural norms and values and use of computer technology during human interaction. The microlevel looks at interaction between individuals via an artefact for example a computer. The mesolevel focuses on everyday life situations and the macrolevel describes the social context of cyberspace culture. Relationships between levels can be studied in reciprocal directions starting from either the micro- or macrolevel. On-line individual interaction influence everyday situations leading to the development of cyberspace culture on a macrolevel. In the opposite direction, cyberspace culture supplies tools such as 'netiquette' needed to correctly interpret on-line situations and behaviour. Visually the model can be depicted as follows:

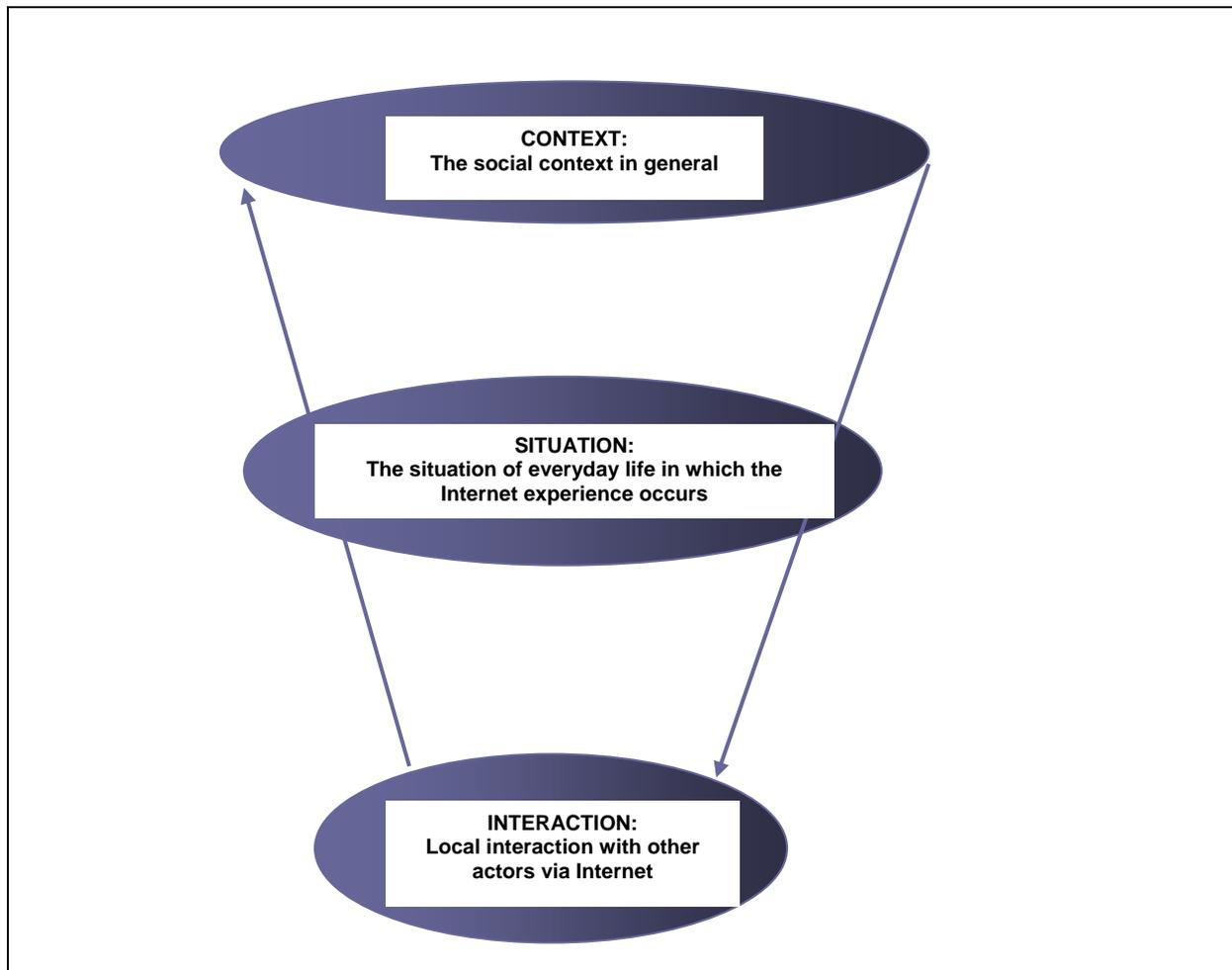


Figure 3.1: A three-level model of the Internet experience

*Microlevel: Interaction*

Carl Roger's ideas and thoughts around creativity will be used to describe behaviour, goals and personal motivations of an individual to interact and form relationships with other individuals via the Internet. This level forms the basis or starting point of the development of cyberspace culture.

*Mesolevel: Situation*

Chat-room groups develop within a borderless world of cyberspace with unique constraints and potentialities different from traditional face-to-face encounters. Specific roles, functions and behaviour such as pseudopersonality development will be described that characterise this unique electronic situation people encounter on a daily basis.

*Macrolevel: Context*

The focus of on-line interaction is on a unique culture of cyberspace with specific social rules to guide interaction in chat-rooms on the situational level. The Symbolic Action Theory within the framework of Cultural Psychology will be applied to discuss this top-down developmental process. Cyberspace culture influences other institutions within broader society, such as the globalisation of economies and social relationships across continents. This project will emphasise the continuing mediating process between technological innovation and human social change, implying that the cyberspace culture is indeed both a social as well as a cognitive concept, making it an unstable, ever changing prerequisite for communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In addition to the three-level domain model, the CEMDA (Complimentary Explorative Multilevel Data Analysis) method will be applied to study these units and the relationships between them. The CEMDA method provides a structured framework to analyse Generation Xers development of cyberspace culture from a psychological perspective. CEMDA provides researchers with the potential to conduct parallel and interconnected research in the same domain (Guiseppe & Galimberti 2001).

The main characteristics of the CEMDA model can be summarised as follows:

- The main aim is to integrate research results in a general framework to understand the phenomenon under question for example cyberspace culture.
- There is a different focus for each level, allowing the researcher to explore the relationship between levels of the Internet experience.
- Researchers have the flexibility to combine various quantitative and qualitative methods in order to compliment the weaknesses imbedded in each. Quantitative methods are applied to extract statistically valid and reliable patterns whilst qualitative methods capture the essence of the phenomena for example the personal experience of chat-room interaction.

### ***3.3 Stages in Complimentary Explorative Multilevel Data Analysis***

Guiseppe and Galimberti (2001: 33) identified the following stages to be used when structuring a research project:

- Stage 1: Determine the scope of the research
- Stage 2: Define the different levels
- Stage 3: Define a start level

[University of Pretoria etd – Richards, A C \(2006\)](#)

- Stage 4: Identification of links between the start- and other levels
- Stage 5: Analyse the direction(s) of the links between the levels
- Stage 6: Formulate hypotheses with regard to the links between the levels
- Stage 7: Identify the overall approach to the research
- Stage 8: Define the methods
- Stage 9: Data collection and selection of data sets
- Stage 10: Integrate quantitative and qualitative results
- Stage 11: Integrate the data from the different levels
- Stage 12: Interpret the data and present the results
- Stage 13: Formulate new hypotheses based on the results.

**Stage 1: Determine the scope of the research**

The study aims to provide a description of a particular group of people, conveniently designated as 'Generation Xers, who are developing a new 'cyberspace culture' through interacting in cyberspace chat-rooms, by means of a twofold process of firstly developing cyberspace or 'pseudopersonalities' that are different from their individual 'normal' personalities, and secondly by sharing unique values, opinions and attitudes.

**Stage 2: Define the different levels**

The three-level model in figure 3.1 was used to determine the following levels:

- Interaction
- Situation
- Context.

**Stage 3: Define a start level**

The process starts at the microlevel where individuals use the Internet during interaction with others.

**Stage 4: Link the start level with the other levels**

For the purpose of this project the development process was described from bottom to top, that is from individual interactions via the Internet on a daily basis, that eventually develops into cyberspace culture with an unique value system.

**Stage 5: Analyse the directions of the links between the levels**

The 'bottom-up' development process will be analysed with a specific focus on the individual's need for creativity, as described by Carl Rogers in 1952. In order to guide the description of the 'top-down' process, assumptions of the Symbolic Action Theory described by Boesch in 1991, will be applied.

**Stage 6: Formulate hypotheses with regard to the links between the levels**

**SUB-THEME 1:** Develop a profile of the Generation Xers living in South Africa and provide a description of their on-line interaction processes in chat-rooms. This provides the platform for:



**SUB-THEME 2:** A description of the development of a unique situation with unique characteristics for example the development of the pseudopersonality that differs from the individual's 'off-line personality'.



**MAIN THEME:** By understanding the patterns of Internet behaviour and the exchange of information through the eyes of chat-room participants, conclusions can be drawn about **values of the cyberspace culture**.

By understanding and describing the phenomenon the researcher will explore the following secondary themes.



**SECONDARY THEME 1:** Exploration of the application of the Internet chat-room as research tool for example on-line focus groups within the South African context.

**SECONDARY THEME 2:** Describing ethical standards applicable to Internet research in the South African context.

**Stage 7: Identify the overall approach to the research**

The development process of the cyberspace culture will be studied from a psychological perspective, more specifically the Humanistic approach to maintain focus on the human experience of cyberspace culture.

**Triangulation** will be used as research strategy whereby qualitative and quantitative techniques will be combined with AMPS results to provide a more holistic view of the phenomenon (Babbie 1989). The research process will be completed as follows:

**a. Literature study**

The literature study will aim to:

Identify theories used in Psychology to describe the cyberspace culture specifically using chat-room behaviour as the unit of investigation. It will involve a look at:

- Social interaction processes in Internet chat-rooms. This will be done by means of cyber-psychological theories as well as Carl Roger's views on the individual's need for creativity.
- Carl Roger's Self Concept Theory will lead the discussion around the development of the pseudopersonality. Other valuable input within the framework of Social Psychology will compliment the discussion.
- The processes used by generation Xers to develop a cyberspace culture will be described by means of a cultural-psychological perspective focussing on theoretical assumptions used in the Symbolic Action Theory.

**b. Quantitative analysis**

Trended population figures will be provided to develop a demographic profile of the South African Internet population compared to the general population.

**c. Qualitative content analysis of South African chat-room protocols**

A pilot phase will be included whereby 20 chat-room protocols will be analysed to refine aspects such as:

- Quality of protocols
- Identification of specific variables to be included to identify specific trends
- Applicable method of content analysis.

For the purpose of this study a chat-room protocol can be described on three levels namely:

- Level 1: A set of original data that is also known as source data
- Level 2: A set of rules by which people's verbal responses are recorded for analysis
- Level 3: A source to gain insight into personality profiles since it provides information about individual behaviour, emotional experiences and underlying pathology.

**a. AMPS data sets**

With the AMPS (All Media and Product Survey) database, trended population figures will be provided to develop a demographic profile of the South African Internet population compared to the general population. Where applicable other available sources for example census data will also be used.

**b. Population and sample size**

The content of **384** chat-room protocols will be analysed. The formula used to determine a sample size of 384 is:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 * 0.50 (1 - 0.50)}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

Currently the population is infinite, since it is unknown how many South Africans visit Internet chat-rooms. The following assumptions apply:

- $z = 1.96$  for the 5% significance level or 95% confidence level. This is the number of standard deviation units in the 'normal distribution' that will produce the desired level of confidence (significance).
- $p = 0.50$ . When the researcher has no idea beforehand of what percentage of the population has the characteristic of interest, and then he or she must be conservative and take it as 50%. This is the estimated proportion of the population who possesses the characteristic of interest for example Internet chat-room participation.
- $E = 0.05$ . This value determines that the sample result should not differ from the population figure by more than 5%. It is the permissible error. It states the expected deviation of the sample result (survey result) for the probable population figure, under the specified significance (confidence) level.

In summary, with 95% level of confidence it can be expected that the sample statistics (results) will not differ from the population statistics (actual values) by more than 5% if the sample is 384 and consists of randomly selected respondents from the infinite population.

**c. Interviews with South African researchers and psychologists**

A total of 10 in-depth interviews were conducted regarding:

- Internet research
- The applicability of on-line focus groups in the South African context
- Ethical considerations for Internet research.

**Stage 10:     *Integrate quantitative and qualitative results***

Chapter 7 concentrates on results from various quantitative data sets and provide a reliable and statistically valid profile of the South African Internet user population. It is complimented by the results of the qualitative content analysis of 384 chat-room protocols to provide an in-depth understanding of on-line interaction group processes

**Stage 11:     *Integrate the data from the different levels***

In order to integrate relevant literature and research results, chapter 9 focuses on the cyberspace culture specifically the development process that starts with interaction between individuals in chat-room groups that develops into virtual communities culminating into cyberspace culture.

**Stage 12:     *Interpret the data and present the results***

Chapters 7 to 9 deal with this process in detail.

**Stage 13:     *Formulate new hypotheses based on the results***

The research process is summarised in the final chapter of this thesis. Insights, key learning areas and new avenues for potential future research will conclude the project.

### **3.4 Concluding summary**

In summary the process makes it possible to look at the Internet experience at different levels. The main research theme is broken down into two subthemes and followed by two secondary themes. Each level dictate the method being used, for example AMPS figures provide a statistical profile of the South African Internet population and the interaction patterns will be best described via qualitative content analyses of chat-room protocols. The quantitative figures represent the phenomenon as a finite set of variables usually portrayed as numerical data, but with the qualitative content analysis of the protocols the person and his or her interaction patterns are described.

## CHAPTER 4: THE INTERNET - A PRODUCT OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS DESCRIBED BY CARL ROGERS

*“Value the gift of creativity...”*

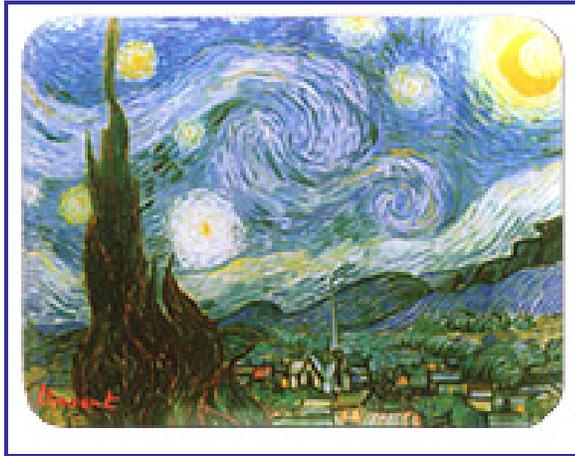


Figure 4.1: Starry night by Vincent van Gogh

### **4.1 Introduction**

Prior to a discussion about any creative process it is important to note that this chapter is based on proceedings titled 'Toward a theory of creativity' delivered by Carl Rogers in Granville, Ohio in 1952 at the conference on Creativity. The value of his work lies in the fact that 53 years later, his theory is still applicable to developments in the Internet environment confirming the assumption that the creative act has an universal nature and can be applied to new ideas and technological creations, irrespective of time frames.

### **4.2 Social need for creativity**

Many contemporary authors will tend to agree with Rogers in reasoning that the past 53 years can be described as a period where creativity was not seen as the most vital points on any society's agenda. Educational systems produced conformists, stereotypes and individuals whose education is complete, instead of producing free, creative, original thinkers (Rogers 1952: 249). In the field of media

development, television specifically was described as a way of providing passive entertainment to a so called 'coach potato' audience. In the industrial world creative processes were only available to a selected few individuals in managerial positions, designers or executives in research departments. "In the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the books we read, and the ideas we hold, there is a strong tendency toward conformity, toward stereotypes. To be original, or different, is felt to be dangerous" (Rogers 1952: 249). At then there was the Internet ... The inception of the Internet and its availability to the general public meant the start of a wave of information readily available on screen in the office, in the home or in the classroom. This instant exposure to global information forced humanity to realise that well known environments keep changing and the only way to keep abreast with it is to *creatively* adapt to change.

During the 1950s, Rogers predicted that "unless man can make new original adaptations to his environment as rapidly as his science can change the environment, our culture will perish. Not only individual maladjustment and group tension, but international annihilation will be the price we pay for a lack of creativity" (Rogers 1952: 250). When one looks at differences between the generations, one will see that the cyberspace culture has developed out of a need of individuals to control environments and not for looking toward a governing body to make those decisions for them. What makes the 2005 version of the Internet different from the 1969 version? Nowadays the Internet is not something distant and foreign and only available to IT specialists in the USA Defence Force. Internet users perceive it as a tool to interact with their environment, to keep abreast with the world in its totality, even if it means chatting on-line with a friend in America about the Academy Award won by Charlize Theron an actress born in South Africa, using an Internet connection at home in South Africa. The digital revolution, unlike previous revolutions such as the industrial revolution, is not controlled by external groups, political parties or governments but by individuals.

### **4.3 The creative process**

In order to scientifically understand an abstract concept such as creativity, there should be something observable, a product of creation in this case the Internet. This product must be a novel construction. This novelty grows out of the unique qualities of an individual in his or her interaction with the creative product or the Internet for example pseudopersonalities that are created once individuals interact with others in chat-rooms. The creative process can be described as follows: "It is the emergence in action

of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other” (Rogers 1952: 251). One of the functions of psychology, is to think and theorise about how people make connections between cyberspace (a novel relational product) and the remainder of their off-line lives.

#### ***4.4 Motivation for creativity***

One could ask the question: So why be creative? Rogers agreed with colleague Maslow, also a Humanistic thinker, that the primary motivation for creativity is “man’s tendency to actualise himself, to become his potentialities” (Rogers 1952: 251). Rogers takes it further and described it as the directional trend evident in all human life: The urge to expand, develop, extend and mature. Although it may be buried under psychological defences, hidden from the face-to-face world that denies its existence, it exists and awaits proper conditions to be released and expressed. This might be another motivation for the development and success of the Internet. Cyberspace provides people with a vehicle to express individual originality, a window whereby creativity can be expressed and shared with others 'like me', but under the protective cloak of anonymity. Furthermore Rogers felt that no distinction should be made regarding the degree of creativity since it is a value judgment extremely variable in nature. In the chat-room this also holds true because whether it is a first year student or a CEO, on-line everybody operates under pseudonyms ensuring equal status. Cyberspace provides a safe space whereby one can be what he or she wants to be.

#### ***4.5 The social value of creativity***

Rogers makes a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ creativity for example on-line self-help group members that operate under pseudonyms in order to protect their identity since they are HIV+ compared to the paedophile acting as a 12 year old in a chat-room for adolescent boys, looking for his next victim. Both are creative acts even though their social values and objectives are different. How can science determine when creativity is constructive or destructive?

The distinction can certainly not be based on examining the product that is the Internet. Can one say that the Internet is evil because of child pornography or the availability of thousands of sexual websites available to anyone, more specifically those members younger than eighteen? In the context of many

television shows and popular journalism children should be kept away from this new form of evil. To play devils advocate, what about the following gentleman's statement? Trocchia and Janda (2000: 6) recorded this verbatim response from an elderly wheelchair-bound informant:

“Informant: I like to get on the chat line and talk to young people

Interviewer: Do you tell them your age?

Informant: Oh, no, I tell them that I'm in my 30's

Interviewer: Why do you do that?

Informant: Because who wants to talk to an old man? It's great because I can be whoever I want to be. Last week I had fun talking about sports and music with young people. I felt like I fit right in.”

Is the Internet really such an evil thing? What is the conclusion? The constructiveness of the creative product does not lie in the examination of the product (Internet) itself. The answer to the question lies elsewhere.

Another avenue to identify a constructive creative product is to look at the purpose of the individual participating in the creative process, or maybe by evaluating the product's creativity at the time it was formed? The Internet was developed in 1969 as a specific closed system namely the American military environment. Surely if the Internet as a possible constructive creative object had been evaluated during the early seventies one would have concluded that it is a product effective within the military environment but not a creative work of art applicable in the public sphere of life. As is the case with many artists' works such as Van Gogh's work, his real creative power only became evident years after his death. The same applies to the Internet, but it was in the early nineties that the Internet exploded and only then did its real creative potential become known. Luckily science did not get stuck in its focus on the original purpose of the development of the Internet. Compare the social value and benefits the Internet system has in life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to its original purpose in 1969 that is internal communication within a military environment. What is the conclusion? Constructive creativity cannot be determined by:

- The time when a creative product was formed: or
- The purpose of individuals participating in the process.

A constructive creative product's value lies in its sense of direction towards a common good. Products that allow people to function freely and fully as true beings, true to the creativity they find within themselves. As Rogers put it: "When a man's unique capacity of awareness is thus functioning freely and fully, we find that we have not an animal whom we must fear, not a beast who must be controlled, but an organism able to achieve, through the remarkable integrative capacity of its central nervous

system, a balanced, realistic, self-enhancing, other-enhancing behaviour as a resultant of all these elements of awareness” (1952: 253). Keeping the progress towards a common good in mind, Rogers also stated that this constructive creative behaviour is not always conventional, not always conforming but individualised. In 1952 he asked whether this could be socialised? Indeed, within cyberspace culture this train of thought is one of the cornerstones, whereby individuality is albeit eccentric, different and unconventional, respected under the cloak of common good.

#### ***4.6 Inner conditions of constructive creativity***

If Rogers back in 1952 had to provide a description of a particular group of people, conveniently designated as 'Generation Xers, he would have started with a description of conditions that had to be present in an individual to be able to be associated with constructive creativity. He summarised his description in these three points namely:

- Openness to experience
- An internal locus of evaluation
- The ability to toy with elements and concepts.

When an individual is open to experience, psychological defence mechanisms are not necessary any more. Since pseudonymity is part of the on-line experience the stimulus can be freely relayed without being distorted by means of a process of defensiveness. According to McKenna, Katelyn and Bargh “the Internet provides a kind of experimental laboratory in which one can try out various possible selves and different roles in a safe and risk-free manner” (2000: 67). Rogers’ descriptions are echoed when one reads descriptions of cyberspace and Generation Xers views on the importance of tolerance of ambiguity, the ability to receive conflicting information without forcing closure upon the situation, as well as openness to the unknown. This openness creates the possibility for creativity and because of this openness, the product of creativity can be destructive or constructive.

Looking at the second point of an internal locus of evaluation, the typical Generation Xer is more inclined to base decisions on personal meaning, rather than on peer group pressure. Creativity is evaluated by asking questions such as “Does it express a part of me – my feeling or my thought, my pain or my ecstasy?” (Rogers 1952: 255). Keeping the direction towards a common good in mind, this internal locus of evaluation does not imply the individual to be oblivious towards or unaware of the judgment of others.

Lastly Generation Xers feel it is their right to experiment with different elements and concepts, that is creativity in motion. Different 'self-pictures' are tested in cyberspace where the individual interacts with the world and by experiencing others' on-line reactions the individual sees him- or herself through the eyes of other Internet users. They display an ability to spontaneously play with ideas, relationships, shapes, other ideas to shape hypotheses and test them, and to create...!

#### ***4.7 External conditions fostering constructive creativity***

Because of the nature of inner conditions of creativity it is evident that it cannot be forced upon people. This implies that external conditions have to be developed in order to foster and nourish and allow creativity to develop and grow. Rogers stated that this external environment should be a place of psychological safety and freedom. Psychological safety firstly implies a space where individuals will be accepted in their own right, hence a space where they can actualise themselves in new, spontaneous ways. The Internet provides the individual with anonymity and personal control over contact with fellow Internet users and thus provides a platform for the individual to explore and finally actualise the real self. As Rogers puts it: "The good life ... is the process of movement in a direction which the human organism selects when it is inwardly free to move in any direction" (1961: 187). The self-concept and personality evolves from human experiences and the individual has the freedom of choice during Internet conversations to creatively explore different aspects of the self-concept without bearing the risk of conditions that apply for experiencing acceptance of others. "Under the protective cloak of anonymity chat-room participants can express the way they truly feel and think. The assurance of anonymity gives one far greater play in identity construction than is conceivable in face-to-face encounters" (McKenna, Katelyn & Bargh 2000: 67).

Furthermore a climate is provided in which external evaluation is absent. For an individual to find himself in an atmosphere where he is not being evaluated, not being measured by some external standard, is enormously freeing. Evaluation is always a threat, and creates a need for defensiveness. If judgements based on external standards are absent, then only the 'I' can be open to my experiences, my own likes and dislikes, my own locus of evaluation, continuously on the path toward my own creativity. If this is the case during chat-room interaction why then are there conflict and aggressive

behaviour such as flame wars? An absence of external evaluation does not mean an absence of 'having reactions'. A reaction such as 'I don't like your idea' is not an evaluation, but a reaction. In many cases individuals cannot distinguish between the two. This distinction can be made easier by applying the notion of emphatic understanding: 'Although I disagree with you, I can still accept you and learn about you'.

#### **4.8 Concluding summary**

In conclusion, these conditions pave the way for psychological freedom. A shy and lonely boy can start communicating with girls on-line. This will give him the freedom to later on in life meet girls in face-to-face situations, thus enhancing his interpersonal relationships with the opposite sex. By using the Internet as a constructive creative tool, people can teach themselves in a safe environment how to be firstly true to themselves, to develop their own unique ways of being creative and ultimately use that 'I-ness' towards a common good. Hereafter they can with dignity and confidence move on to more involved interpersonal relationships.

During this chapter the focus was placed on the creative roots of the Internet. The next chapter will elaborate on the development of a cyberspace or 'pseudopersonality' during encounters in cyberspace. For this purpose, theoretical assumptions within the broad field of social psychology as well as the Self-Concept theory of Carl Rogers will be applied.

## CHAPTER 5: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PSEUDOPERSONALITY



Figure 5.1: The pseudopersonality at work (Tapscott 1998).

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will deal with the various issues around the development of the pseudopersonality. The aim will be to compare how a pseudopersonality develops and manifests in the off-line and on-line world. After a description of the history and manifestation of the pseudopersonality in the off-line, face-to-face world, a description will be provided of virtual interaction characteristics that promote pseudopersonality development in cyberspace. The developmental process itself will be explained in more detail by applying theoretical assumptions from the well known Johari window as well as the person-centred approach of Carl Rogers. The chapter will be concluded with a discussion around the relationship between the real world and cyberspace with the pseudopersonality as vehicle to commute between the two.

## **5.2 The pseudopersonality in the off-line world**

Various psychologists and theorist from as early as the 1800s described and paid attention the theme of a plural self. Frederik van Eeden published a pamphlet with the title 'Our Dual Self' in 1888. He was followed by Max Dessoir who published a book in 1889 under the title "The Double Self". A prominent figure in French psychiatry Pierre Janet focused on the pathological conditions exhibited by hysterical patients and documented one patient for leading a triple existence. His work is considered by many others as the front runner to 'The Three Faces of Eve' which only appeared a century later. Henri Bergson also made a distinction between a public and an inner existence or a social and an individual existence (Van den Berg, 1974: 25). This phenomenon was labelled in different ways for example: Freud described the ego, Id and superego. Jung used the word archetypes. Lewin talked about subregions of the personality. Goffmann referred to multiple selfing and Shapiro talked about subselves. More detail will be provided in the next section on the following psychologists contributions to the theme namely:

- William James
- George Herbert Mead
- Harry Stack Sullivan
- The Humanistic movement in Psychology
- Middlebrook.

### **5.2.1 William James**

In contrast to the abnormal manifestations of multiple personalities William James already paid attention to the theme in 1891 when he mentioned a pure self, the spiritual self, the material self and the social self:

- "The spiritual self is the personal, inalienable, inner self strictly our own. It is the centre of consciousness, that part of us which makes us say 'I'. It is the unique unparalleled self, which, as a condition to our existence, accompanies us until we die" (Van den Berg 1974: 1).
- The material self contains everything about us of a substantial nature namely the body, clothing as well as money.

- The social self imply that we are not singular, exclusive, independent individuals, but that we belong together, we are not solitary, but solidary creatures. "This belonging to a society is our nature to such an extent that there is no completely solitary individual. A person growing up without any human contact loses all human qualities, he does not even learn how to laugh and is practically and animal in everyway. We are formed, moulded, by being together; it provides us with a self, a social self. *It does so to such an extent that being with one person or with another results in having different personalities. A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognise him. Every person has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares*" (Van den Berg 1974: 3).

He continues by providing reasons for this divided existence by stating that the mind has the ability to reflect on everything. This implies an ability to make divisions and the creation of contrasts. This function is much needed in the communities people live in. "These communities consist of separated groups, groups with few connection between them, so few connections that the individual does not have anything but isolated selves to refer to" (Van den Berg 1974: 94).

### 5.2.2 George Herbert Mead

George Herbert Mead complimented the views of William James in 1934 when he addressed the 'multiple personality' in his book *Mind, Self and Society*. He also referred to a divided existence whereby "we divide ourselves in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances" (Van den Berg 1974: 170). According to Mead people live a multiple existence divided into many parts and it is a normal state of affairs as long as society as a whole remains a unity. "For within the community as a whole ... there is a unified self ..." (Van den Berg 1974: 170).

### 5.2.3 Harry Stack Sullivan

Harry Stack Sullivan's views in 1940 on man's plural existence focused on various kinds of experiences namely the:

- *Prototaxic experience:*  
A general all-inclusive experience for example the experience of a city with all its sights, sounds, traffic, people and activities.

- *Syntactic experience:*

Here the focus is placed on the words that people use to communicate with. Every interaction people have with one another is a syntactic experience in that understanding and progress is based on shared meaning, for example consensus based on interaction.

- *Parataxic experience:*

This experience compliments James's 'social self' whereby when "A is talking to his friend B he is quite the same person as he is when he is talking to his other friend C" (Van den Berg 1974: 180).

#### **5.2.4 The Humanistic movement in psychology**

The earlier mentioned descriptions of the personality in terms of its multiplicity, preceded the Humanistic movement in psychology which first arose as a protest against the image of a human being offered by behaviouristic and psychoanalytic psychologies, that attempted to explain human conduct solely on the basis of a biological or mechanistic model. Humanistic thinkers argued that the study of human beings begin with the human experience and proposed a psychology of growth rather than control. They started using concepts like self-realisation, self actualisation and a psychology of 'being'. Within this paradigm, personality is seen as a construct that changes continuously throughout an individual's life. As the individual gets older and gain more life experience his or her personality grows and changes since it is influenced by human experience (Wertz 1993: 11).

#### **5.2.5 Middlebrook**

As early as 1974, Middlebrook was quoted on describing the "individual not as a single self, but many selves, which change somewhat as the individual shifts from situation to situation and person to person" (Rowan 1990: 7). This phenomenon was defined in various ways for example: subselves, subidentities, alter personalities or subpersonalities. For the purpose of this study the following working definition of subpersonality is applicable. "A subpersonality is a semi-permanent and semi-autonomous region of the personality capable of acting as a person" (Rowan 1990: 8).

Subpersonalities originate from the different roles that people have in the off-line, face-to-face world such as father, husband, brother and worker. The person can experience an inner conflict between two or more subpersonalities for example the strain of being a good worker and mother simultaneously, since each personality has its own responsibilities, demands and expectations that differ from each other. During times when an important decision has to be taken the 'I' is caught up in the middle surrounded by many selves that compete with each other. One of the easiest things for the human mind is to store information in compartments. A healthy personality implies a fluid open relationship between these compartments that are integrated into one holistic whole i.e. personality. As for diverse subpersonalities, it can become difficult to integrate them with each other. This process is called the continuum of dissociation. In cases where subpersonalities become almost 'strangers' to each other and completely dissociated with each other, abnormal behaviour and personality disorders can develop. In the case of personality disorders the barriers between the multiple personalities are more rigid or inflexible than in the case of normal subpersonalities. This term should not be confused with multiple personalities that entail a much higher degree of dissociation and abnormal behaviour. In contrast subpersonalities are part of an integrated personality and self-concept and are used when individuals experience different situations and people. During off-line, face-to-face interaction the individual can project different subpersonalities depending on the specific circumstances and/or people he or she encounters (Rowan 1993:78). Later on in the chapter the Johari window will be used to explain the process whereby the individual can hide and reveal characteristics during his or her interaction with others.

All these variations are integrated in the real personality that can be defined as the "combination of those relatively enduring characteristics of an individual which are expressed consistently across situations and over time" (Baron & Byrne 1991: 522). In summary personality has been described in terms of its multiplicity by various authors throughout the centuries. In the off-line world the real personality can be described as the keeper or integrated host of our many selves (Van den Berg 1974). This phenomenon of multiplicity is also visible in on-line world and in cyberspace it manifests itself as a pseudopersonality.

### **5.3 On-line pseudopersonalities**

When this phenomenon manifests in the on-line world the subpersonality is replaced with the pseudopersonality since the 'real me' behind the computer remains anonymous and invisible to others. The word 'pseudo' comes from the Latin word for "false". The anonymity of cyberspace makes it possible

for individuals to create cyberspace personalities or pseudopersonalities. For the purpose of this study the **pseudopersonality** is defined as a "temporary construction of the self without revealing the 'real me' during on-line interaction (Wood & Smith 2001: 58). The Internet chat-room can be described as a social laboratory because it provides freedom to the individual to subscribe to different roles that are not always possible in his or her everyday life and to try out various possible selves in a safe and risk free environment. In cyberspace the written word and information are more important than physical appearances and therefore the possibility exists to create multiple identities. During chat-room interaction the individual has the freedom to develop a pseudopersonality whereby he or she can adopt any age, gender, name etcetera. With this pseudopersonality the individual has the advantage of interacting with everybody without showing the 'real me'. It provides the individual with more power over the hidden and unknown elements of the personality. It is important to remember that as in the case of off-line subpersonalities the on-line pseudopersonality also remains a semi-permanent region of the personality capable of acting as a person in the unique context of cyberspace.

#### ***5.4 Virtual interaction characteristics that promote pseudopersonality development***

Humans live in a world where sight is one of the most important senses used to evaluate the world as well as the people in it. Almost everybody has been exposed to Hollywood and the famous notion of acting out different roles and playing different lives also influence virtual interaction. Although transvestites can be perceived as negative in the physical life, on-line gender swapping is common. The virtual environment also allows space for those that are different from mainstream cultures, for those people with weird and sometimes wonderful ideas to meet people 'like me', thus combating loneliness. The discussion starts with the well-known saying: 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder'...

##### **5.4.1 Invisible appearances can be deceiving (WYSIWIS - What you see is what I say)**

The 'WYSIWIS' principle was first quoted by Gackenbach in 1998. Considerable research within the paradigm of social psychology shows the effect physical appearance has on impression management as well as determining whether a relationship will start between two people. During face-to-face

interactions people infer qualities for their identities based on physical characteristics such as gender, race and clothing. During on-line interactions, physical appearances are invisible and cannot be assessed, at least not initially, therefore friendships are built on different grounds such as similarity, values and interests. In the computer-mediated world the self becomes fluid and multiple, made and transformed by language and people are recognised through their textual behaviour by means of:

- Their signatures
- Their pseudonyms [According to Wallace (1999) 45% of pseudonyms are related to the individuals themselves in some way]
- How they conduct themselves in chat-rooms
- The type of contributions to the conversations
- Their unique use of language (Wood & Smith 2001).

Since chat-room interaction is limited to written communication, people use words to create pseudopersonalities around the idealised version of the self, for example those attributes the individual would like to possess during on-line interactions. For example the reflection projected back is then one with good looks, irrespective of actually being overweight or an extrovert, but the real person behind the computer screen is actually the shy girl without the courage to talk to other girls on a playground.

"We see ourselves differently when we catch our image in the mirror of the machine" (Turkle 1995: 20). In first-time encounters an individual will be liked better if the encounter takes place in an Internet chat-room rather than if the two strangers meet face-to-face. People who first met via the Internet and then talked face-to-face to each other, liked one another more than those who met each other face-to-face in both encounters. Even those that were under the impression that they had met two different people, one via the Internet and another via face-to-face interaction, significantly liked the person they talked to via the Internet better (McKenna, Katelyn & Bargh 2000) One can argue that if physical appearance does not interfere with the initial impression formed, then once the Internet partners meet in person and physical appearance does come into play, it may carry less weight, as in the case of face-to-face encounters.

In cyberspace the physical body becomes a distant role player when the pseudopersonality is formed. Sometimes the individual has a body, at other times the personality is disembodied. The context and given situation dictates the personality traits, thus the self is defined by the social environment giving the individual the opportunity to give birth to multiple selves dependant on situational characteristics.

#### 5.4.2 All the world's a stage – Virtual role play

In the off-line world most people live in a situation of ambiguity, where their beliefs and behaviour are partly controlled by the groups that they belong to. They do not act the same way at home with the family as they do at work or when with friends and therefore different roles are played out in different situations. The famous words of Shakespeare come to mind: 'All the world's a stage...' Eric Erikson referred to a specific development phase in his theory called the 'psychosocial moratorium' wherein adolescents focus on identity development. Usually it is a time of intense interaction with other people, a time of experimentation in order to facilitate the development of the core self. Erikson described this as a stage that has to be completed before the adolescent can move on to becoming an adult (Louv 1990). In many cases people move on and become older even if some issues in certain development stages are still unresolved. Turkle (1995) argues that in cyberspace the individual, irrespective of age, is given the opportunity to experiment to develop a core self. In cyberspace people will rather control the multiple roles they play than suffer from the burden of having to negotiate them. With this unique opportunity of role play individuals learn more about themselves. At the same time the anthropological experience of 'dépaysement', for example the experience of seeing the familiar through unfamiliar eyes, comes into play where the individual learns more about other gender groups, races or classes by acting out different roles (Wood & Smith 2001).

Frau-Meigs (2000: 230) describes the digital identity as a 'licence to grow'. Wallace (1999) elaborates on the idea of growth and expands on Erikson's 'psychosocial moratorium' by stating that it is not confined to adolescence; instead it is a process of life. She discusses the MAMA-process (Moratorium – Achievement – Moratorium – Achievement). The moratorium phase is a phase of self doubt about who people are and they experience this every time they experiment with different roles on the Internet. In contrast to off-line living, cyberspace creates an environment wherein people can explore unknown parts of the self by creating and experimenting with on-line pseudopersonalities that they never got around 'being' in real life. Although cyberspace is synonymous to a theatre, a realm where one is invited to perform a variety of roles, the key is to reach the achievement phase. As in the off-line world care must be taken not to develop dissociated multiple personalities that can result in abnormal behaviour and personality disorders. During the achievement phase all newly acquired knowledge of the self are integrated into one intact, responsible personality able to effectively adapt to different situations throughout life (Smith & Kollock 2001).

The Internet makes it much easier for an individual to establish new relationships and express these important aspects of identity without the risk of upsetting the balance of the off-line relationships. It is difficult for a person to effect changes in his or her self-concept when the surrounding social environment remain static. In face-to-face interaction, features of one's physical appearance are strongly associated with social categories, roles and stereotypes. When individuals interact in chat-rooms they acquire new peer groups that has no ties with off-line social groups. The members of this new Internet peer group have no prior conceptions or expectations about the kinds of identities or roles to which this person should adhere to. Starting out with a blank slate, the individual is then free to construct him- or herself in any number of different ways.

A social psychologist Mead contends that one discovers oneself by reflection from the people around one (Cathcart & Samovar 1975). With the freedom of identity construction, it might be that the individual has a need to be accepted and will turn into the person he or she thinks will get the kind of attention that is needed. From a different point of view, the pseudopersonality works to the advantage of the hearing-impaired individual, whereby it provides him/her with more freedom to take on different roles and interact with people from different spheres of life, not readily available during face-to-face interactions. Unfortunately the darker side of crime is becoming more evident in cyberspace. For example, the pedophile can use gender swapping to present himself as a nice young girl looking for friends, but with darker motives in mind only open to him in the off-line world.

#### **5.4.3 'MORFing' – Gender swapping**

Gender as demographic variable is one of the primary means by which people classify themselves. In most cultures the self is treated as being located in one body with a male/female dichotomy. As stated earlier, during chat-room interaction the person can have a body and can be disembodied at times. Although the embodiment is unknown in cyberspace, Smith and Kollock (2001) stated that people will anticipate a body talking back to them that is either male or female. Wallace (1999) described the same process but linked this spontaneous gender-evaluation to priming. The term priming implies that certain social categories are more accessible than others and people tend to use the one closest to the surface to form impressions about newcomers for example 'newbies' in a chat-room. The male/female label is one of the primary categories by which newcomers will be evaluated. This is evident early in chat-room conversations when the question is asked: 'M or F?' (Male or Female), which is conveniently given the term 'MORFing'. According to Smith and Kollock (2001) there are three levels of classification during the early phases of chat-room discussions, for example:

- Level 1: Gender and age
- Level 2: Location
- Level 3: Race.

The 'MORFing' phase provides no assurance that the individual will portray his or her real gender. On the cyberspace stage role play is rife and gender swapping does take place, as is evident in the next example:

"I have always used my first name as my login id, and I don't want to change now, but if I had to do it over again, I would probably use my last name. I have discovered the disadvantages as being identified as a woman by my login id" (Winter & Huff 1996: 52).

Smith and Kollock (2001) also found that women tend to choose gender-neutral pseudonyms to avoid on-line harassment. Males tend to choose female personalities because it is perceived that females get more attention, receive more help as well as offers of sexual advances, especially if they are 'newbies'.

Interestingly enough, Wood and Smith (2001) found that those individuals that swap genders on-line tend to portray rigid stereotypical roles and are caught in the act more than often. This process was described as 'hypergendering' by Smith and Kollock in 2001. When then are personalities that people create not foolproof? Erving Goffman, developer of the Impression Management theory stated that some impressions and expressions are 'given', for example those deliberate actions aimed at creating a specific impression. Then there are the impressions and expressions 'given off', for example those impressions that are more subtle and harder to control. The latter becomes evident in the specific writing styles and language the person use.

Generally men and women have different communication styles. Men are more competitive and women tend to seek consensus and are mutually more supportive (Smith & Kollock 2001). According to Wallace (1999) women tend to:

- Use more verbal fillers that are relatively meaningless
- Use more intensifiers during on-line conversations
- Ask more questions
- Use more justifiers
- Emphasise relational aspects rather than having a task-orientated approach.

Women with more power adopt 'male-like' speech patterns. Although women can be subtler on-line, men communicate in a very direct fashion using explicit threats at times. In chat-rooms where males and females are present, women can start to control groups. Wallace (1999) identified specific tactics that males use to react to the controlling party. Men will avoid these postings or divert the attention away from the posting often by focussing on a tangential or incidental piece of the posting. These general differences between males and females provide proof that is needed to determine a person's real gender-orientation during on-line interaction. Individuals participating in gender-only groups, exercise gender-authenticity tests and look out for those impressions that are given off during on-line interactions (Smith & Kollock 2001).

#### **5.4.4 Reading race on-line**

According to Goffman, race is also a sign 'given off' and during on-line interactions race can be determined by focusing on ethnicity. Ethnicity is based on cultural markers of membership to a specific group for example language or religion. South African blacks tend to quite often use the words 'sisters', 'bro' and 'comrades'. The racial identity can also become known to the audience by means of descriptions of the person's heritage, hometown or parents (Smith & Kollock 2001). Although the pseudopersonality is almost a given, at least initially during on-line communication, the 'real-me' do leave "fingerprints" behind that can be identified at a later stage.

#### **5.4.5 Marginalised social identities**

Although many chat-rooms focus on specialised topics and interests, other chat-rooms are not concerned with mainstream and non-stigmatised issues. The existence of these chat-rooms plays a very important role in the lives of those individuals who possess concealable stigmatised identities. It can be very difficult to find other similar identities in real life because of the potentially embarrassing nature of the identity and fear of the possible consequences of disclosure. Anonymous on-line chatting provides the protective cloak needed for these individuals to admit to having marginalised or non-mainstream proclivities that must be kept a secret in real life. During on-line conversations an individual is feeling less isolated and gain much needed emotional support. A person who took part in a series of in-depth interviews stated:

“It seems to be easier to recognise who is similar to you and whom you’ll like on the net. Maybe this is because chat-rooms and newsgroups are more personalised and so you come into the room knowing you have something in common” (McKenna, Katelyn & Bargh 2000: 74).

Active participation in chat-rooms that were concerned with marginalized aspects of identity, caused the individual to eventually bring the concealed identities into the open, telling family and friends about it for the first time (McKenna, Katelyn & Bargh 2000). For people who felt that their identity was stigmatised in real life, the Internet provided a safe environment by which they could find ‘people-like-me’ who helped them build significant relationships with others (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainaple & Fox 2002).

#### **5.4.6 Loneliness and self-disclosure**

Another aspect that is interrelated with the levels of self-disclosure is the feeling of loneliness. For the purpose of this chapter, loneliness is defined as a "self-perceived state that a person’s network of relationships is either smaller or less satisfying than desired" (Leung 2002: 242). The cognitive layer imbedded in this concept refers to the individual’s conclusion that he or she has fewer or less initial social relationships than desired. The other side of the coin refers to the subjective experience of uneasy, uncomfortable feelings, distress and perceptions of deficiencies in one’s social relations.

Sermat and Smyth in Leung (2002: 241) attributed loneliness to a “lack of opportunity to talk about personally important, private matters with someone else”. Lonely individuals many times are unwilling to enter into interpersonal situations that involve risk of being rejected, embarrassed or disappointment. During chat-room interactions those risks are few because of the faceless encounters, as is evident from the following verbatim response. “I know that I sometimes use the net to combat loneliness and isolation, but I am usually content to read messages, it makes me feel involved, and in fact through the notices, I get involved with things that otherwise would have passed me by. It’s like radio, only interactive” (Winter & Huff 1996: 30).

Leung (2002) tested the relationship between chat-room use specifically on the ICQ.com website and loneliness. Three types of loneliness were identified:

- *Chronic loneliness:* It evolves from social deficits continuing over a period of years and can no longer be attributed to the situation or environment. These individuals tend to devalue social activities.
- *Situational loneliness:* This results in the termination of a relationship. These individuals tend to adjust to the environment by, for example, attending social group activities.
- *Transient loneliness:* This term refers to the short duration of loneliness that most people experience periodically, as a result of brief periods of minor social deficiency.

With a correlation analysis Leung (2002) indicated that the frequency of chat-room use was not significantly correlated to chronic loneliness. [Frequency was measured in days per week ( $r = -0.09$ )]. Chronically lonely individuals reported less active use of the Internet than situational-lonely and non-lonely individuals. This ties up with the assumption that chronically lonely people tend to devalue any form of social activity and their interpersonal communication is characterised by withdrawal and passivity. Those that do use a faceless environment as safety net for interaction have more reason to develop a pseudopersonality. As mentioned earlier, loneliness is related to valence, accuracy and amount of self-disclosure. This provides a reason why lonely individuals would be keener to be less honest about revealing the 'real-me' during on-line conversations.

### ***5.5 The process of pseudopersonality development***

According to Wood and Smith (2001) the 'mediated self' constructs a sense of 'who I am' through interaction with others by means of the Internet chat-room. This process of mediation can be seen as a point on a continuum. As illustrated in the next figure, during off-line socialisation processes the individual either remains anonymous or reveals his or her identity by engaging in face-to-face interaction. During on-line socialisation the individual has the freedom to move between these two extremes. The real me remains anonymous and the pseudopersonality is based on those aspects that the individual chooses to reveal to others. For example it is impossible to hide one's weight or skin colour during face-to-face interactions but in cyberspace chances are good that nobody will ever know someone else's weight or skin colour.

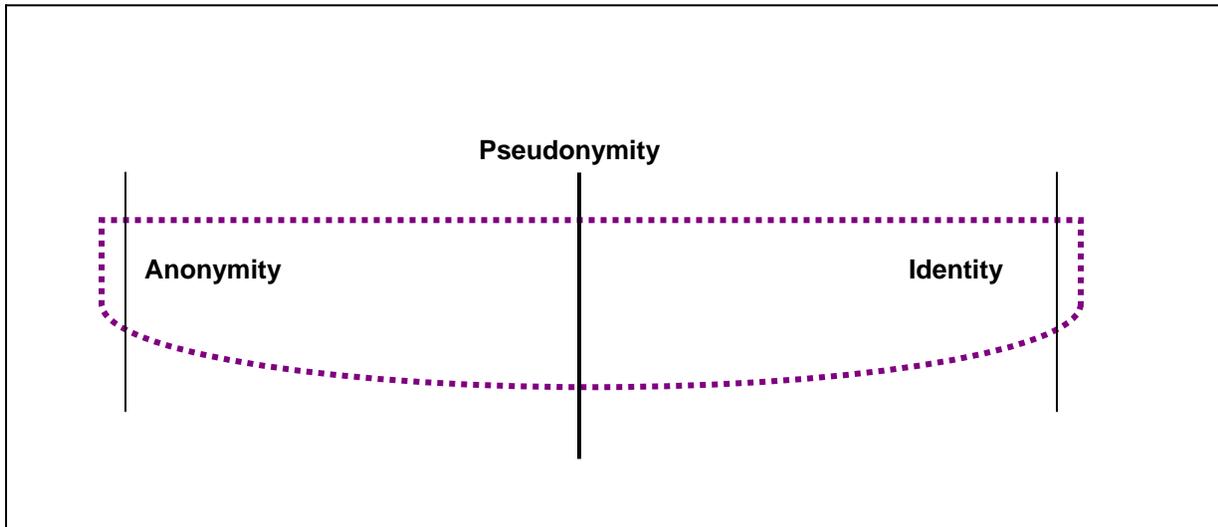


Figure 5.2: Continuum of anonymity

Personal accountability in the off-line world is based on physical appearances, for example, a witness will testify in a murder trial that the killer has been seen a crime scene. In contrast to this in cyberspace these degrees of anonymity have implications for personal accountability and debates around on-line identity usually centers around three issues:

- *The informative aspects of identity.*  
By providing personal credentials with a statement, it carries more weight thus making it more credible. On the other hand, the marginalised social identity needs anonymity to provide the much needed protection.
- *Group pressure:*  
If other group members can identify a person, he or she might only say the minimum thus conforming to group views, versus the freedom anonymity provides when expressing unpopular views, irrespective of what other group members think.
- *Law enforcement.*  
Anonymous postings can not be held accountable in court.

Irrespective of the views against and for anonymity, it remains one of the major attractions of cyberspace. 'On the net nobody knows you're a dog'.

## 5.6 Theoretical descriptions of the development process

Next the aim will be to explain the process of pseudopersonality development by applying two theories:

- The Johari window
- The person-centred approach by Carl Rogers.

### 5.6.1 The 'Johari window' in the virtual world

The development of the pseudopersonality can be explained by using the Johari-window concept formulated in 1955 by Luft and Ingham (Catcart & Samovar: 1975). In broad terms the Johari window illustrates relationships in terms of awareness of information to the self and other individuals.

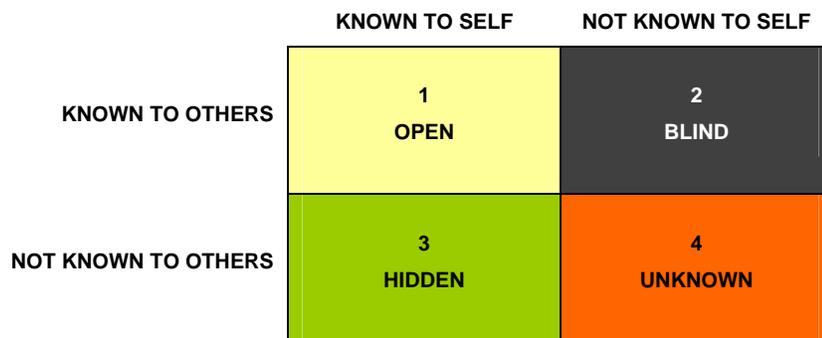


Figure 5.3: The Johari window in the off-line world

- *Quadrant 1:* The area of free activity, or open area, refers to behaviour and motivation known to self and known to others.
- *Quadrant 2:* The blind area is where others can see things in a person of which he or she is unaware.
- *Quadrant 3:* The avoided or hidden area represents things people know about themselves, but do not reveal to others.
- *Quadrant 4:* The area of unknown activity, where neither the individual nor others are aware of certain behaviour or motives.

During face-to-face conversations in a newly formed group Q1 is very limited, with not much free and spontaneous interaction. As a group grows and matures, Q1 expands in size and this usually means

that people are free to be themselves and to perceive others as they really are. Imbedded in this process is the assumption of power and control over different parties in a group. The individual has control over Q3 and does not expose behaviour or motives he or she does not want to. In Q2 other individuals are aware of certain aspects that an individual might not be aware of, giving others more control over the process. With this 'give and take' feedback process, the group grows and the open area in Q1 increases.

Within the virtual environment the individual has the power to manipulate information and create a pseudopersonalities with new characteristics. This higher degree of personal control, linked to anonymity, contributes to individuals taking greater risks during on-line communication on the Internet. The amount of social anxiety that is part and parcel of meeting somebody face-to-face for the first time is less during on-line meetings. "On the Internet you can't smell my breath, catch the tremor in my voice or realize that I'm watching the rest of the party over my shoulder" (Guiseppe & Galimberti 2001: 42). One of the first things one usually asks when meeting someone for the first time, is his or her name. In the virtual world the individual can be anybody and everybody except him- or herself. The real ID book name Albertus, Jacobus, Stephanus Smit, can be changed to 'Hunk' or 'Sexy AI' for that matter. The individual continues to have more control over Q3 (hidden area) and the principal of 'WYSIWIS' (What you see is what I say) is at play. In Q2 (the blind area) the individual might not be aware of specific impressions that are given off which nevertheless are visible to others. This area decreases since there is no guarantee that true information about the self is provided.

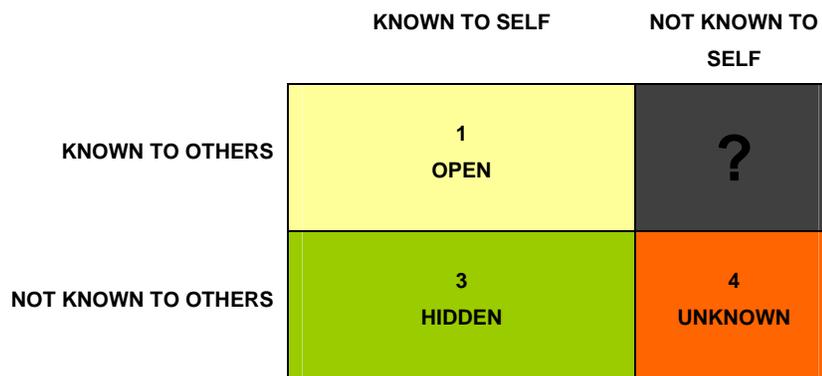


Figure 5.4: Changes to the Johari window in the virtual world

When constructs from the Johari window are used, the interaction process in the virtual world can be described as follows:

As indicated in the next figure there is one aspect that changes in the virtual world, compared to the off-line world, namely the amount of personal control an individual has during online interaction processes. The cyberspace environment is described as a “hybrid, allowing for different degrees of anonymity” thus making personality construction not a stable but a dynamic phenomenon and social construction (Talamo & Ligorio 2002: 110). On the left-hand side of the figure before the individual connects to the chat-room, he or she has the power to provide details of the true or real personality. The choice of what potential self to show is driven by strategic moves that participants can make within that situation. Choices are influenced by the individual’s perception of how that social situation is characterised and what features will be more relevant and effective. Many times the individual chooses to provide more attractive information, for example adopt another age group, refer to good looks, or resort to gender-swapping.

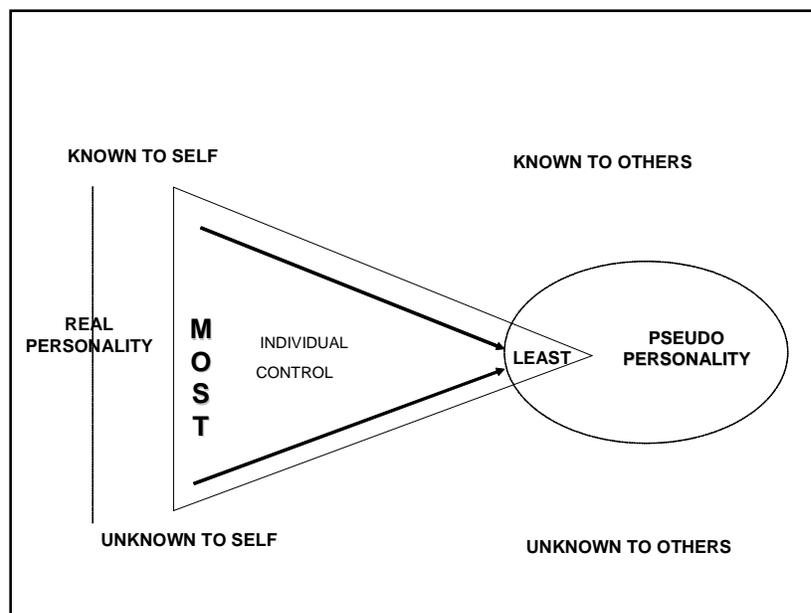


Figure 5.5: The 'virtual' Johari window

The amount of personal control diminishes once the individual partakes in a chat-room. Pseudopersonality construction is co-dependant on social interaction. The individual has no guarantee that the 'new' personality will elicit the kind of response he or she wants. Furthermore he or she also has no control over other people’s reactions to a pseudopersonality. This co-constructed context then guides and models further choices of pseudopersonality development, thus giving relevance to specific characteristic of each personality according to the specific type of chat-room, community and its development process (Talamo & Ligorio 2002). Since all participants share vulnerability during

interaction because no outcome can be predicted, people tend to trade control by gradually revealing more true information about the self and by covering wider areas of each other's lives (McKenna, Katelyn and Bargh 2000). As is evident from the previous sections, pseudopersonality development is part and parcel of communication in the virtual world. With no hindering physical boundaries inhibiting contact, communication is used as a technique with the ultimate goal of self-actualisation in the physical world.

## 5.6.2 Pseudopersonality development via the Person-centred approach

“If I keep from meddling with people they take care of themselves. If I keep from commanding people, they behave themselves. If I keep from preaching at people, they improve themselves. If I keep from imposing on people, they become themselves” (Rogers 1961: 178).

According to Rogers (1961) man is the architect of himself, emphasising the value of personal power during on-line relationships. People have the resources for self-understanding, for altering self-concepts and attitudes by means of self-directed behaviour, but this can only be achieved in a climate that facilitates unconditional acceptance. Imbedded in this quote, lies Carl Rogers' approach to address loneliness by truly listening to the meaning a person gives to life. In many cases people live in private dungeons and do not have the luxury of expressing their own private inner world in face-to-face relationships. The act of listening implies creative, active, sensitive and non-judgemental listeners which are all adjectives used to describe fellow chat-room participants.

The foundations of the Person-centered approach lie in two related tendencies:

- Actualising tendency
- Formative tendency.

“The good life ... is the process of movement in a direction which the human organism selects when it is inwardly free to move in any direction” (Rogers 1961: 187). The theory is based on basic trust in common good, a trust in organisms' movement toward constructive fulfilment of inherent possibilities for example, the actualising tendency. This actualising tendency implies an integrated whole, for example an integration of different selves into one holistic whole. This whole is very important since humans have a tendency to express themselves in the widest range of behaviours in response to a wide variety of personal needs. People build on a self by cycling through many selves (Turkle 1995). As stated

earlier, especially in the case of marginalized personalities all these needs cannot be addressed in the everyday life. This motivates the need for a temporary resort to a pseudopersonality in a different space. Under the protective cloak of anonymity, the chat-room participant can express the way he or she truly feels and thinks. "The assurance of anonymity gives one far greater play in identity construction than is conceivable in face-to-face encounters" (McKenna, Katelyn & Bargh 2000: 67). The optimal base for formative communication is congruency, for example, when the following three levels match:

- An individual's experience of a moment
- His or her awareness of an experience
- His or her communication of an experience.

These types of situations are growth-enhancing where an individual can feel free to develop a unique self. Modern day chat-rooms are perceived as being non-judgmental space, a space where one can discover unknown elements of the self, a safe space where a person can come into touch with a wider range of experiences.

Moving on to the formative tendency, Rogers (1961) described the need for positive regard from others that in turn influence the need for positive self-regard. This implied that the formative tendency is not possible in isolation but can only be achieved in the presence of others or a broader social network making the personality a fluid construct that changes and are influenced by human experience. To elaborate on this train of thought, there are two main motivators behind the tendency to interact with others on the Internet, for example self-related motives and social-related motives. During Internet interactions with the focus on self-related needs, an individual will strive to find a social framework in which he or she can express his or her personality if it cannot be expressed in the immediate real-life environment. To achieve personal satisfaction, a person has to be able to express his or her real self in social interaction and receive social recognition for it. Different 'self-pictures' are tested in cyberspace where the individual interacts with the world. By experiencing others' on-line reactions, an individual sees him- or herself through the eyes of other Internet users. An obese person has the choice of creating:

- Pseudopersonality A: a good-looking, well-built body builder in order to produce the picture of the ideal self to ensure positive feedback and regard from others.

or

- Pseudopersonality B: chooses to hide his obesity (according to Johari-window principals) thus creating a pseudopersonality by only focussing on the emotional and cognitive side and downplaying physical appearance completely.

Scientists know that in a virtual environment, the individual experiences acceptance irrespective of real physical appearances, but the choice still remains which pseudopersonality to choose in order to integrate all the aspects of the self into one integrated whole. “The Web is a safe place to try out different roles, voices and identities. It’s sort of like training wheels for the self you want to bring out in real life” (Guiseppe & Galimberti 2001: 1).

If a gentleman only seeks positive regard from females, he will most likely choose pseudopersonality A, although it is a false representation of himself, that will only make the process of actualisation more difficult. His actualisation tendency will be enhanced if he chooses personality A as an idealised self. If he would like to address his obesity, he could portray the persona of the body builder and experience the positive feedback on-line which can give him the motivation to revert to an off-line healthy lifestyle off-line. Another option is to focus on other positive aspects of the personality and construct pseudopersonality B. This will also enhance the actualisation process, since the safer Internet environment can foster more confidence in people during their off-line encounters as a male respondent puts it:

“I used to be a complete disaster when it came to talking with women. In fact, I was so nervous about it that I would go to great lengths to avoid having to meet or talk with them, especially if I found them pretty or intelligent. On the Internet I discovered that talking with women was much easier and not only that, many of them seemed to really like me, found me humorous, and sought me out to talk to. I have become so much more confident with women and not just on-line” (McKenna, Katelyn & Bargh 2000: 76).

The principal of ‘liberty with responsibility’ can be used to summarise Carl Roger’s viewpoints, when applied to on-line pseudopersonality development. Although cyberspace is synonymous to a theatre the key is to reach a platform whereby newly acquired knowledge is integrated into one integrated, intact, responsible self.

### ***5.7 The missing link – The journey from the ‘cyber-me’ towards the ‘real-me’***

“There is a possibility that the rewarding experiences with an on-line pseudopersonality may become decompartmentalised: generalised to the off-line or real world, causing, in the worst case, delusions and unrealistic behaviour“(McKenna, Katelyn & Bargh 2000: 69). The researchers assessed the

degree of ability to express the real self in a social environment with laboratory experiments. Two hypotheses led the investigation, for example:

- Introverts or neurotic people with difficulties in social interactions will locate the 'real-me' through the Internet
- Extroverts or non-neurotic people will locate the 'real-me' through traditional social interaction.

A sample of 42 hi-tech workers aged 20-32 years who were chat-room visitors completed questionnaires. The questionnaire comprised of four questions:

- Do you think you reveal more about yourself to people you know from the Internet than to real-life (non-Net) friends? (Yes/No)
- Are there things your Internet friends know about you that you cannot share with real-life (non-Net) friends? (Yes/No)
- On a scale from 1-7 respondents had to rate the extent to which they expressed different facets of the self on the Internet compared to what they do in real life.
- Using the same scale they had to indicate the extent to which family and friends would be surprised were they to read personal Internet e-mail and newsgroup postings.

These four items were standardised to z scores and then to t scores. (Reliability for the 'real-me' questionnaire was calculated as 0.79 by means of Cronbach's coefficient.) Based on the average a 'real-me' index was formed; thus the higher the score the 'real-me' is more firmly placed on the Internet. Although the results were based on a small non-representative sample of chat-room participants, it was found that:

- Extroversion was negatively related to the 'real-me', for example extroverts tend to locate the real me through face-to-face interaction
- Neuroticism was positively related to the 'real-me', thus implying introverts tend to locate their real-me through Internet interaction.

## **5.8 Concluding summary**

In summary, characteristics of the Internet for example anonymity and individual control of revealing information prove to be 'green lights' that attract those individuals who find it difficult to express the

'real-me' in face-to-face encounters. It also shows the importance of a link between on- and off-line living. Cyberspace should not be seen as an alternative space, something distanced from the physical world. Cyberspace is an extension of one's physical world, a world mediated by means of one's computer, an electronic reflection of the world people currently inhabit. It will always mirror people's real selves, their real lives. Pseudopersonalities are temporary vehicles constructed by people for the journey of actualisation. Going back to the question that was asked in chapter 2: Is it mankind that is making technology (tools) or is mankind now being made by technology? The results of this study will compliment this theoretical discussion by illustrating how mankind is being made by Internet technology. Web spaces play an important role to facilitate personality growth towards maturity.

## CHAPTER 6: COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION (CMC) – A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE



Figure 6.1: “We live in each other’s brains as voices, images, words on screens”

(Rheingold in Turkle 1995: 235).

### **6.1 Introduction**

Computer-mediated-communication or CMC is defined as human behaviour maintained or altered by exchanging information through machines (Wood & Smith 2001). This definition forms part of the concept of a mediated society where people are separated through different forms of technology ranging from paper in the more simple form to a cellular phone or in the present study case chat-rooms. In ancient civilisations Plato is quoted for having said that the true self could not be defined by text. He believed in immediate communication where messages are transmitted more or less directly without the aid of exterior technology. Today humankind is surrounded by devices designed to describe, influence and to some extent alter mediated communication routes. This in turn implies a ‘mediated self’ where people construct a sense of who they are through interaction with others by means of various media forms. The discussion will focus on different cognitive processes and theoretical perspectives of computer-mediated communication and the value of each within the broad framework of the modern cyberspace culture.

## **6.2 Cognitive processes in cyberspace**

The following cognitive processes are used during communication in cyberspace:

- Activation of stereotypes
- Prototype effects and;
- Priming of social categories resulting in the process of
- Snowballing.

### **6.2.1 Activation of stereotypes**

The use of stereotypes need no introduction since it is part of daily life. Although all participants for example Chief Executive Officers and students are equal in status when participating in chat-rooms, stereotypical roles and characteristics can be assigned to individuals based on limited amount of information available. It has been reported that women tend to receive more sexual advances on-line than their male counterparts and it can be based on the stereotypical role of women to be 'sexual objects' (Gackenbach 1998).

### **6.2.2 Prototype effects**

Membership of different groups is co-determined by how good the individual is perceived as an example of a group. Judgments are then based on how well the individual fits into a specific group (Guiseppe & Galimberti 2001). Should an unmarried male take part in computer-mediated communication, he can be categorised by means of a prototype effect. Other group members would perceive him as either a 'bachelor' or maybe a 'homosexual' since he would easily fit into one or both categories, despite being a heterosexual student looking to meet interesting people on-line.

### **6.2.3 Priming of social categories**

At any given moment some categories of information are more readily available than others. Using the path of the least resistance, these categories are more likely to be used to form impressions about others (Guiseppe & Galimberti 2001). For example participants in women-only chat-rooms can be wrongly perceived as 'feminists' or 'lesbians' since there are no other sources of information available on other participants.

#### 6.2.4 Snowballing

When stereotypes are formed or priming takes place during the initial phases of computer-mediated communication, Gilbert in Guiseppe and Galimberti (2001) stated that the communication process gathers momentum and it becomes more difficult to change these initial perceptions over time. This can lead to mistakes since assumptions are made based on a specific trait ignoring individual behaviour that reveals more about the true person behind the computer screen. If the emphasis is placed on the pseudopersonality, some attributes will be seen as more fitting than others. This becomes the norm for example **all** women need help on the Internet especially when they are considered as 'newbies'. This process of wrong perceptions or conclusions becoming the norm dictating future interaction during computer-mediated communication is known as 'snowballing'.

During on-line interaction it can also happen that people create opportunities for others to respond in a particular manner for example men tend to ignore women when the women are perceived as being strong willed and forward (Refer to chapter 5, paragraph 5.4.3). This in turn provokes aggression from the women participants fuelling the perception of 'aggressive women', that is by the process of snowballing. It is important to note that during the process of snowballing the perceiver is unaware that he or she is producing the behaviour of the target person. It is likely that he or she would have behaved differently if the target person were not present. One possible explanation for this type of behaviour is that during computer-mediated communication people spent more time on monitoring their own behaviour, impressions and responses to others than focussing on the result of, or effect their own behaviour has on other participants.

In summary these cognitive processes that were described are rife especially during the onset of computer-mediated communication. It is evident that computer-mediated communication has changed from being a pure cognitive artefact to a social artefact, one that exceeds geographical boundaries. Since chat-room participants are bound to the written inputs from others during computer-mediated communication, it is much easier to make mistakes, to draw wrong conclusions about other participants, especially in the early stages of communication. It is important to get to know the individual, as is the case during face-to-face interaction, before any conclusions are drawn about who the person really is. The Web is not an alternative world, but an electronic reflection of the world that people currently inhabit. It is therefore important to provide individuals with an opportunity to reflect themselves back to others instead of painting a picture on their behalf.

### **6.3 Theoretical descriptions of the CMC process**

Against the backdrop of the mediated society and cyberspace culture, different theoretical models have been developed to describe the role and influence media has on a communication process. Face-to-face communication is seen as the benchmark to evaluate the input of the different media forms during the process. The following theoretical models will be discussed:

- Model of Media Richness
- Model of Social Presence
- Theory of Social Context Cues
- Model of Social Identity De-individuation (SIDE).

#### **6.3.1 Model of Media Richness**

Media forms differ in their ability to reduce ambiguity during communication processes. Rich forms of media facilitate feedback and communication and is based on multiple cues with unique, individually tailored and highly specified messages implying a non-ambiguous and interactive communication process (Guisseppi & Galimberti 2001; Gackenbach 1998). Face-to-face communication is the richest form of communication placing computer-mediated communication lower in ranking because of limitations such as:

- The absence of meta-communicative features like facial expressions
- The absence of collaborative commitment and co-formulation of messages
- The asymmetrical imbalance of the sender-receiver relationship
- The longer waiting period for interaction to take place (Guisseppi & Galimberti 2001).

#### **6.3.2 Model of Social Presence**

Wood and Smith (2001) conceptualised social presence as the degree to which individuals perceive one another as real people and any resulting interaction between two people as a relationship. The importance of the connection is based on the amount of non-verbal information available to the receiver

through any channel. The higher the number of communication channels that are available the greater the social presence an individual has. During face-to-face interactions the optimum number of channels is available. During computer-mediated communication, only text is available implying the lowest social presence of all. According to this theory computer-mediated communication is very task orientated and impersonal that leads to more negative perceptions about participants (Gackebach 1998). This implies that computer-mediated communication is limited in a sense that non-verbal contact is impossible and that sharing of emotions is only possible to a certain extent.

### **6.3.3 Theory of Social Context Cues**

Here the focus is placed on information or social cues that are provided during computer-mediated communication. People tailor communication to the setting around them. Gackebach (1998) defined social context cues as indicators of appropriate behaviour within a specific situation. During computer-mediated communication a limited amount of social cues are available to the participants. During these situations people tend to become more self-orientated and less concerned about feelings and opinions of other participants, a motivation for development of de-individuation. As in face-to-face encounters, people will always be motivated to develop social relationships in any communication context, including computer-mediated communication. They form impressions of each other based on available information in a social situation, which can be very limited especially in the initial stages. The absence of on-line social cues, especially during initial contact phases, create ample opportunities for cognitive mistakes such as stereotyping and snowballing to occur. During computer-mediated communication, as in other social situations, it is important that participants are sensitive to the differences between a *face-to-face* social situation and an *electronic* social situation.

### **6.3.4 Model of Social Identity De-individuation (SIDE)**

During an Internet conversation in a chat-room one usually operate by means of pseudonyms. Even when a participant decides to use his or her real name, there is still an amount of anonymity involved especially when he or she interacts with individuals from other cities across continents. De-individuation can be described as a cognitive state produced by visual anonymity and physical isolation (Guiseppe & Galimberti 2001). Winter and Huff (1996) stated that the lack of social cues (for example dress codes in face-to-face interactions) during on-line conversations create an environment where people feel less inhibited and more prone to hostility and aggression. Gackebach (1998) agrees with the definition that on-line behaviour is less inhibited than comparative behaviour in off-line encounters.

Another explanation for de-individuation is the two-component model of self-awareness summarised by Gackenbach in 1998. In this model the focus is placed on:

- *Public self-awareness* - An individual is aware of a possibility of being evaluated.
- *Private self-awareness* - An individual is aware of his or her inner motives and personal evaluations.

During computer-mediated communication, private self-awareness is more dominant since individuals tend to be more concerned about their own presentation to others in a group. Greater self-disclosure is associated with private self-awareness and the individual becomes less concerned about external evaluation that is public self-awareness. This compliments the discussion about personal power that is more dominant in a 'virtual Johari-window' (Refer to chapter 5, paragraph 5.6.1).

According to McKenna, Katelyn and Bargh (2000) de-individuation can:

- Result in a weakened ability to regulate one's own behaviour
- Reduce one's ability to engage in rational long-term planning
- Increase one's tendency to react to immediate cues and emotional states
- Result in an individual that is less likely to care what others think of his or her behaviour.

Guiseppe and Galimberti (2001) elaborated on this list by stating that de-individuation implies greater group cohesion and group identity that dominates individuality of participants. Due to the anonymity of postings, social identities rather than personal identities, are activated during on-line group discussions (Gackenbach 1998). Behaviour is regulated by means of the norms and values in a chat-room and those social context cues that are available at a given time. This enhances group conformity, polarisation of ideas and arguments, downplaying individuality. As a practical example, a person may anonymously participate in a chat-room debating a certain issue. If another individual sends a posting that this person disagrees with or finds emotionally upsetting he or she may experience de-individuation, react ferociously and respond in the heat of the moment by attacking the other person in a highly volatile and aggressive manner. These reactions are known as 'flames' or 'flame wars' and can erupt between faceless, anonymous, de-individuated participants. "Flaming is behaviour found in electronic communication that produces tension and may generate disparity between individuals. Flaming is hectoring or haranguing another person electronically, in response to an electronic message" (Winter & Huff 1996: 31). Where the individual is unaware of a snowballing process, Gackenbach (1998) reminds researchers that de-individuation is a deliberate action on the part of a participant.

## **6.4 Assessment of CMC theoretical models**

The value of any theory is determined by its practical applicability in the 'lived' world. Since on-line snowballing based on stereotypes, prototypes and priming occur specific actions are taken to prevent it from happening as far as possible. "The main purpose of the Internet is to allow people from around the world to communicate and exchange information. It draws its strengths from the diversity of the users because there is no one group or person in charge. Just like the physical world, the Internet cannot rely on laws to keep order. There must be some level of ethics that people operate under in both these worlds" (Thomas, Forcht & Count 1998: 74). By setting norms for behaviour, specific actions are encouraged. Wells and Meche (1999) described this process on the Internet as 'netiquette'. As within any social process rules are needed to govern behaviour encouraging mutual respect between participants. Many chat-rooms also have moderators evaluating postings in order to limit flame wars. Moderators can intervene by means of 'toading' certain individuals. Participants that disrupt groups can be 'toaded' for example given a special character such as a frog only visible to other participants as an identification tool, thus making the culprit visible to other chat-room participants (Wallace 1999). The SIDE model provides valuable insight into the reasons for flaming. This motivates Internet site-owners to introduce chat-rooms with clauses like: "Please respect the rights and dignity of others using this forum – racism, hate speak and other fascist expressions will not be tolerated" (<http://mweb.co.za/airyou.../forums> 11 Mar. 2004).

Every coin has two sides and although de-individuation can result in flaming, the process has positive results as well. Internet communication allows individuals to take greater risks in making disclosures to their Internet friends. Although the assurance of a faceless encounter provides an individual far greater play in identity construction than in face-to-face encounters Gackenbach (1998) warns against excessive self-disclosure on the Internet. Under the protective cloak of anonymity users can express the way they truly feel and think, giving the reason for the success of on-line self help groups (Winter & Huff 1996).

In the three models, namely the model of media richness, the model of social presence and the theory of social context cues, computer-mediated communication is described, as a process in which non-verbal cues and emotional communication are limited or absent, making it a poor communication medium with little social presence and limited social context cues. Computer-mediated communication

can never replace face-to-face interaction but research findings in chapter 8 will show how often emotions and other non-verbal cues are used creatively in chat-rooms. Emoticons are symbols or abbreviations that describe emotions bringing back feeling to on-line conversations. Some individuals describe emotions attached to the messages in detail and others use emoticons such as 'Lol' meaning 'laugh out loud'. Virtual reality is a potentially rich medium that opens up new pathways for representing emotion. Colours, three dimensions of sculpture, music or interesting abbreviations are being used in dynamic ways to express individual feelings and thoughts.

## **6.5 Concluding summary**

The question can be asked whether modern computer-mediated communication is socially more desirable than traditional face-to-face encounters? It depends on the individual motives of participants. For a shy individual, computer-mediated communication might be beneficial since he or she is able to be very selective with presenting the self to others. But then again, reduced social cues can lead to an idealised perception of an individual, and when an actual face-to-face meeting does take place, one can be disillusioned since the computer-mediated communication impression was overly positive. During computer-mediated communication the levels for self-disclosure are higher, making electronic self-help groups very effective, since anonymity motivates an individual to remove those strategic, carefully constructed self-presentations and reveal more about a real me.

Is computer-mediated communication a replacement of traditional face-to-face encounters? Computer-mediated communication is merely an extension of our face-to-face world and can be seen as a social network. In the off-line world, tarred roads connect people and enable them to maintain geographically dispersed networks. In the borderless world of cyberspace chat-rooms connect people although they will never meet face-to-face. On a highway care must be taken not to exceed speeding limits. The same principle applies to on-line interaction where people must be aware of de-individuation and its effects for example flaming. Participants must not be hasty in drawing conclusions that might be wrong and sticking by it for example snowballing throughout an on-line conversation. People prefer a communication medium that is most suitable in a given context which is not always the richest medium for example in formal working relationships, e-mails are appropriate and should one wish to experiment with multiple pseudopersonalities, the use of different chat-rooms are more appropriate.

## CHAPTER 7: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CYBERSPACE CULTURE - A CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



Figure 7.1: Symbols of cyberspace culture

### 7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the computer-mediated communication process on the microlevel has been described in detail. This chapter will be structured in two distinct sections to provide a theoretical discussion of the next two levels of the Internet experience:

- Firstly the discussion will focus on the second stage of cyberspace culture development. On the mesolevel of an Internet experience the focus is placed on group dynamics as well as community development in cyberspace compared to the same phenomenon in the off-line world. In order to make a theoretical comparison between on-line and off-line groups and communities, research and theoretical explanations within the broad field of Social Psychology will be applied.
- The main focus of this chapter will be on the second section looking at the macrolevel of the Internet experience. The Symbolic Action Theory will be used as basis to explain in detail the development of the cyberspace culture from a cultural-psychological perspective.
- The chapter will be concluded with a psychological description of different values important in the off-line world. Later on the research results will aim to identify and compare the values that forms part of the cyberspace culture.

## 7.2 **Group dynamics in cyberspace**

Sceptics have always debated whether cohesive groups could really emerge from computer-mediated communication due to the lack of usual social cues that are present in face-to-face groups. Contrary to this viewpoint, there is evidence for a very strong sense of 'groupness' that emerges regularly on the Internet in the form of thousands of on-line chat-rooms operating on a global basis, 24 hours of the day. Before the discussion begins the term 'group' should be defined. A **group** "is a collection of two or more people who are interacting with and influencing one another" (Wallace 1999: 57). Furthermore a group is also defined as "one kind of social network, one that is *tightly bounded* (delimited by strict measures of inclusion or exclusion of members), *densely knit* (with connections maintained between most pairs in the group), and *multiplex* (with ties based on many different kinds of exchanges) (Gackenbach 1998: 215).

### 7.2.1 **Group conformity**

When individuals influence each other during interaction, the word conformity is often used as a first phase of group development. Successful off-line groups need a certain amount of predictability and one way of achieving this is to improve individuals' willingness to share, think alike and agree with a group's way of thinking. In off-line groups, for example sport teams, individual players must conform to a unique dress code during matches. In cyberspace these physical features that contribute to people's tendency to conform in a group setting are absent since groups members are not physical visible to one another.

Furthermore, members of on-line groups conform by means of their communication styles and patterns that are different from their off-line communication styles and patterns. Traditional grammar rules do not apply to computer-mediated communication, misspellings, punctuation errors and ungrammatical sentences are perfectly acceptable, and preferred during on-line communication. In off-line groups real names will be provided by group members but in cyberspace, use of pseudonyms is the norm. In the face-to-face world group members will have a fair amount of personal information on each other such as gender, age, personal contact details and physical addresses. In cyberspace it is accepted that no such personal information is provided especially in the case of children.

New entrants to off-line groups for example first timers in an elegant five star restaurant will often watch how regular visitors behave in order to learn acceptable patterns of behaviour in order to conform to a group. These visual cues are not available to newcomers in a chat-room or on-line group making access let alone conforming very difficult. In order to compensate for this Wells and Mesche (1999) used the term 'netiquette' to describe the on-line guides available to 'newbies' or newcomers prior to entering and interacting in chat-rooms. The Internet 'netiquette' consists of various dimensions namely:

- Country-specific 'slanguage'
- Grammar rules
- Emoticons.

As one enters a chat-room (on-line group) netiquette will provide general rules about on-line behaviour, guiding newcomers thus making it easier to join and ultimately conform to on-line group behaviour.

The main motivation for conformity in any group whether it is in the on-line or off-line world, is to protect a group from destabilisation. In the face-to-face world, should an individual fail to conform to the rules of a group there are various mechanisms in place to redirect behaviour or in extreme cases to punish unacceptable behaviour. Personal accountability in the off-line world is based on physical appearances, for example a witness will testify in a murder trial that the killer has been seen on the crime scene. In contrasting cyberspace, pseudopersonalities failing to conform to the rules of a chat-room have to be dealt with in different ways. On-line group moderators can stop postings from a particular offender and ban him or her from a site. A more potent threat to on-line group members failing to conform is the process of 'toading'. 'Toading' refers to on-line group moderator's power to alter an individual's personality and appearance to a negative character for example a frog. This is only visible to other group members thus labeling the individual as a non-conforming culprit (Wallace 1999: 65).

### **7.2.2 Group polarisation**

Group polarisation is often a result of group conformity where an individual is dominated by the majority vote or view that result in extremist and fascists groups. The off-line world can share many such examples of which the segregated political past of South Africa is just one. In an off-line group the group polarisation process can be described as follows: initially an individual holds a relatively moderate view about an issue, but after talking to others about it he or she may move away from the

middle ground towards one of the fringes or extreme points on the continuum. Psychologists David Mayers and George Bishop showed how this 'move towards the fringes' occurs when like-minded people get together to discuss racial attitudes (Wallace 1999: 71). As in the off-line world group polarisation is also applicable to on-line group behaviour since on-line groups mainly develop because of shared views, interests and hobbies. An individual opinion can easily get lost during on-line communication especially since group members are not physically visible to each other. In many cases group members will just ignore postings of individuals who disagree with a group's point of view (Kiesler 1997: 181). In summary group polarisation do occur in off- and on-line groups, especially if there is a strong sense of group identity that promotes group conformity and cohesiveness.

### **7.3 Virtual communities**

Despite the active participation in on-line groups that has been discussed in the previous section is it possible to talk about the existence of virtual communities? In order to answer this question, communities as they are known in the face-to-face world should be described in order to ascertain whether virtual communities really exist.

#### **7.3.1 Communities in the off-line, face-to-face world**

What makes a group of people develop into a community? Central to off-line community development is a sense of belonging. Individuals in an elevator rarely feel as if they belong to a group in the same way that they belong to a religious group or political party. Well known in social psychological circles are the terms 'Gemeinschaft' and 'Gesellschaft'. Back in 1957 the German social psychologist Ferdinand Tönnies already called this sense of belonging or sense of we-ness 'Gemeinschaft' compared to a detached gathering of people he called 'Gesellschaft' (Wood & Smith 2001: 114). The feeling of belonging to a fellowship reflects the bonds experienced in a state of 'Gemeinschaft'. Besides this sense of belonging, communities in the face-to-face world share common beliefs, attitudes and behaviour on a daily basis and tend to live in close-knit communities situated in a central geographical location in close proximity of each other (Smith & Kollock 2001). Traditional communities were often bound together by economic considerations or a need for mutual protection. Imbedded in this description are the assumptions that communities are geographically bound to specific locations and community members must experience face-to-face interaction on a regular basis.

### 7.3.2 Virtual communities in cyberspace

"Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Internet when enough people carry on public discussions long enough with significant human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold in Wood & Smith 2001: 110). Communities in the off-line and on-line world provide individuals with a sense of belonging or 'Gemeinschaft'. Imbedded in this definition the major difference between the virtual and face-to-face communities is the assumption that virtual communities are based on ongoing communication and not geographical boundaries or face-to-face interaction. Virtual communities thus allow people to transcend geographic boundaries and unite with others who share common interests by means of computer networks. Complimentary to the above, Wood and Smith formulated another definition of the virtual community stating that it is "a shared understanding of inter-relatedness among participants in computer-mediated environment" (2001: 117)

Virtual communities distinguish themselves from on-line groups when they feature the following four characteristics (Jones in Wood & Smith 2001: 115):

- *A minimum level of interactivity:* Instead of face-to-face interactions there must be a flow of messages or postings between the participants.
- *A minimum level of sustained membership:* Once-off or sporadic on-line interaction does not constitute a virtual community. A virtual community only exists if there is an *ongoing, continuous* flow of messages through time between participants. With time strong bonds and relationships develop between group members that are based on shared ideas, perceptions and world views.
- *A variety of communicators:* On-line community members establish and maintain their relationships and community ties by interacting by means of different communication mediums. In most cases chat-room discussions are complimented by personal e-mails, webcam communication and sharing of personal web pages with each other.
- *Common public space:* In the borderless world of cyberspace no physical addresses or meeting places are available to community members to meet at or live in. However cyberspace does provide common public spaces in the form of chat-rooms where members of a virtual community can meet on a regular basis, irrespective of their off-line physical geographical locations.

In summary on-line computer-mediated communication between individuals do have potential to develop into close-knit virtual communities with unique features that are different to those from traditional off-line communities. These virtual communities are prerequisites for the development of the cyberspace culture on a macrolevel that in turn connects different virtual communities on a global basis.

## **7.4 Development of cyberspace culture**

Within the broad paradigm of Cultural Psychology this section will describe the Internet experience on the macrolevel. Specific principles from the Symbolic Action Theory formulated by Boesch in 1991 will be applied to describe the developmental process of cyberspace culture.

### **7.4.1 Defining culture**

Complimentary to the definitions provided in chapter one as well as the Humanistic way of thinking where human experience influence personality, Boesch defined culture as "the stable psychological, material and institutional results of the process of interaction between individuals and groups, and their natural material and social surroundings (1991: 9). He elaborated further by arguing that "culture is a creation of human beings, a result of choices made over generations, but also a result of continuous interactions between individuals, groups and their environment" (Boesch 1991: 367).

### **7.4.2 Experiencing culture**

In the off-line world foreign cultures are experienced by means of language while a culture-specific language is also the carrier of non-verbal cues. As is the case in the off-line world, cyberspace culture is also experienced via unique language use in chat-room discussions that were referred to as 'slanguage'. When the ICQ.com website is visited, one can visit the <http://www.slanguage.com/southafrica.html> for country-specific on-line dictionaries. Therefore, in any culture the individual can label his or her experience with a word thereby applying a *denotative* classification to an experience thus focusing on the 'surface traits' of culture.

However these denotations are also associated with a personal experience, personal or cultural beliefs and evaluations private to an individual. Complimentary to the Humanistic definition of personality as

an ever-changing construct influenced by human experience (discussed in chapter 5), culture also influence the process of personality development. "Learning an alien culture confronts barriers deeply founded in our own self, relating to processes of self-definition" (Boesch 1991: 27). These *connotations* are difficult to communicate and are described as the 'depth traits' of a culture (Boesch 1991: 23). A connotational understanding of culture is important for establishing personal relationships and a sense of belonging between individuals. In summary the experience of the cyberspace culture starts with denotation where the newcomer must learn the language first. Over time and with continued interaction and participation in virtual communities the individual gets to know the depth traits or connotative meaning of culture. It ties in with the main theme of this study: "By understanding the patterns of Internet behaviour and the exchange of information through the eyes of chat-room participants, conclusions can be drawn about norms and values of the cyberspace culture" (Refer to chapter 3).

#### **7.4.3 Cyberspace culture's starting point: Action**

Humans are in constant interaction with an environment whether it is a physical environment or cyberspace. "It is action which relates the individual to his or her environment, action which leads him/her to assimilate his or her world, to identify with it, submit to it, dissociate from it or rebel against it. In the course of these various forms of interaction, the individual's reality will be influenced or even transformed, and the self will be structured. These processes are interrelated in complex ways, but the basic concept that symbolise them is action" (Boesch 1991: 364). The Symbolic Action Theory compliments Carl Rogers' views on personal growth and creativity when the assumption is made that an individual tends to maintain and enlarge his or her action potential by transcending existing structures, testing frontiers and trying to cross them. Although each individual interaction process with an environment is unique they overlap, hence the formation of groups and communities. On the macrolevel this assumption implies that culture is also a field of action. Culture combines these overlapping fields of action in a collective space of action that consist of the combination of individual action spaces.

#### **7.4.4 Culture defines possibilities and conditions for action**

Since culture develops and changes as a result of individual actions and interactions, the opposite is also true; culture also influences behaviour. In this perspective **cyberspace culture** are "a set of

beliefs or standards, shared by a group of people, which helps the individual decide what is, what can be, how to feel, what to do and how to go about doing it *when using the Internet*" (Johnston & Johal 1999: 183). Culture does not prescribe action but allows the individual some freedom of choice. Boesch described it as 'conditions for action' or 'zones of tolerance'. As long as behaviour falls within these zones it may appear to be daring or unusual but it will not yet be considered deviant (Boesch 1991: 36). Culture needs individualisation, originality and inventions in order to creatively adapt to change as much as it needs collective conformism to ensure long term longevity.

#### 7.4.5 The meaning and symbolism of action

In previous paragraphs the cyberspace culture was defined in terms of its 'depth traits' or connotative meaning of actions that are based on personal experiences. It is in this realm that actions begin to symbolise a deeper meaning or understanding of experience. Any action, for example the choice of a pseudonym can be interpreted in relation to its symbolic meaning shared by members of the same cultural group. Boesch (1991: 73) distinguished between five different forms of symbolism namely:

- a. Situational symbolism
- b. Functional symbolism
- c. Analogical symbolism
- d. Ideational symbolism
- e. Otherness symbolism.

a. *Situational symbolism:*

Actions and their results are connected to an external situation or place. In off-line cultures this usually relates to a geographical physical place, for example the African continent on which various African cultural groups reside. As illustrated in the next figure, the physical qualities of a landscape such as warm climate, high temperatures and scenic landscapes are used as symbols when describing the African people living in these areas.



Figure 7.2: The Zulu Kingdom in South Africa

In cyberspace culture, web spaces are designed to act as cultural mediators. As illustrated in the next figure, visual artists of cyberspace create virtual spaces wherein physical bodies can interact without meeting each other personally.



Figure 7.3: The on-line chat-room ICQ.com

*b. Functional symbolism:*

Actions and their outcomes are connected to a functional outcome. 'Functional' has two meanings: on the one hand it refers to processes within the organism for example breathing, feeling or thought. On the other hand it refers of the instrumental use of an object for example a hammer is for nailing and a pen is for writing. One example is a knife when interpreted in a Western culture in terms of its functional symbolism will refer to cutting, but in the Asian culture its functional symbolism will also refer to bad luck representing the break-up of interpersonal relationships. In cyberspace culture a computer is not merely an information processor but, based on its functional symbolism, it is seen as a connection to the global village.

*c. Analogical symbolism:*

Since culture combines overlapping fields of action in a collective space, actions are related to each other by analogy for example in off-line Western cultures use of guns may remind people of the World Wars and the killing of innocent civilians. In the cyberspace culture pseudopersonalities are constructed based on experiences in the face-to-face world. According to Wallace (1999) 45% of pseudonyms are related to the individuals themselves and personal experiences in the off-line world (Refer to chapter 5).

*d. Ideational symbolism:*

Actions can remind people of similar actions and it can also be connected to general ideas. In the Christian culture reference to human pottery can symbolise the general idea of God's relationship with the human race, since the Bible describes God's creation of man with statements like God that has molded man from clay. Within the cyberspace culture the Internet symbolises the general idea of freedom of choice since it is not governed or regulated by any governing body.

e. *Otherness symbolism:*

According to Boesch there is no reality without its alternatives. In off-line language terms it is described asonyms. In the off-line world the Nazi regime in Germany symbolised a powerful empire but also the inability of one cultural group to respect cultural differences. In cyberspace people specifically create on-line pseudopersonalities that are different from their off-line personalities, symbolising a person they are **not** in real life.

## **7.5 The psychology behind values**

### **7.5.1 The definition of values**

Taking the reader back to the definition of value systems provided in chapter 1 and without repeating all of the information, values can be described as "desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives" (Seligman, Olson & Zanna 1996: 2). The cultural group's value system acts as a peer group against which the individual compares his or her own value systems and it will guide individual behaviour in everyday situations when in contact with others. Individuals therefore reorder their own value systems continuously according to the situations they found themselves in. For example if a woman is confronted with the choice of having an abortion or not values related to the individual will be more important than conforming to traditional belief systems. The opposite is true when one has to vote for a specific political party where the group value system is more important than the individual value system.

### **7.5.2 Motivational values**

The authors elaborated on their discussion by providing ten motivational type values that govern off-line behaviour. The following table provides a list of the value types, each defined in terms of its central goal and followed, in parentheses, the specific single values the primarily represent it.

Table 7.1: Definitions of motivational types of values in terms of their goals and the single values that represent them (Seligman, Olson & Zanna 1996: 3)

VALUES	DEFINITIONS
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources (Social power, Authority, Wealth).
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards (Successful, Capable, Ambitious, Influential).
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself (Pleasure, Enjoying life).
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life (Daring, A varied life, An exciting life).
Self-direction	Independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring. (Creativity, Freedom, Independent, Curious, Choosing own goals).
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature (Broadminded, Wisdom, Social justice, Equality, A world at Peace, A world of beauty, Unity with nature, Protecting the environment).
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact (Helpful, Honest, Forgiving, Loyal, Responsible).
Tradition	Respect, commitment and acceptable of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self. (Humble, Accepting my portion in life, devout, Respect for tradition, Moderate).
Conformity	Restraint of action, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms (Politeness, Obedient, Self-discipline, Honouring parents and elders).
Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self. (Family security, National security, Social order, Clean reciprocation of favours).

In addition to this theory they described the relationships between these values by grouping them in terms of specific dimensions. The next figure illustrates the conflict that develops between actions that are taken in pursuit of a specific set of values that are different from each other. The motivational goals of the value types in **opposing** positions in the circle can not easily be pursued at the same time for example to seek personal success for oneself is likely to obstruct actions aimed at enhancing the welfare of others. The dimension of 'openness to change' reflects an emphasis on individual thought and actions. This is the direct opposite of the dimension of 'conservation' with a restriction of the individual actions in order to conform to traditional thoughts and practises. The dimension of 'self-transcendence' where others are accepted as equals and there is a concern for others is in conflict with the dimension of 'self-enhancement' where individual success and dominance over others are important.

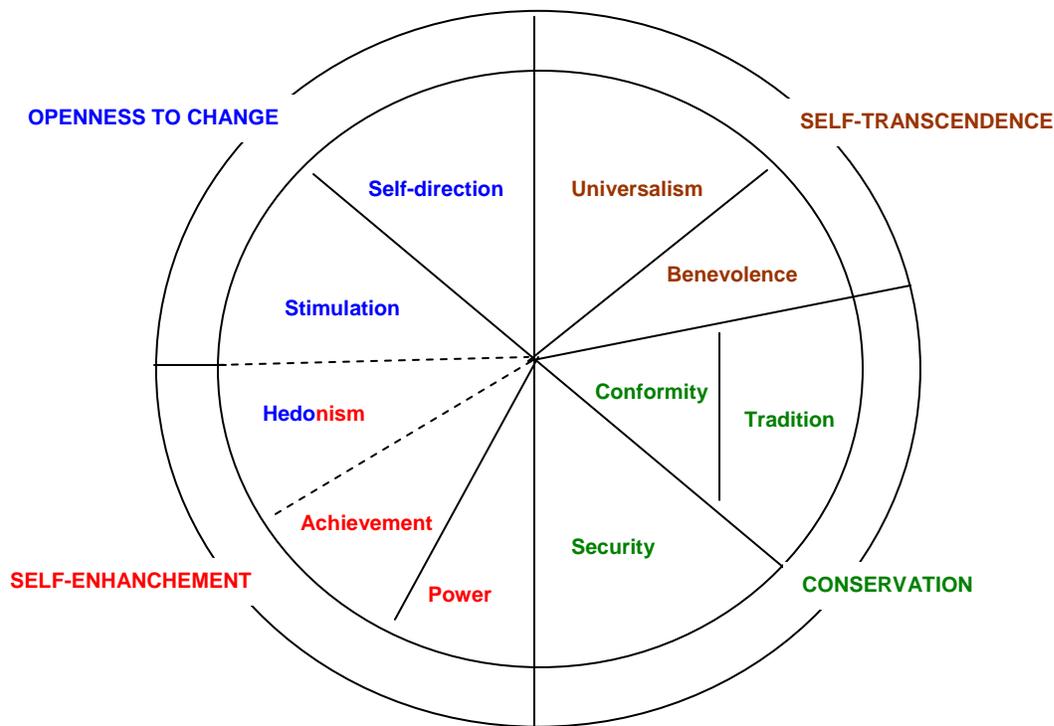


Figure 7.4: The prototypical structure of value systems (Seligman, Olson & Zanna 1996: 5).

During their research the authors also found that the strongest predictor of failures in interpersonal cooperation can be attributed to the power values since it emphasises the competitive advantage to be gained even at the expense of others in the group. Achievement as value promotes self-interest and also predicts failures in interpersonal cooperation. The strongest predictor of successful interpersonal cooperation was the value of benevolence followed by universalism and conformity since the group and what is important to the group is put before individual needs and wants. Conservation (coupled with the three values of conformity, tradition and security) correlated negatively with a readiness for out-group contact since any feedback from outside the group is perceived as a threat to the traditional belief systems and therefore the security, cohesiveness and thus longevity of the group. In contrast the dimension of openness to change (including the values of self direction, stimulation and hedonism) correlated positively with readiness for out group contact since it provides exposure to new and different ways of life and opportunities to learn and explore them. The same positive correlation was shown between the dimension of self-transcendence (including values of benevolence and universalism) and a readiness for out group contact since individuals although different from each others are seen as equals and not rivals.

### 7.5.3 Social values

Since the first set of values focused on motivational aspects it is also important to look at social values and how it influences behaviour. According to the Social Adaptation Theory values develop from different life experiences. People in the off-line world people adapt to different life roles in part through value development and value fulfillment. Value development summarises previous experiences and provides a strategy for dealing with new situations and therefore new choices. For example a person who value fun and enjoyment will use the Internet for games and social interaction but a person who value a sense of accomplishment will use the Internet for work related activities for example e-mail communication with colleagues. Within this theoretical framework the following list of values (LOV) has been formulated.

Table 7.2: The list of values according to the Social Adaptation Theory (Seligman, Olson & Zanna 1996: 138).

<b>VALUES</b>	<b>DEFINITIONS</b>
Sense of belonging	To be accepted and needed by family, friends and the community
Excitement	To experience stimulation and thrills
Warm relationships with others	To have close companionships and intimate friendships
Self-fulfilment	To find peace of mind and to make the best use of your talents
Fun and enjoyment in life	To lead a pleasurable, happy life
Security	To be safe and protected from misfortune and attack
Self respect	To be proud of yourself and confident with who you are
As sense of accomplishment	To succeed at what you want to do

These social values compliment the motivational values discussed in the previous section for example self respect and self-fulfillment compliment the dimension of self-enhancement with a focus on the individual achievements and successes. Security is seen as a motivational as well as a social value and is important for people who lack economic, physical and psychological security. A sense of belonging and the value of having warm relationships with others fit in with the dimension of self-

transcendence where it is important to be seen as an equal within a group thus being well respected within the group. Excitement, fun and enjoyment fit with the motivational value of hedonism that fuels both dimensions of openness to change as well as self-enhancement. These values are important in day-to-day off-line situations. The next step will be to ascertain which of these values are important in day-to-day on-line situations within the cyberspace culture.

## **7.6 Concluding summary**

From a social psychological theoretical point of view this chapter aimed to compare on-line and off-line groups and communities with each other. The researcher aimed to provide a cultural psychological description of the development process of culture in the off-line and on-line world. Theoretical assumptions of the Symbolic Action Theory were used during the process. Various values were described from a psychological perspective and in the following chapters the researcher will aim to test the applicability of these theories within the South African Internet context whilst addressing the main theme and research objectives of the study.

## CHAPTER 8: INTERNET-USER POPULATION

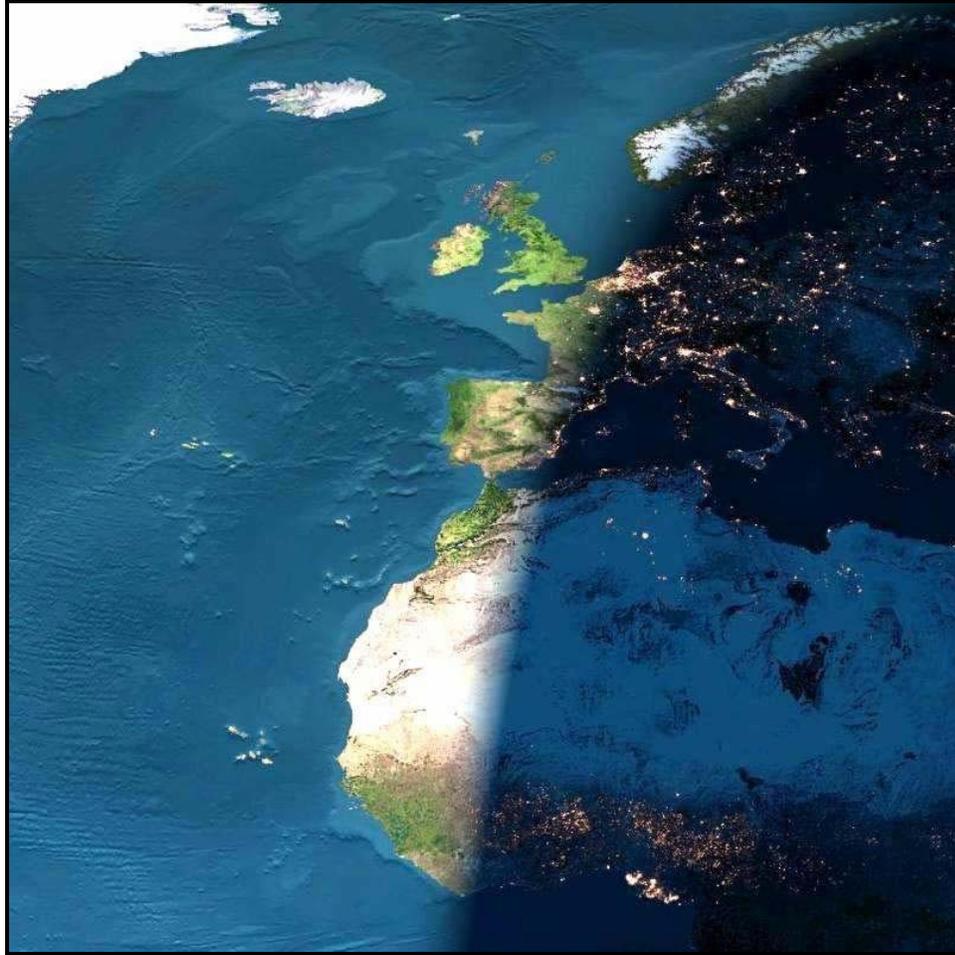


Figure 8.1: Sunset from space

NASA. <http://www.cnn.com> (5 March. 2002).

*This photograph was taken by the crew on board the Columbia during its last mission, on a cloudless day. The picture is of Europe and Africa when the sun is setting. Half of the picture is in night. The bright dots you see are the cities' lights. The top part of Africa is the Sahara Desert. Note that the lights are already on in the Netherlands, Paris, and Barcelona, and that it's still daylight in Dublin, London, Lisbon, and Madrid. The sun is still shining on the Strait of Gibraltar. The Mediterranean Sea is already in darkness. In the middle of the Atlantic Ocean you can see the Azores Islands; below them to the right are the Madeira Islands; a bit below are the Canary Islands; and further South, close to the farthest western point of Africa, are the Cape Verde islands. Note that the Sahara is huge and can be seen clearly both during daytime and night time. To the left, on top, is Greenland, totally frozen.*

## **8.1 Introduction**

During the early ages when people still believed the earth was flat, it implied that nothing existed beyond the horizon, limiting science to what could be seen at a particular time. Social sciences were born out of this observation: “It doesn’t mean that if you can’t see it, it does not exist”. Early explorers motivated by this fact set out to cross horizons exploring the unknown. Today humanity knows 'there is something beyond a horizon'. Today science is not a limitation but a tool to perceive the world from different angles, (to take sunset photographs from space). Technology makes it possible to connect people on different continents and thereby forming a global village of inhabitants around the world. This chapter concentrates on the results of various quantitative data sets and provides a reliable and statistically valid profile of the South African Internet user population, who are also members of the global village. From this population a sample of chat-room protocols will be taken for the purpose of data analyses.

## **8.2 Quantitative data sources**

Information was retrieved from three main data sources in order to develop a comprehensive description of the typical South African Internet user, namely:

- The NUA website ([www.nua.com](http://www.nua.com))
- All Media Product Survey (AMPS)
- Census 2001 Second Edition.

### **8.2.1 The NUA website**

Nua.com is an authoritative on-line source of information on Internet demographics and trends. NUA was founded in 1996 and acquired in June 2001 by Scope Communications Group, Ireland's leading IT Media Company. This database contains over four years of freely accessible information gathered and collated by NUA, an array of weekly editorial articles, which have put topical events into context since 1997. NUA is particularly well known for its unique [How Many On-line?](#) Feature which offers an estimate of the global Internet user population, based on extensive examination of surveys and reports from around the world. Where possible, ‘How Many On-line’ is also quoted in this chapter. This

medium represents both adults and children who have accessed the Internet at least once during the 3 months prior to being surveyed. Where figures are not available, NUA uses figures of users who have gone on-line in the past 6 months, past year or ever. An Internet user represents a person with access to the Internet and is not specific to Internet account holders. When the figure for Internet account holders is the only information available, this figure is multiplied by a factor of 3 to estimate the number of Internet users. When more than one survey on a country's demographics is available, NUA will take the mean of the two surveys or, in the case where NUA feels one study may be more comprehensive or reliable than the other, NUA will quote this figure rather than another.

### **8.2.2 All Media and Product Survey (AMPS) database**

The SAARF AMPS survey covers the adult population of South Africa, albeit with a few minor exceptions. Adults are considered to be persons 16 years and older. The universe from which the sample is drawn comprises of adults aged 16 years or older being resident in private households, or hostels, residential hotels and similar accommodation in the Republic of South Africa. Excluded from the universe are:

- Residents and staff of institutions such as prisons or hospitals
- Military personnel on active service
- Within each population group, minority subpopulations in certain geographical areas.

The AMPS survey uses personal in-home interviews of thousands of people representative of the total population. The questions pertaining to the use of mass media, such as all available radio and television stations, all major newspapers that are sold as well as suburban "free sheets", and most major consumer magazines. Special consumer interest magazines are also included in this category. "Outdoor", for example billboards and trailer advertising as well as cinemas, are covered. *For the purpose of this study activities surrounding the Internet and the World Wide Web were included and trends were discussed around various demographical data.* Although household income is not the only indication of general living standards, it correlates well with usage figures within the different Living Standard Measures (LSM) groups. In order to understand what this measurement entails, SAARF ([www.saarf.com](http://www.saarf.com)) published the following description:

"The SAARF Living Standards Measure, developed by the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) has become one of the most widely used marketing research tools in South

Africa. Paul Haupt, MD of SAARF, comments, "Unfortunately, it has become so relied upon that it's very often being misused and has therefore become the victim of its own success". To understand what can be achieved by using the SAARF LSM as a marketing segmentation tool, one needs to know why it was created. When thinking about any population, it is important to understand that although people are very diverse, they do have certain commonalities. What is required from a market segmentation tool is to create an index that will differentiate between people with different behavioural patterns and group together those people with similar behaviour.

The development of a LSM Index was stimulated by a series of events; the most important being the fact that the then commonly used market segmentation tool of 'urban-rural' distinction was losing its impact as a differential. The gap between urban and rural markets was narrowing and the habits of both markets were becoming increasingly similar. To counter this, SAARF introduced a new grouping according to community size, namely "metropolitan", "cities and large towns", "small towns and villages" and "rural". This was an attempt to further segment the market by level of sophistication so that marketers could better define their markets. It was just another demographic index, however and it was soon realized that what was needed was a set of descriptors based on more than one variable, which would provide a more powerful segmentation tool than any single variable taken on its own.

The late Eddie Schulze had been working on a system of classification for Unilever, based on whether people shopped at a supermarket or not, and then going further, to split supermarket shoppers into those who owned commodities such as cars, television sets and radios and those who did not. From this thinking, emerged South Africa's first multivariate market segmentation index - the LSMs, which in addition was also a move away from segmentation based purely on demographic variables.

The LSM index was designed to profile a market into relatively homogeneous groups. It is based on a set of marketing differentiators that group people according to their living standards, using criteria such as degree of urbanisation and ownership of cars and major appliances (assets). Naturally, the LSM bands are not airtight pockets. LSMs bring together groupings of people out of the total population continuum into contiguous and sometimes slightly overlapping groups. Essentially, the LSM is a wealth measure based on standard of living rather than income - in fact, income does not appear anywhere within the LSMs at all. Interestingly enough, variables such as income, education and occupation were tested as part of the first LSM but did not add anything to the strength of the measure.

In the new SAARF Universal LSM™, the population continuum is divided into ten groups, from 1 at the bottom end, and 10 at the top end. The LSMs are calculated using 29 variables taken directly from the SAARF All Media and Products Survey (AMPS™):

1	Hot running water	16	Less than 2 radio sets per household
2	Fridge/freezer	17	Hi-fi or music centre
3	Microwave oven	18	Rural outside Gauteng or Western Cape
4	Flush toilet in/outside house	19	Built-in kitchen sink
5	No domestic in household	20	Home security service
6	VCR	21	Deep freezer
7	Vacuum cleaner/floor polisher	22	Water in home or on plot
8	No cellphone in household	23	M-Net or DStv subscription
9	Traditional hut	24	Dishwasher
10	Washing machine	25	Electricity
11	PC in home	26	Sewing machine
12	Electric stove	27	Gauteng
13	TV set	28	Western Cape
14	Tumble dryer	29	Motor vehicle in household
15	Home telephone		

Some users still think LSM's are the 'polite' way of talking about race. However, this was never the intention and race has never been used as part of the LSM at all. It is true that initially LSM levels did correlate highly with race, with most blacks falling into LSM 1 to 6, and the higher LSM levels being multiracial. This, however, is because LSMs reflect the reality of South Africa - they weren't created to obscure it but to reflect it.

### 8.2.3 The Census Data 2001 (Second edition)

In October 2001, South Africans for a second time were counted as citizens of a democracy. More than 83 000 enumerators as well as over 17 000 supervisors and fieldwork co-ordinators were employed to collect information on persons and households throughout the country by means of a uniform methodology. In preparation for the census, the country was divided into about 80 000 small pockets of land called enumeration areas (EAs). An enumerator was assigned to each enumerated area visit all places within it where people were living. The information collected was processed at the Census Processing Centre in Pretoria, employing about 1 000 people working in shifts for sixteen months to process questionnaires. For the first time, scanning was used to capture data on a computer. Captured data were then edited and made accessible for analysis.

### 8.3 Internet-user population figures

#### 8.3.1 Overall Internet-user population figures

On average 1 in every 15 South Africans had Internet access by the end of 2001 according to a report from World Wide Worx. This compares to 1 in every 2 users in First World countries such as the United States of America, Canada, Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong. The August 2001 figures stated that the number of on-line Internet users worldwide was approximately 513.41 million. Annual South African figures in ascending order are:

Table 8.1: South African Internet penetration figure growth from 1997–2004

DATE	NUMBER	%	SOURCE
2004	3 500 000	7.6	OPA SA
2003	3 280 000	7.0	Goldstuck Report
2002	3 100 000	7.0	Goldstuck Report
2001	2 025 000	5.0	University of Pretoria
July 2001	1 500 000	3.67	Nielsen//NetRatings
December 2000	2 400 000	5.53	ITU
May 2000	1 820 000	4.19	Media Africa
August 1999	1 622 000	3.74	Media Africa
December 1998	1 266 000	2.92	Media Africa
November 1998	1 040 000	2.4	Media Africa
February 1998	800 000	1.7	South Africa On-line
January 1998	600 000	1.5	SANGONet
February 1997	700 000	1.6	South Africa On-line

\*\*Source: (<http://www.nua.com>).

\*\*Please note: These population figures include Internet access in general, for example at home, office or elsewhere. If an individual has access in more than one way he or she is only counted once.

The AMPS survey also showed that Internet usage figures were increasing from 1997 – 2000 and stabilised from 2000 – 2002 at around 1 300 000 South Africans. World Wide Worx predicted similar figures when it was expected that Internet usage would be less than 10% in 2002. The slow growth rate was attributed to:

- Delays in licensing a second network operator
- The leading South African operator, Telkom's uncompromising attitude toward Internet service providers
- Market ignorance about the value of the Internet
- Low levels of education in the South African population. As indicated in the next table the 2001 Census reported that only one fifth (20.4%) of the population had a grade 12/matric qualification and 8.4% a post-school qualification.

Table 8.2: Highest level of education by province amongst those 20 and older (percentages)

Level of education	Eastern Cape	Free State	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Limpopo	Mpumalanga	Northern Cape	North West	Western Cape	South Africa
No schooling	22,8	16,0	8,4	21,9	33,4	27,5	18,2	19,9	5,7	17,9
Some primary	19,8	21,7	11,2	16,9	14,1	15,9	21,0	20,0	15,2	16,0
Completed primary	7,4	7,8	5,5	5,7	5,5	5,9	8,3	6,8	7,9	6,4
Some secondary	29,6	30,7	34,3	28,8	26,1	26,6	29,9	29,0	36,5	30,8
Grade 12/ Std 10	14,1	17,5	28,0	19,8	14,0	18,2	16,5	18,5	23,4	20,4
Higher	6,3	6,3	12,6	6,9	6,8	5,9	6,1	5,9	11,2	8,4
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

According to Nielsen//NetRatings, South African Internet home-based users went on-line for an average of 4 hours and 32 minutes per user in June 2001. In somewhat more detail home users went on-line 10 times per month in sessions lasting on average less than 26 minutes. By international standards, as is evident in the next table, it is a relatively short average time spent on-line and Nielsen//NetRatings attributes this to high Internet call costs.

Table 8.3: South African on-line time measures compared to the UK and USA

ACTIVITY			
Number of sessions per month	10	13	9
Time spent per month	4:32:18	5:58:53	9:44:52
Time spent during surfing session	26:02	28:07	30:47
Active Internet Universe	684 735	12 740 627	101 464 514
Current Internet Universe Estimate	1 499 172	23 375 121	167 138 270

<http://www.eratings.com/news/20010730.htm> (2 Nov. 2002).

Four developments were expected to boost growth in 2004 namely:

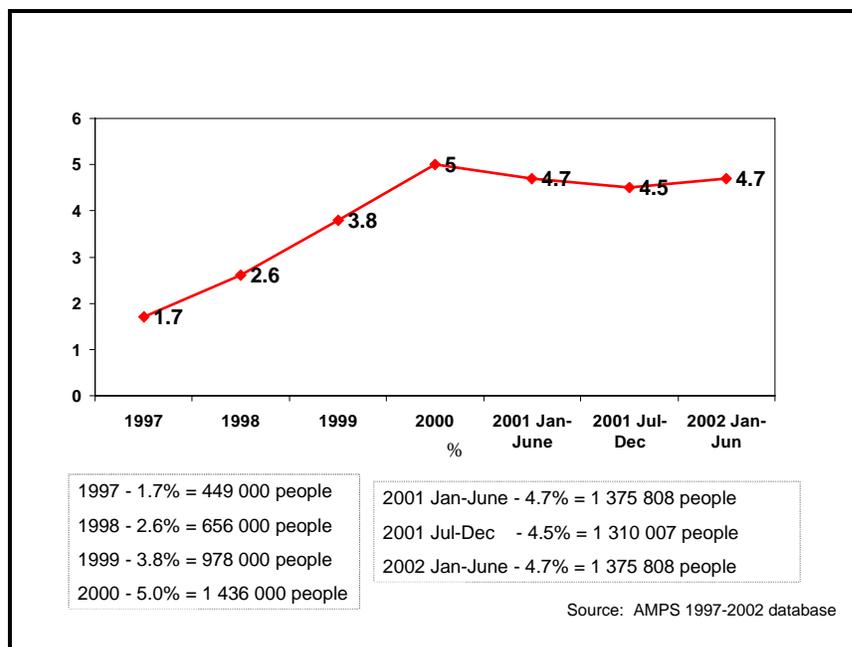
- The roll-out of competitive access services to businesses by a Second Network Operator (SNO), which has finally been granted a license to operate.
- The roll-out of high-speed or broadband wireless access by Sentech.
- The healthy Rand-dollar exchange rate, which has dramatically brought down the cost of equipment for rolling out infrastructure.
- School connectivity is to receive a boost in 2004 as long-awaited projects were finally implemented. Internet-based learning or a ‘virtual school’ offers the entire South African curriculum from Grade 1 up to grade 12 as well as the Cambridge international programme that is available on CD. This is a practical example of how young South African sportsmen and women can continue their education at the same time whilst participating in intensive international sport programmes.

In summary the AMPS figures for 2004 recorded the following facts:

- More than half of South African Internet users had access to the Internet at work (56.89%) and the others at home (35.60%) followed by other locations for example, at school and university (7.51%)
- On average they spent 6.59 minutes on-line per day
- In case of adults the most visited site was news24.com
- Only 12.5% have ever bought anything on the Internet.

### 8.3.2 Internet penetration figures as quoted from the AMPS survey

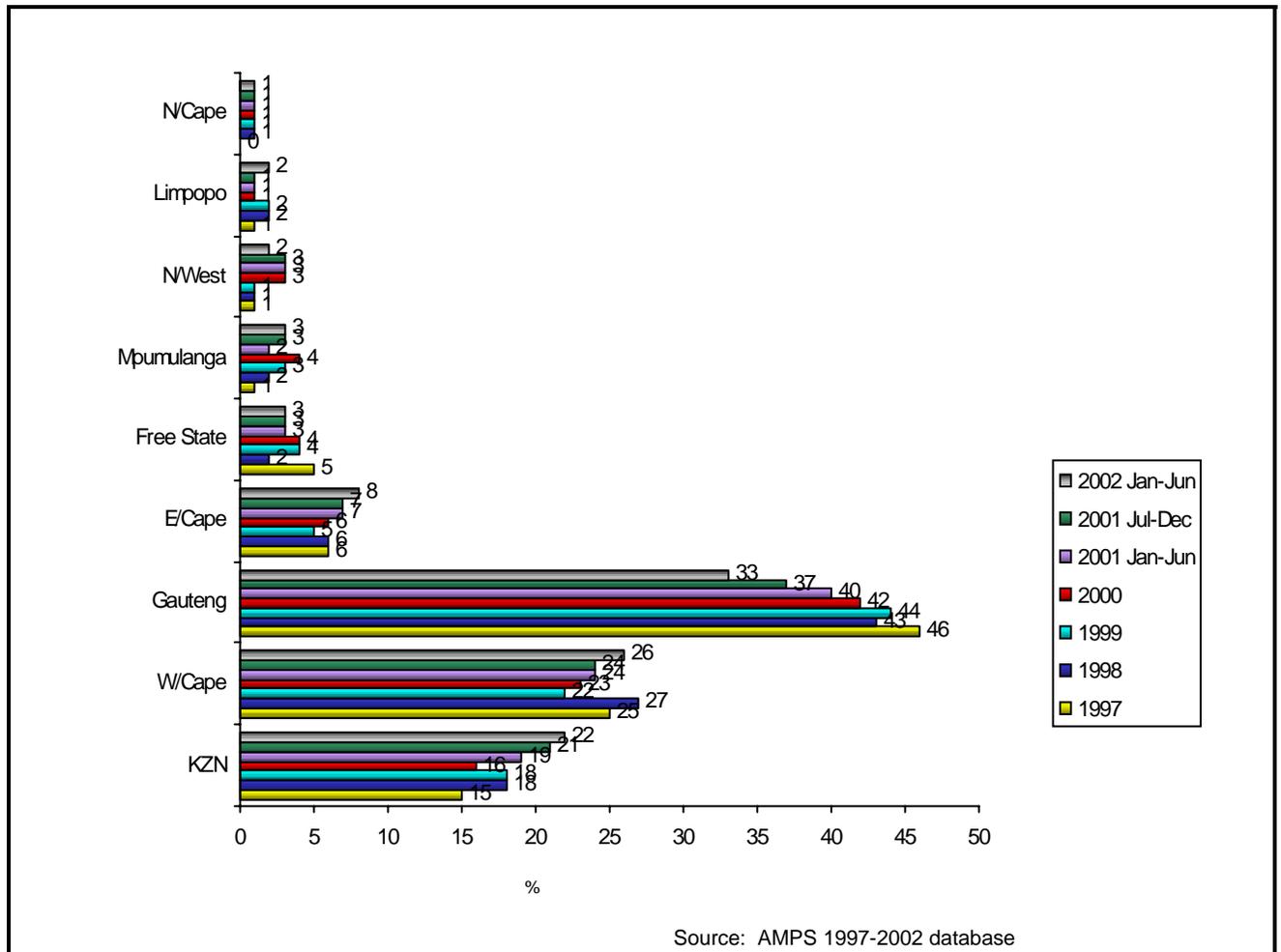
The AMPS survey provides a longitudinal database for analysing trends in Internet penetration and the information presented hereafter is based on the AMPS 1997 – 2002 database.



Graph 8.1: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks

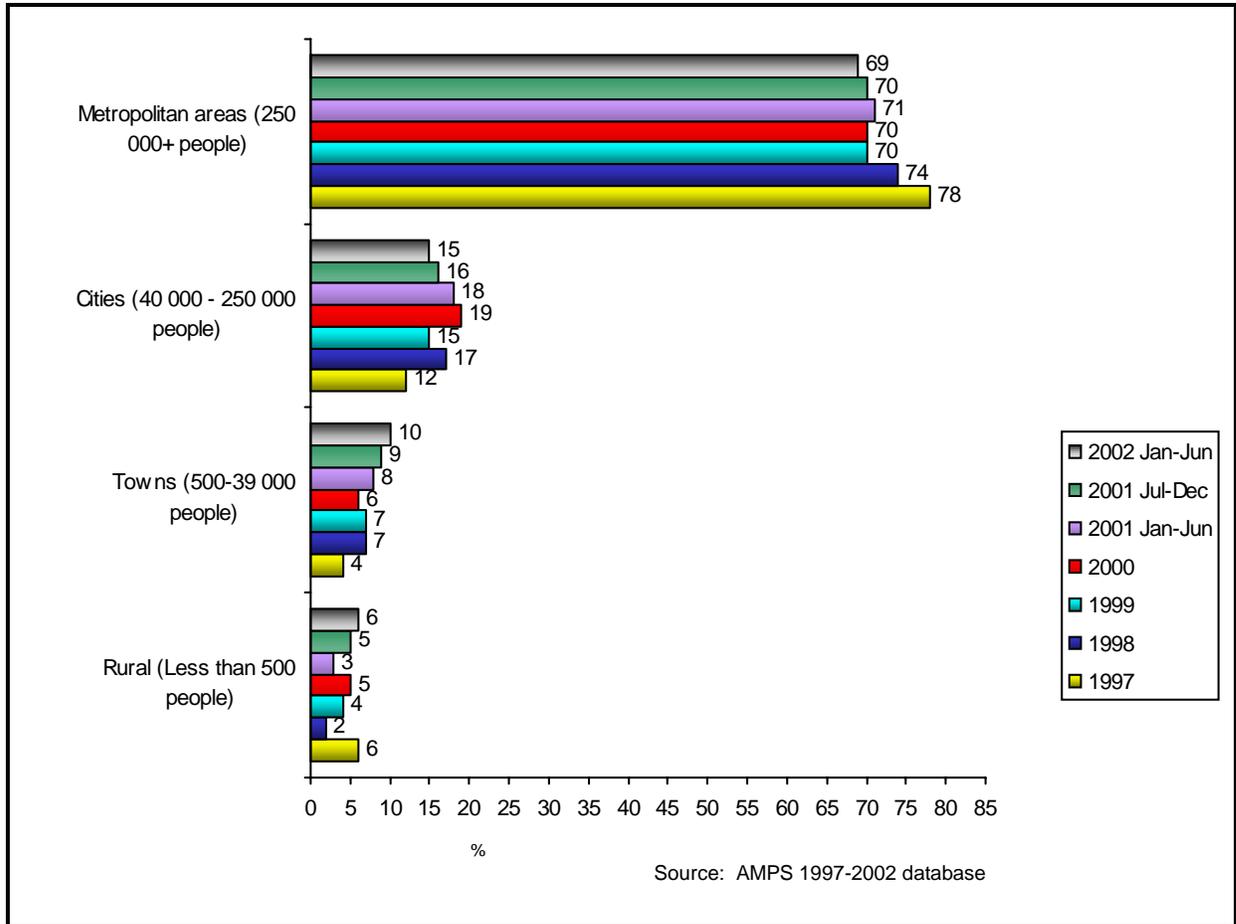
In terms of the geographical split, Internet usage are the highest in three provinces namely:

- Gauteng (Average = 41%)
- Western Cape (Average = 24%)
- KwaZulu-Natal (Average = 18%).



Graph 8.2: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by provincial distribution

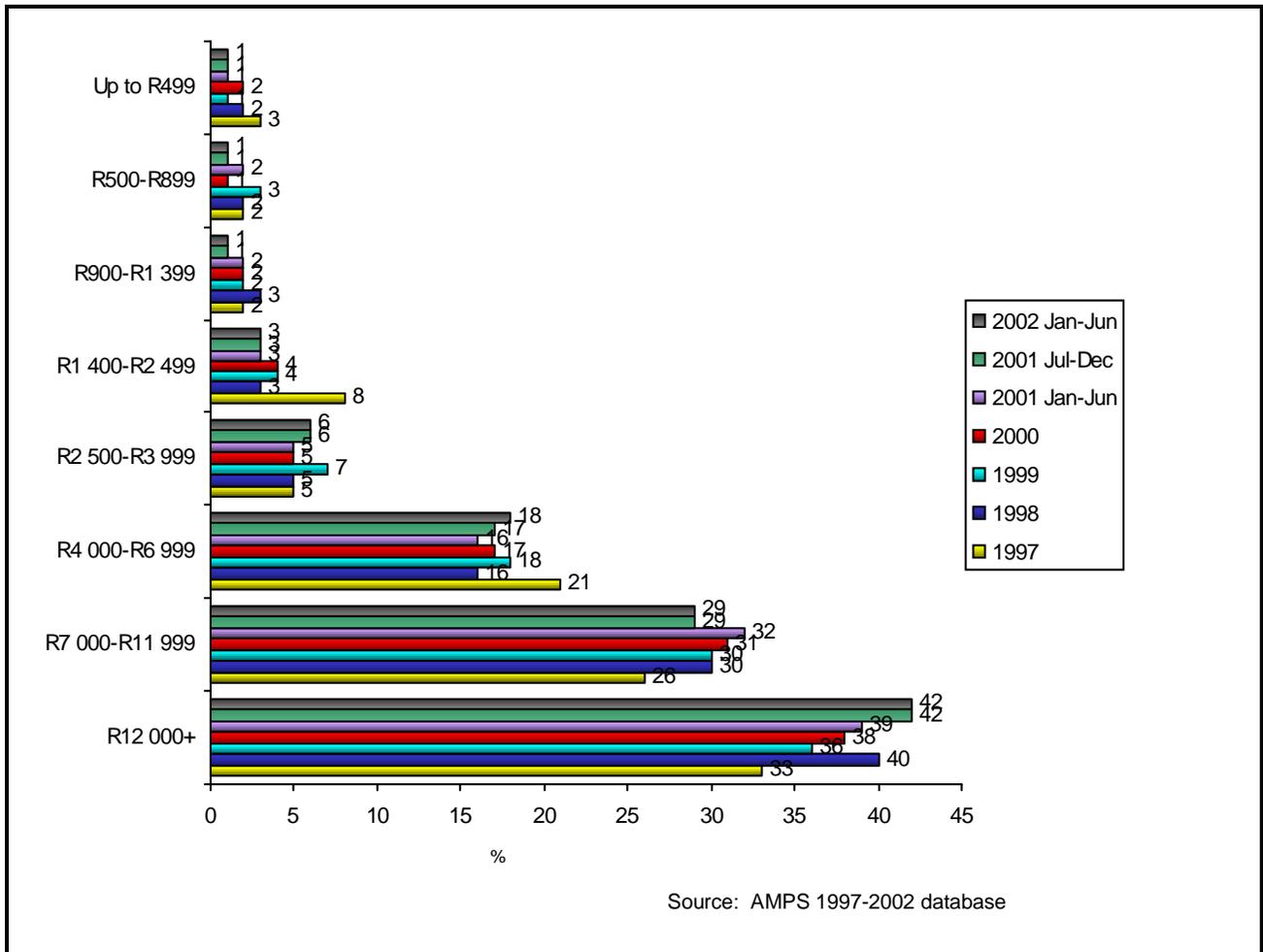
Interestingly enough, although Gauteng remains the frontrunner in terms of usage, figures dropped substantially from almost half (46%) in 1997 to a third (33%) in 2002. In KwaZulu-Natal usage figures increased from 15% in 1997 to 22% in 2002. The three provinces mentioned also include three of the major metropolitan areas where usage figures are also high, as shown in the next graph.



Graph 8.3: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by geographical distribution for metropolitan and rural areas

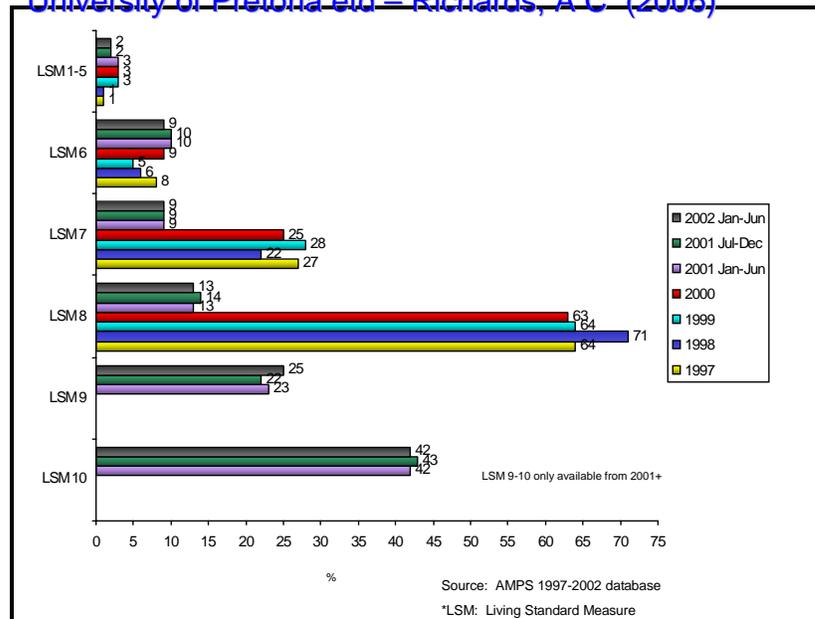
The above graph shows that within South Africa's borders the majority of Internet users reside in metropolitan areas. It compliments the figures in graph 8.2, since the main metropolitan areas are situated in three provinces namely Gauteng, Western Province and KwaZulu-Natal. Despite the fact that metropolitan areas have more people than rural areas, the majority of businesses are centered in these areas, implying a need for electronic communication, hence Internet access.

An average of 18% of the households with a gross income of between R4 000-R6 999 accessed the Internet. This figure increased when gross household income increased. For those in the next income bracket (R7 000-R11 999) the average figure were 30% and peaked around 39% for those households with an income of R12 000 and more implying that they have the financial means to purchase computers.



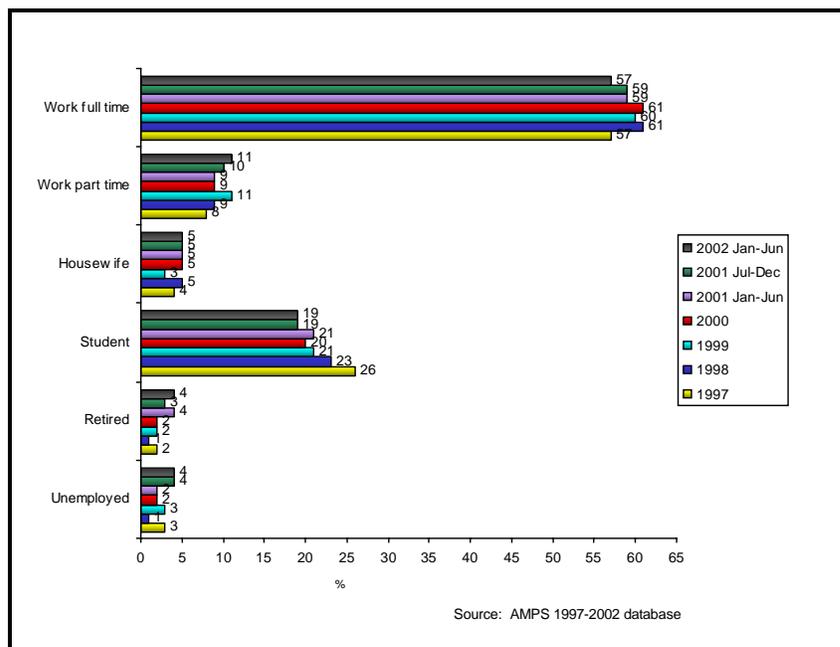
Graph 8.4: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by gross household income distribution

Up to 2000 the South African population was divided in eight LSM groups, but this was extended to also include LSM 9 and 10 in 2001. Complimentary to the previous graph, Internet penetration figures reaches its highest peak in the higher LSM categories.



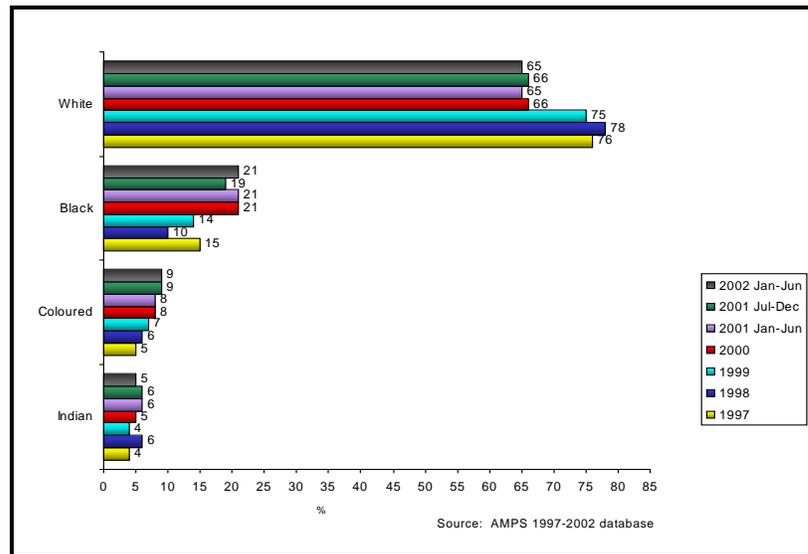
**Graph 8.5:** Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by LSM distribution

Almost two-thirds of Internet users work full time (average = 59%) with a fifth (average = 21%) of them studying and 10% working part-time. In 2002 new data were released by the SA search engine Ananzi, the search-term 'jobs' has become most popular keyword on this site during February–May 2002 ([www.nua.com](http://www.nua.com)).



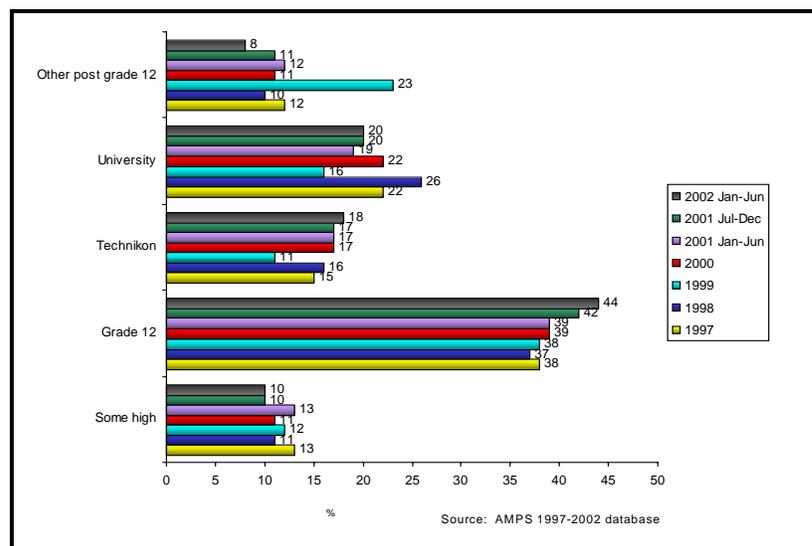
**Graph 8.6:** Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by work-status distribution

Internet access remains a white dominated activity but access figures in the black population increased from 15% in 1997 to 21% in 2002. In the Coloured population segment it almost doubled from 5% in 1997 to 9% in 2002 and Indian participation remained stable at around 5%.



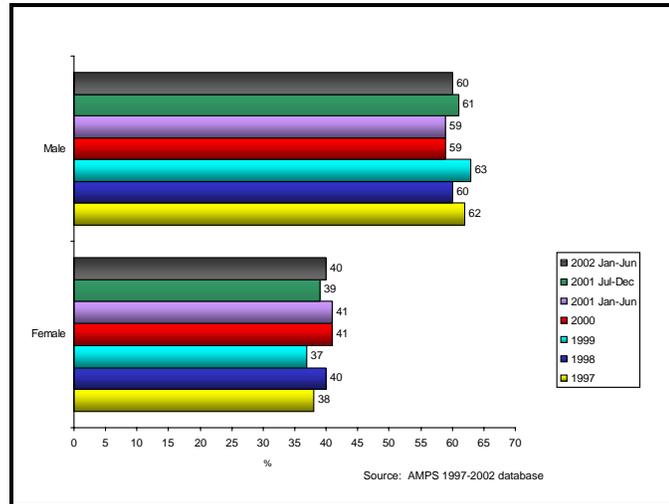
Graph 8.7: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by racial distribution

As is expected, Internet access requires computer literacy that is mostly achieved in higher educational levels that is from grade 12 and upwards, whereby the Internet becomes a part of everyday life with use of e-mail to communicate with others on a daily basis.



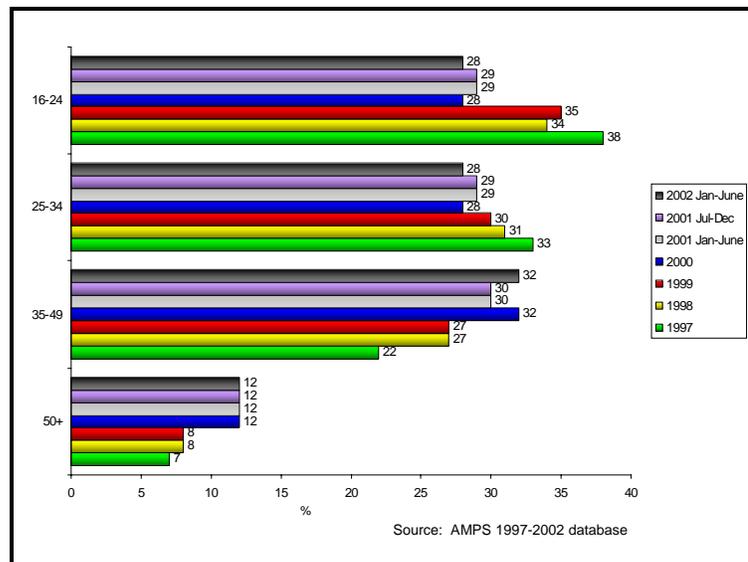
Graph 8.8: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by educational level

Research by Webcheck indicated that in January 2002, 49% of South African Internet users were women ([www.nua.com](http://www.nua.com)). Although there are contrasting arguments in different datasets in terms of female Internet usage, it is evident from the AMPS database that male access remains higher around 60% with female usage hovering around the 40% mark.



Graph 8.9: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by gender distribution

In terms of age groups the older segment (50+) became more interested in the Internet since their access figures almost doubled from 7% in 1997 to 12% from 2002. It can possibly be attributed to high emigration figures making the Internet a desired contact medium with children and relatives living abroad. The Internet is accessed by people from 16-49 years, with average figures around 30% in the different age segments.

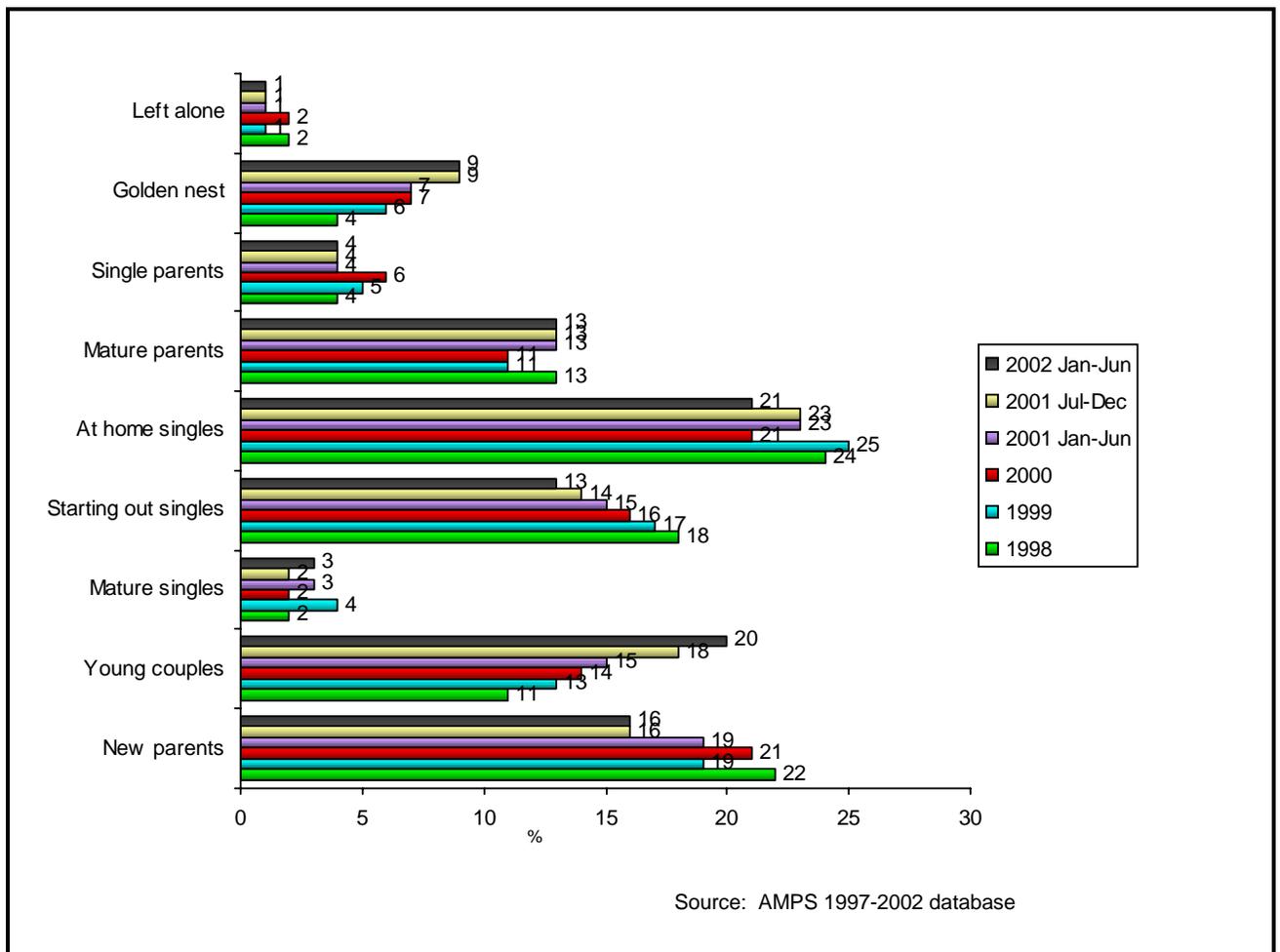


Graph 8.10: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by age distribution

When looking at life stages, the younger groups surf the net more actively, as is evident in the next summary of percentages:

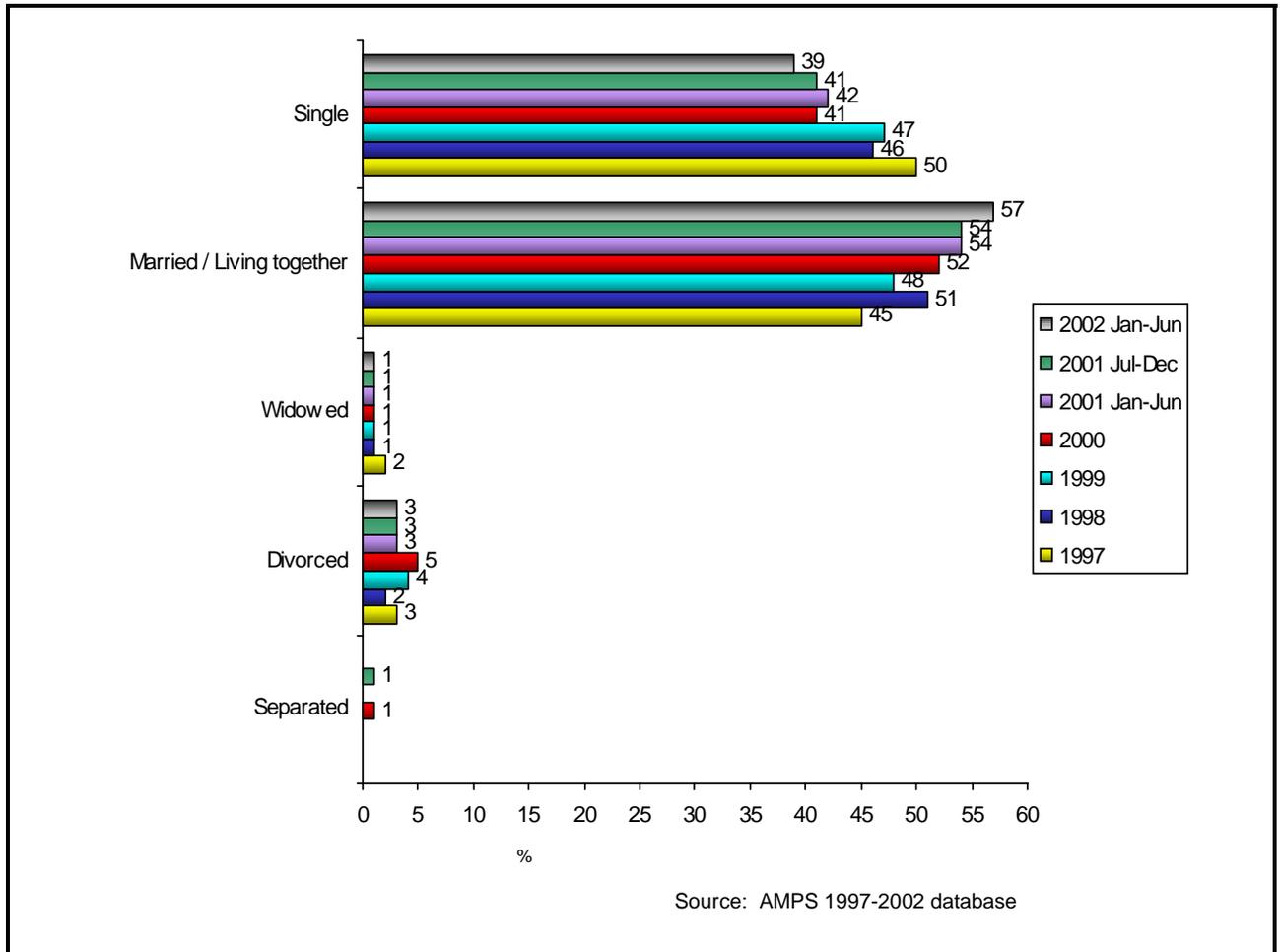
- At home singles: 20%
- New parents: 16%
- Starting out singles: 13%
- Young couples: 13%
- Mature parents: 11%.

Although a higher percentage of the ‘at-home-single’ segment access the Internet in comparison to other segments, it is interesting to look at individual trends within the ‘young couple’ segment where access figures almost doubled from 11% in 1998 up to 20% in 2002.



Graph 8.11: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by life stage distribution

Single men and women accounted for 50% of Internet access in 1997 but dropped to 39% in 2002. In contrast, married couples became more interested with a 43% access figure in 1997 that increased to 57% in 2002.



Graph 8.12: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by marital status distribution

## **8.4 Concluding summary**

More and more people in South Africa are using the Internet, but overall access figures remain low at around 7-8% of the total population. South African Generation Xers can be described as a diverse group of people representing different segments in the general population. They are the richer and more affluent part of South African society, living in major metropolitan areas, earning R12 000+ and are classified as LSM 7-10 especially LSM8. It is a white, male-dominant activity where participants work on a full- or part-time basis as well as students. Although people from different age groups between 16 and 49 years access the Internet, higher access figures were reported among adolescents, young adults, many who have married for the first time as well as new parents.

The Department of Informatics at the University of Pretoria polled 6 000 Internet users in August 2001 and its figures also confirmed AMPS trends of South African Internet users as being males between 20-40, well-educated with higher earnings. Furthermore it found that 36% of users go on-line at work, 19% at home and 45% in both locations. Their preferred activities are e-mail, research, browsing, entertainment and on-line banking ([www.nua.com](http://www.nua.com)). Potential reasons for the differences in Internet penetration figures among the different demographic variables can be described as 'information-rich' versus 'information-poor' groups as is evident in higher access figures among the well educated groups. There is a definite computer ownership gap between rich (earning R12 000+) and poorer South Africans. Furthermore socio-personal development is a major driver for Internet users, for example to communicate via e-mail, job seeking searchers and finding information about special interests by sharing ideas on specific topics in chat-rooms. Social and work networks are important since many people access the Internet at work.

## CHAPTER 9: QUALITATIVE RESULTS

### "A SIGN YOU'RE ADDICTED TO THE NET:

*You wake up at 3 a.m. to go to the bathroom and stop to check your e-mail on the way back to bed" (<http://www.rider.edu.html> 19 Nov. 2004).*

### **9.1 Introduction**

The aim of chapter 8 was to provide statistically valid and reliable profiles of South African Internet users. Although addressing a gap in the research literature, quantitative analyses could not provide an in-depth understanding of on-line interaction group processes, or the development of values of cyberspace culture. The CEMDA research process recommends an introduction of qualitative results to compliment limitations in quantitative analyses. A quantitative statistical formula was used to determine the sample size of 384 chat-rooms, and the content of each protocol was subjected to an in-depth qualitative analysis aiming to describe the development process from initial virtual interaction to a contextual level. Personalities interact with one another in a borderless world of cyberspace and virtual reality creates a unique situation wherein face-to-face behavioural patterns have to adapt to cyberspace. A resultant ripple effect eventually reaches the macrolevel, where a new cyberspace culture develops through computer-mediated communication across the globe.

The chapter will be structured as follows:

Main decisions with regards to the overall methodology that was taken during the pilot phase will be discussed followed by a graphical description of the different levels of the Internet experience. Detail on the realised sample will precede a detailed discussion of the qualitative results.

### **9.2 Pilot phase**

During the pilot phase methodological aspects were refined namely:

- Quality of protocols
- Identification of specific variables to be included to identify specific trends
- Appropriate methods of content analysis.

The following decisions were made:

- The researcher downloaded chat-room discussions as these happened in real time, but did not participate in any of the discussions. The verbatim protocols are a true reflection of spontaneous on-line interaction between chat-room participants.
- Websites with easy access to chat-rooms or discussion forums were included implying that no predefined criteria were used such as subscription costs, membership passwords etcetera. Any Internet user can access these forums quite easily and straight away participate in discussions.
- Websites with an on-line archive of chat-room discussions were selected to provide a longitudinal view of on-line group developments and changes.
- Initially each protocol was described and summarised according to six specific variables that remained constant throughout the process namely:
  1. The number of virtual participants in chat-rooms
  2. Pseudopersonality development compared to usage of the a real personality
  3. The role of emotions during on-line interaction processes
  4. Interaction processes within chat-rooms
  5. Links between virtual life and real life
  6. The development and use of cyberlanguage.
- A quantitative data file provided a framework for the presentation of the most important qualitative results based on:
  1. The chat-room source
  2. The context within which interaction in chat-rooms took place
  3. Themes of chat-room discussions
  4. Values identified during these discussions.
- Words combined with figures were interpreted to describe the pseudopersonalities that were created by chat-room participants. By applying “story sequence analysis” as technique of analyses, conclusions were drawn on different levels of complexity.

### **9.3 Levels of content analysis**

By applying various steps in the CEMDA method, three distinct levels were identified as the basis for the qualitative content analysis process. This in turn compliments the three-level (domain) model described in Chapter 3. The next two figures will visually illustrate the relationships between:

- The scope of the project that provided direction to the identification of;
- the different levels of qualitative content analysis that were used to address the;
- subthemes and main theme of the study;
- in a structured format by focussing on three levels of Internet experiences that can also be described as the major units of analysis.

**RESEARCH SCOPE:**  
**University of Pretoria etd – Richards, A C (2006)**

The study aims to provide a description of a particular group of people, conveniently designated the 'Generation Xers, who have developed cyberspace culture through interacting in cyberspace chat-rooms, by means of a twofold process of firstly developing pseudo- or 'cyberspace personalities' that are different from their individual 'normal' personalities, and secondly by sharing unique values, opinions and attitudes

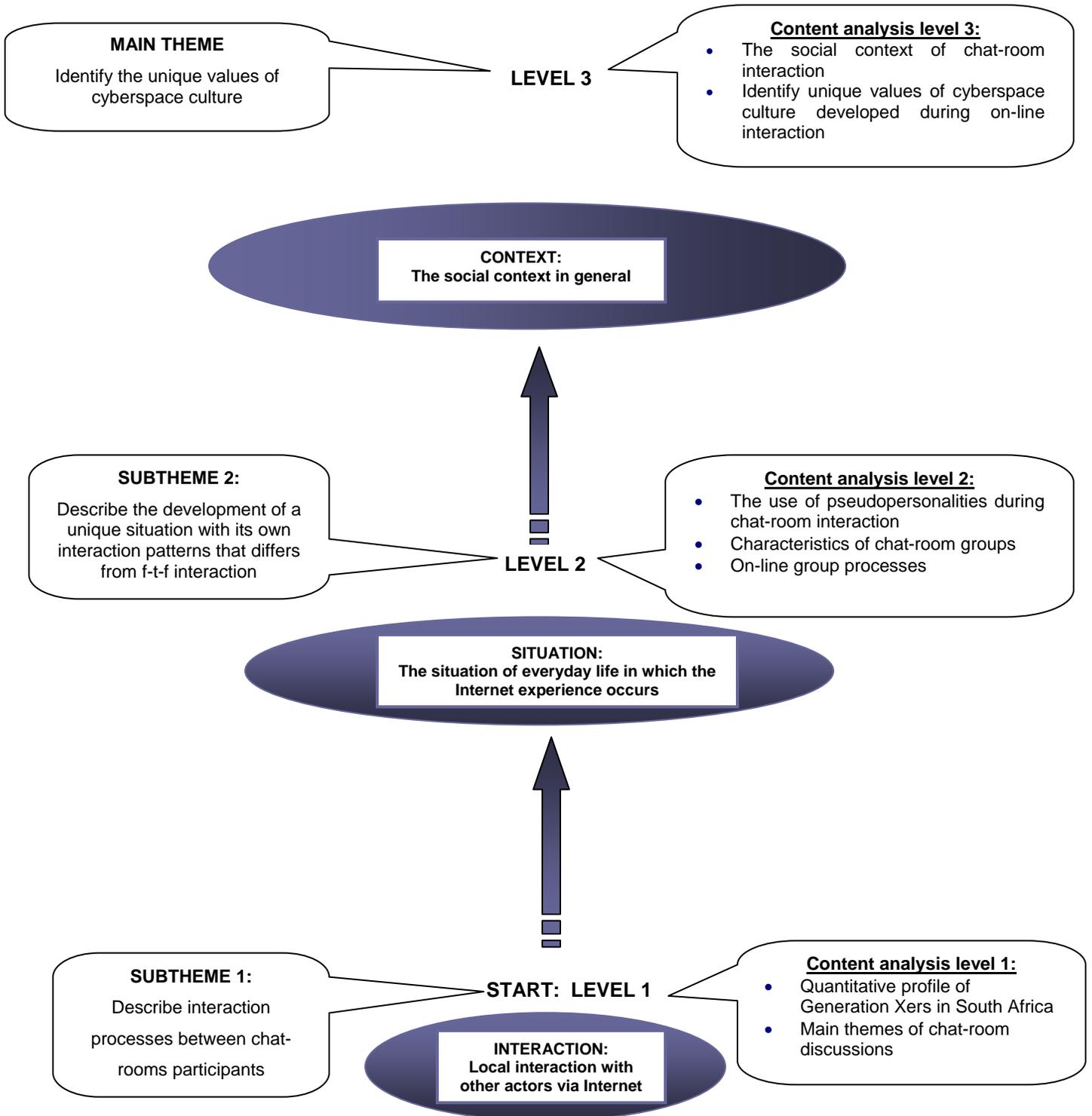


Figure 9.1: Complimentary Explorative Multi Data Analysis techniques applied in a three-level model of the Internet experience

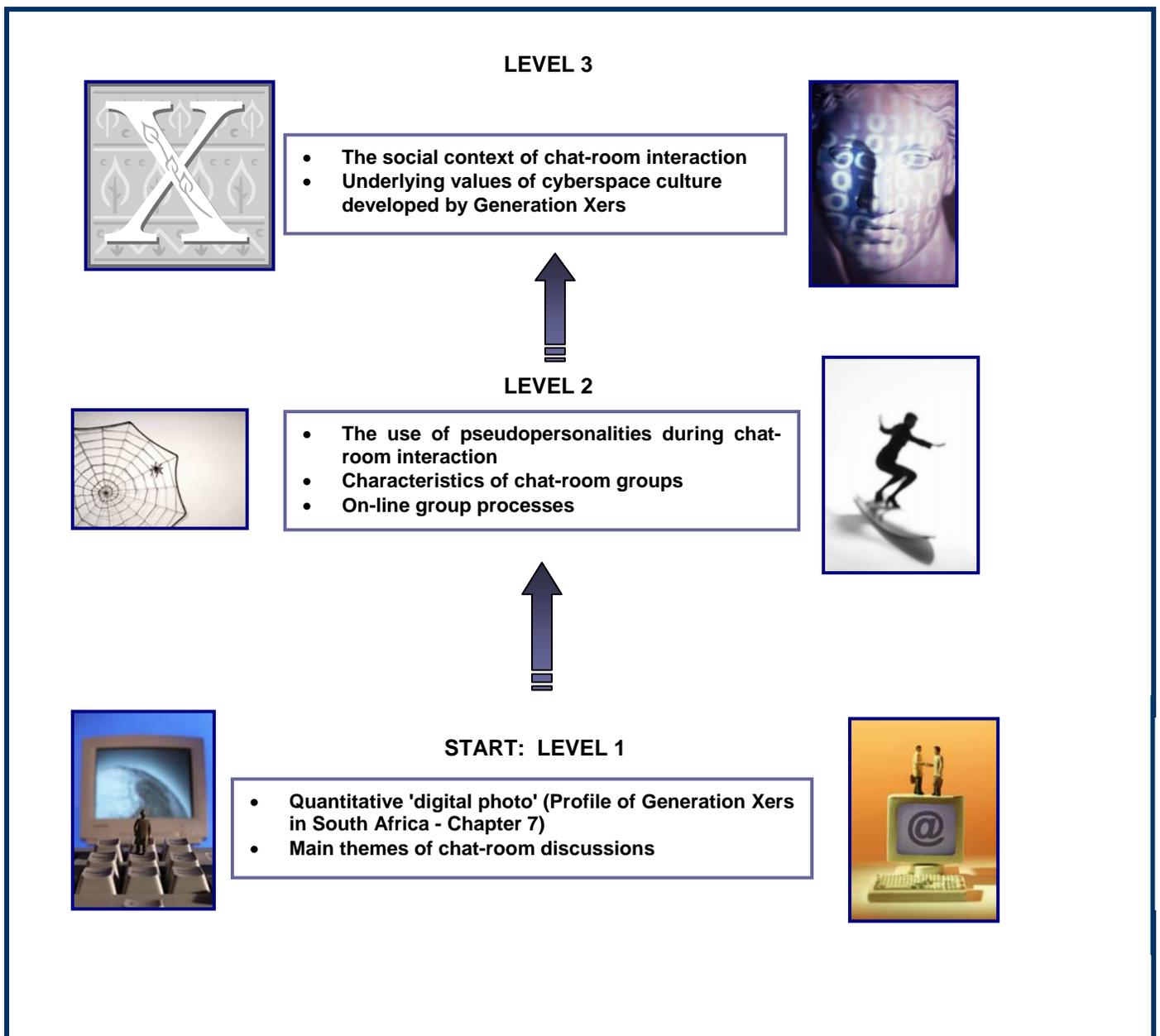


Figure 9.2: Graphical description of qualitative trends describing results at each level

## 9.4 Sample realisation

The following table provides a list and number of the different chat-rooms that were included in this study. Chat-room names were changed in order to protect the identities of the websites that hosted these chat-rooms.

Table 9.1: Sample realisation figures

Chat-room source	Cell sizes	%
Newspaper A chat-room	84	22
Newspaper B chat-room	83	22
International chat-room	64	16
National chat-room	41	11
Newspaper C chat-room	41	11
Radio station A chat-room	39	10
Radio station B chat-room	32	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100</b>

## 9.5 Qualitative results

Since a demographic profile of South African Internet users has been provided in Chapter 8, this section will focus on the qualitative results as graphically depicted in figures 9.1 and 9.2.

### 9.5.1 Main themes of chat-room discussions

In the majority of cases chat-room participants provided reactive responses to themes and topics provided by the chat-room hosts. In these cases a topic was discussed in detail and the conversation could be followed easily, for example:

TOPIC: Education: *"... says that she did not go to university because her mother could not afford it. Are South Africans (or Zimbabweans) unable to attend university unless their parents pay for it? This was not my experience Is this the norm? / I assume you have a point here ...well out with it, we wait with baited breath for your pearls of wisdom. Unless of course you have no point (surprise surprise) and are merely trying to infer that ... should have worked to pay for studies at the same time and are*

*not eloquent enough to say this plainly. Well? / Remarkable, where did you go to school? They managed to teach you to be both boring and witless. / Nah- I went to Tech first on a 100% bursary (with a salary), used the money I saved to pay for university. My parents just did not have the money to pay. Hey, I had free room and board after I left my job after tech and went back to university! "* (Newspaper B group).

Some hosts for example the 'Newspaper C' chat-room group did not provide a theme and many of the discussions that took place in this room can be described as directionless chatting for example:

*"Goeie more julle agter in die ry staaners... / More / Dag voor boor / Hoe voel jy oor my en jou span? / Ek voel daaroor soos 'n baba oor 'n moeder met 'n houtpram. / Ag toe nou / Ag nou toe / Ag toe nou / Moet jy alles naaap? / Moet jy alles kritiseer? / Hallo / Wie het op jou knoppie gedruk? / Hallo / Weet nie, maar dit was die regte koppie / Ek sien' (Newspaper C chat-room).*

In cases where a theme has been repeated for a couple of weeks or no theme has been provided people got frustrated and bored.

*"SOMEBODY PLZ GIVE THIS TOPIC A ONEWAY TICKET COZ ITS GETTING TO ME BOW" (Radio station A chat-room).*

*"Tsunami this, Tsunami that, I'm sure everyone is bored to death with the whole Tsunami Fiasco!!!! HINT ... change the topic" (Radio station A chat-room).*

The following themes were very popular during on-line discussions:

a. Politics

National and international political issues and politicians were constantly being discussed by the different chat-room groups. Some examples of popular political topics include:

- The political situation in neighbouring Zimbabwe
- Statements of national political leaders on various issues related to health, education and the local economy
- International politicians' views on terrorism and violence
- The election process especially the one in the United States of America.

The South African society remains acutely aware of the political situation in the country and active debates on political issues were widely supported by chat-room participants. One reason for this might be the segregated past wherein people from different designated groups have not been allowed to interact and communicate with each other. Currently chat-rooms are used as public forums wherein different people from different backgrounds interacted on a daily basis.

b. Race/Culture

Coupled with the political theme, differences and similarities between different racial and cultural groups in South Africa were addressed in many chat-rooms. In some cases it was the dominant theme and in other cases a political discussion had a secondary, and just as important racial or cultural undertone. One could make the assumption that people are actively addressing issues of the country's segregated past via 'safer' electronic platforms where different racial groups can interact without ever meeting each other personally, for example:

*"The boeremag members are just a small sample of many stupid people in their kind. / With the so-called two digit ISs..nm / Jigs in the Boeremag? I don't think so!.... / Yup, just like you! / I agree on that how could 10 of them try and overthrow a government. / One thing is for sure they are making the judicial system look like fools and the ANC. Can you imagine all this (swearing) they are feeding the ANC. Next we will hear how they planned to (swear) and (swear) a little in every 5kg's bag of iwisa namba 1 putu pap so the coons could eat (swear) and die" (Newspaper A chat-room).*

c. Sexuality

Sexuality was another dominant theme across the different chat-rooms. In many conservative cultural groups sexuality as topic was not discussed between gender groups especially not in public. However during chat-room discussions, aspects of sexuality were present in the majority of cases even when other themes or topics were debated. Various aspects of sexuality whether it was a primary or secondary theme, featured in discussions and will be addressed in more detail later on in the chapter. Some examples include:

- In the majority of cases sexual flirting and invitations remained top priority for chat-room participants and limited interest was shown to relationship problems and healthy sexual lifestyles.
- Sexual immaturity dominated as well where emphasis was placed on anatomy as well as sexual organs and functions. In these cases, participants used sexuality as a tool to degrade and insult one another as well as political figures.

d. Religion

A fair amount of interest and interaction were recorded among different religious groups, and more specifically to determine their views about death and afterlife, where people asked questions to learn from different groups, since they haven't been exposed to them in the past. International terrorists attacks associated with religious belief were also discussed against the backdrop of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in the United States of America. Since religion remains a sensitive topic in many society's, communication outside ones own religious border, as is the case with political, cultural and sexual borders, was discouraged in the past. Once more the borderless world of cyberspace opens up gateways to groups different from one's own and it seems as if people are more than keen to explore the unknown beyond their 'own front gate'.

*Topic: **What is the Buddhist view of hell?** "The Buddhist teaching in it's highest aspect is Advaita [non-duality]. There is no 'self' 'soul' 're-birth' 're-incarnation'. All these concepts stem from religion. An attempt to bring the masses into a social structure and comfort them with 'simple' 'cause effect' explanations. Behave [obey the law] and you will go to heaven. Don't and you will go to hell. 'Sin' [what is this?] and you will be re-born.... / In Tibetan cosmology the universe falls into six states of existence: the lowest being the Hell realm. The other day I was driving and someone cut me up on the roundabout I got very angry...seething. / Hell. Hell, in one way, is how we project and add on to situations. The other driver didn't make me angry that was my responsibility, my reaction. So I suppose the Buddhist perspective is one of ownership of our situation. Of course there are other more literal interpretations of hell realms but again one of the key points is that all phenomena are subject to impermanance...including hell. I didn't stay angry long..." (International chat-room).*

e. Leisure and Social

Chat-rooms were used as platform to meet other people, make new friends, advertise parties and invite others to social gatherings. In many cases people will log on to a chat-room a few times a day just to see if another 'e-friend' is on-line, for example:

*"Goed ek het 5 minute vir julle stront. Enige iets belangrik op die hart. Praat dan vinnig want ek het werk om te doen. Niks nie? OK Bi dan"* (Newspaper C chat-room).

*"Ali's gone very quiet - must have gone to fetch the kids, what? [Ali2](#) Nope, Prov, I'm still here, just watching and working away 😊 [Ali2](#) Little ones finish at 20 past one –"* (Newspaper B chat-room).

On-line support structures developed between on-line friends as time went by, for example:

*"As you all probably know, Bananaboy is going in for open heart surgery tomorrow, probably at 0730. I have been asked to ask all of you who know this very humorous man to pause a minute at about 1500 SA time to say a little prayer, or whatever you wish, for his recovery and safe journey through his bypass. I can assure you all this is a terrifying ordeal, for patient and family. I can also assure you all, the Arizona Heart Institute is one of the best, especially since their chief surgeon is a Cooley (Houston) trained professional. Here's to Bananaboy. May he be with us soon. A wannabee Illuminatus. / In US Eastern Standard Time 1500 in Johannesburg and 0700 in Houston is 0800. I will be offering my prayers as I ride Metro. If you speak to Mr. Bananaboy, please give him my very best and ask him to contact me as soon as he's recovered" (Newspaper B chat-room).*

f. Health and medical issues related to drugs and alcohol abuse

In the case of unknown and sometimes sensitive medical conditions, people take advantage of the anonymity cyberspace provides, to search for more information about specific conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome. In other cases such as drug and alcohol abuse an opportunity is given to patients to retrieve not only factual information about conditions, but also to meet others in a similar situation dealing with it on a day-to-day basis, for example:

*Topic: The white lady loves you more "Any advice on kicking my cocaine addiction. My habit is getting absolutely out of hand, and I feel I don't have the finances/stamina to keep this up. Cheers. / There are a lot of organisations who deal with this now, try looking them up on the drugscope web-site. Also you're GP may be of help as more and more of them are training on this subject (RCGP guidance is just being published). Also you're local drug service or drug action team should be able to inform you where to get help. Otherwise I would suggest going to bed with a lot of food for a few days. Then be prepared to feel really depressed and lethargic. If the depression persists, see your GP who may prescribe an anti-depressant. There isn't the same cold Turkey as with heroin, its more like an extreme version of nicotine withdrawals. extreme hunger, lethargy, depression and irritability. It can be done, though and many people have done it. Try getting some on-line support e.g the alliance web-site" (International chat-room).*

*Topic: Alcohol bed wetting "Hi, I hope someone can help. I'm a married Mum of three kids - although I sometimes feel like it is 4! My husband who is 36 has a habit of 'wetting the bed' after a certain amount of drinks. He doesn't need to be rolling drunk to do this. I have found that him eating late at night helps*

*a bit, but to be honest I am sick of having to prepare food at 11.00 o'clock at night. I know the easiest answer is for him to give up drinking - but he will never do this, he likes a drink too much. I have purchased rubber sheets etc., but it is really getting me down. If he has a big night out (not very often) then I usually either have to wake up when he comes in and try and help him into bed, or else he falls asleep on the settee - and well you can guess the rest. I work full time and my children are all under 7 - I am knackered. I don't really know what to do. Apart from this problem we have a relatively happy marriage. Any advice would be gratefully received. / Usually, they are rolling drunk when people pass bodily fluids as they sub-consciously don't know what they're doing. ( unless they are diagnosed with a medical condition ) I'd have assumed that he was a heavy binge drinker but, you wrote 'not often does he have a night out'. If not, then I think he really is taking the P outta you. Tell him to clear his own mess up and/or pay to have it all professionally cleaned or if not renewed. Don't put up with his sloppy messy behaviour and threaten him for him to wear nappies or incontinence pants on his night's out( if he aint got a medical condition.) If he's not willing to make positive changes for himself ( like seeking professional help i.e DR's or Alcohol counsellor ), for you and for your family then, discuss alternative options like brief separation until he sees that behaviour is unacceptable and will no longer be tolerated" (International chat-room).*

A summary of these main themes identified across all 384 chat-rooms, leads to the conclusion: Generation Xers in South Africa use chat-rooms as alternative medium to communicate with each other on a daily basis, debate important issues such as politics, and interact with different groups that represent different gender, age, racial or religious affiliations. Chat-rooms can be seen as electronic mirrors of people's daily lives.

### **9.5.2 The use of pseudopersonalities during chat-room interaction**

The discussion around pseudopersonalities will be structured as follows:

- a. A description of on-line pseudonyms
- b. The MAMA-process (Moratorium - Achievement - Moratorium - Achievement)
- c. 'MORFING' - Gender swapping
- d. Creating foolproof pseudopersonalities
- e. Going on-line with your real self
- f. Summary of pseudopersonalities.

a. A description of on-line pseudonyms

The majority of the chat-room participants made use of pseudonyms and some websites provided site-specific icons that participants could use to describe their pseudopersonalities in more detail. In 'Radio station A' chat-rooms they were also able to use colours should they need it to enhance a description.

Some examples of popular 'Radio station A' icons:



The same trend applied to 'Radio station B' where individuals were also allowed to use colour, but here they were able to include their own picture to compliment a pseudopersonality for example:



The 'Newspaper B' chat-room had the most on-line cues available for pseudopersonality construction. People could use:

- Two pseudonyms describing an on-line and off-line personality
- Quotes from famous people in their postings
- Any picture or photo to compliment their pseudopersonality, for example:



By analysing the pseudonyms they chose, interesting conclusions was drawn about the real, off-line personality, thus making the pseudopersonality an electronic reflection of the real person behind the computer. Herewith some examples:

For many black South Africans it was important to emphasise their African heritage and they deliberately developed race specific frames that act as cultural markers of membership of a specific group. Some used their African names, for example *Thabo*, and others created African pseudonyms for example '*T-girl*', '*Ghettolova*', '*Qabakazi*' or '*Tsotsi\_gurl*'.

Extreme, right-wing, conservative, white groups also applied the same principle of deliberately developing race-specific frames to act as cultural markers. They chose pseudonyms such as *HIV-*, *Rooivalk*, or *WitWillem* to emphasise their background and belief systems.

Sexuality was already identified as one of the major themes across chat-rooms. This was also portrayed in the specific pseudonym choices since on-line sexual flirting was a popular pastime across all chat-rooms, stimulating a focus on characteristics that enhance physical and sexual desirability.

The majority of females emphasised their sexuality during on-line interactions, for example:

*Deliciouszz*; *\_TeeZer\_*; *Fatfree*; *Spiced chocolate* (Radio station A chat-room)



or

*Diamant*; *Aarbei* (Afrikaans-speaking white females)

or

*TellAll* (Newspaper B female).



Some might argue that the only way to get noticed is to project sexual desirability. Many females across different chat-rooms used their sexuality to introduce themselves to a group, thereby ensuring feedback and attention from males in the group.

Their black male counterparts followed suit with pseudonyms such as *'Nevasloppy'*, *'Testosterone'*,



*'Stunner'* or *'Penetration'*. In 'Radio station A' chat-rooms, males favoured bodybuilding icons to illustrate male strength and sexual desirability. White males also used external cues, for

example the car they drove, for the same erotic purpose and created pseudonyms such as *'GTI'*. They also used pictures to illustrate barriers in off-line living that limit sexual exploration and growth such as:



Many times lonely individuals are unwilling to enter into interpersonal situations that involve risks of being rejected, embarrassed or disappointed. During chat-room interactions such risks are few because of the facelessness of encounters and they find it easier to express their emotions and perceptions. These are noticeable by their pseudonyms for example:

alien8;



old man



'Winter' was a pseudonym that was used by the particular person to symbolise depression, negativity and loneliness. On closer inspection, her experiences of loneliness, low self-esteem and need for acceptance were reiterated in her postings:

*"Winter: Ek groet maar al is ek nie 'n interesting persoon nie..... Die forum self is morsdood en dis die mense wat daar chat wat dit lewendig maak. M.a.w ek verlang na my pelle wat ek daar gehad het. Ek het vriendskappe gesluit daar, van daardie vriendskappe is nog steeds dieselle, ander het suur geword. Ek is aanvaar soos ek is. Ek het nie regtig faaits gehad op die chat nie.... As ek chat, wil ek dit doen omdat ek dit geniet. Ek wil die mense om my geniet en saam met hulle lag en huil, ernstig wees en ook klomp bollie praat. Dit is tog waaroor chat gaan. Al is jy duisende kilometers van mekaar weg. Al weet jy nie hoe die ander een lyk nie. Vir my is daar `n mens aan die ander kant.. dis `n mens met gevoelens wat die poste maak. Poste maak seer, bou op, breek af, maak iemand bly"* (Newspaper C chat-room).

Many individuals are desperately lonely and they create pseudonyms such as 'DONOTDELETE', 'Don't Speak' or 'Bliss' illustrating their willingness to please and do almost anything for acceptance, even if it means adopting an attitude of 'Ignorance is bliss' that overlooks individual differences in order to alleviate their personal feelings of loneliness.

South African emigrants used .co.za chat-rooms to keep in touch with their country of origin. Many of these emigrants felt alienated and alone in their new country and used pseudonyms such as 'Goner' or 'SAVANCOUVER' to stress their need for social interaction with people 'like-me'.

*"Since when has this forum been called the "HomeComing Revolution" anyway? (I know there is one called that, I wonder how it's getting on?) How many forums that are SA-related do you visit that you're getting confused here? Not got anything better to do in Toronto? So sad ... "* (Newspaper B chat-room).

One discovers oneself by reflecting on people around you. With the freedom of identity construction, it might be that an individual has a need to be accepted and will turn into the kind of person he or she thinks will get the attention needed. That is why many individuals choose pseudonyms such as:

*'Little\_miss\_sunshine; JollyRoger; Funny man=on-line, off-line=Journeyman; Ed the Red*



They project an extrovert, fun-loving, positive personality to conceal off-line feelings of low self-esteem and a lack of confidence that are represented in both pictures of the sad clown and 'Mr Bean', the lonely comedian.

Some individuals have a need to be admired by their on-line peers and they will introduce themselves as being on a higher level than the rest of the group, by using pseudonyms such as 'God of da Net', 'Prophet' or 'Gandalf'. These individuals can be described as typical 'wallflowers' in his or her off-line social group, introverts that lack self-confidence. They are usually the victims of bullies and the resultant on-line power struggles will be discussed at a later stage.

In many cases people live in private dungeons and do not have the luxury of expressing their own private inner world in face-to-face relationships. The act of listening implies creative, active, sensitive and non-judgemental listeners, all adjectives used to describe fellow chat-room members. During Internet interactions with the focus on self-related needs, an individual will strive to find a social framework in which he or she can express another personality: if it cannot be expressed in the immediate real-life environment. Many chat-room visitors are those with a need to project their own uniqueness and individuality that separate them from others in the group. They used pseudonyms such as *ORigiNaL*, *Lo\_X\_Tion*, *Spinn@ker* or *@dee*. Another example of such an on-line social framework is the 'Newspaper B' chat-room. Here people like the following are met:

*Provocateur;*



*Witty=on-line, So bold=off-line,*



*Realogun*



b. The MAMA-process (Moratorium - Achievement - Moratorium - Achievement)

The 'digital identity' was described as a 'licence to grow' within an ever-changing virtual world where the individual is given chance to discover parts of the self that he or she would not have found in everyday life. By adapting to the MAMA-process the moratorium phase is a phase of self-doubt about who people are. They experience this every time they experiment on the Internet with different roles and different personality types that they never got around 'being' in real life. Therefore chat-room participants choose pseudonyms like:

*Bravebird = on-line, Stranger = off-line*

or

*Questioning, = on-line, Addict = off-line*



Coupled with a with a picture of young girl (An adult female presenting herself as an adolescent girl in the phase of questioning things)

or

*Headroom = on-line, Journeyman = off-line*



Coupled with the following quote:

*"I can't wait for a second childhood; I blinked and missed it first time round"* (Newspaper B chat-room).

c. 'MORFing' - Gender swapping

In the majority of .co.za chat-rooms, gender was one of the primary categories used to evaluate and classify group members. If gender neutral names were chosen, other group members made mistakes and on-line flame wars erupted for example:

*"And for ur info iam not a (swearing) guy iam a gal , get that tru ur cloned brain. p.s. go find somethin' 2 suck on.and leave me alone"* (Radio station A chat-room).

*"THE OTHER PERSON WHO JUST JOINED US ..... wasup mchana? how u doing. im sorry, I kinda 4got ur name and it takes too much energy to go bak and check. u a chick or the other sex?" / "lic..... male or female"* (Radio station A chat-room).

*"You mean he`s not Xhosa? / Sorry to disappoint you. She is Xhosa. / Stuart? Xhosa? and female? right..."* (Newspaper A chat-room).

d. Creating foolproof pseudopersonalities

Goffman's theory on Impression Management stated that some impressions and expressions are 'given' for example those deliberate actions that create a specific impression. Then there are those impressions and expressions 'given off', for example those impressions that are more subtle and harder to control. The latter becomes evident in the specific writing styles and language that a person uses. It was obvious that 'Cypha Cat's' new personality was only skin-deep:

*"CYPHA CAT WHYDID U CHANGE UR ICON AND NAME?"* (Radio station A chat-room)

During a discussion in a 'Newspaper B' chat-room, the topic of 'Trolls' came up. 'Trolls' are those individuals taking on other existing personalities without being sensitive to impressions and expressions personalities 'give off' in chat-rooms, for example:

*"He is probably back trolling under another nick. Why do you think he's one of the trolls HJ? Trolls' usually give themselves away big time by their typing styles anyway. (One from the old forum always spelt one or two words very very peculiarly, and when on this one, they do the same thing)"* (Newspaper B chat-room).

The same trend was also identified in the 'Newspaper A' chat-room:

*"Go call Busy back (the real one...). She's interesting / Busy\_bee! don't take this daylight robbery of your name lying down! I cannot believe the arrogance of some people this Busy-bee! thinking it can use my name in vain and drag it through the mud! / And this other one SWEARS TOO! The nerve of some people! / There are quite a few imposter around. I'm afraid this one may hang around for a few more days, but eventually the joke wears thin. But it was awfully funny watching DB talk to `you`. Most of us here knew it was an imposter, because we've learned to check the way the nickname is written carefully. / You bloody tosser! Msunu kanyoko! Go ahead...If you are the real Busy-bee, say something only DB, Mzoo, Banned & Myz can understand!"*

e. Going on-line with one's real self

In some cases people didn't see any need for using pseudonyms. In these cases for example the National chat-room, people joined a discussion based on a need to communicate and interact with others 'like-me'. Although people introduced themselves on first-name basis, they still enjoyed a level of anonymity. Another characteristic of these chat-rooms was that there were no vertical interaction processes between chat-room participants implying that they remained 'strangers' to each other. The same trend was identified in chat-rooms based on a topic or hobby or interest shared by individuals. The main purpose of a chat-room was the actual hobby and the personality was almost of secondary importance to the remainder of the group members.

Table 9.2 Summary of pseudopersonalities

<b>REAL PERSONALITY</b>	<b>LOOKING FOR PEOPLE ....</b>	<b>PSEUDOPERSONALITY IS USED TO ...</b>	<b>DOMINATING INTERACTION STYLE ON-LINE</b>	<b>DOMINATING INTERACTION STYLE OFF-LINE</b>	<b>CHAT-ROOM(S) THEY PREFER</b>
Bully	That can be victimised, for example, women and other minority groups	To scare and intimidate people	Mockery, insults and flame wars	Mockery, insults and conflict	Newspaper A chat-room
Society's misfits	With the same secrets as me	Make confessions easier	Cry and accuse	Keep quiet and blend in with a crowd	National, Newspaper B and International chat-rooms
Informed realist	To join their debating team	No need for one, they use their first names	State the facts	State facts	Newspaper B chat-room
EMENM-wannabee's	Who can follow rap battles	Portray a cool image	Rap, swear and shout	Spend as much as money possible	Radio station A and B chat-rooms
Wallflowers	Who will accept them	Convince others to 'pick me'	Always smile	Keep quiet and blend in with a crowd	Everywhere
Sex Traders	To go home with	Be as provocative as possible	Sexually available	Unhappy partners, history of unsuccessful relationships	Newspaper C, Radio station A and B chat-rooms
Concerned taxpayers	Like me	No need for one, they use their first names	Ask questions	Ask questions	National chat-room
Leisure time experts	With similar hobbies, interests, ideas	No need for one, they use their first names	More interested in what you do than who you are	Busybodies	Interest groups, for example International and newspaper chat-rooms

### 9.5.3 Characteristics of chat-room groups

The previous section dealt with the different pseudopersonalities that were active in chat-rooms. Although each personality was unique there were similarities between them whether it was in terms of their interests, motives, on-line behaviour, needs etc. The following section will aim to cluster these groups together in terms of the specific chat-rooms. Each chat-room catered for one of more specific groups of people.

#### a. Radio station A and Radio station B chat-rooms

*“The forum targets young adults (25-34 year olds), and aspirational youths (16-24 students & executives). The aim is to provide a tool for networking and interactivity while reflecting Radio station B's brand values”* (Radio station B chat-room).

In Chapter 8 the quantitative figures stated that only 21% of Black South Africans accessed the Internet in 2002. The qualitative analysis of chat-room behaviour on the 'Radio station A' and 'Radio station B' websites yielded interesting results on this specific group of 'Black young yuppies'. Compared to the majority of uneducated, poor, Black South African adolescents living in squatter camps, this minority group is not necessarily socially accepted because of their higher socio-economic status.

This group of young, upmarket Black South Africans portrayed a need to create a unique identity by sharing proudness about their African heritage, culture and customs. This in turn strengthened group solidarity and internal cohesiveness and they described themselves as part of the 'Y-family'. They knew each other off-line quite well, since they exchanged e-mail addresses and attended parties that were advertised in chat-rooms.

It was evident that this group was disappointed with their existing political leaders and were openly and aggressively criticising them. They were outspoken and overtly aggressive towards authority, re-enacting gangster-type behaviour and attitudes:

*“Who cares? I free country u are free to do wotever u like as long as u ar comfortable, others might not use vulgar for I reasons, others uses it for fun or they are used to shit out mouth, it wont hurt mos so what the hell... FREE UR MIND AND KEEP UP THE POWER”* (Radio station B chat-room).

*"live ur life to the fullest. And stop worrying about what other people thinks of u. You r who u r and it will never change. celebrate being youself. I with positivity"* (Radio station A chat-room).

*"Tools, I got your back, express yourself like in 'cell c for yourself'... But take it easy on the 'unnessesary'. Everyone has the right and the free well to do what ever shit he wants, webmaster eat a dick (lets see you block this). Swear everybody, its free, its fun, its emoral and we are all going to HELL. a.k.a: aka TOOLS"* (Radio station A chat-room).

The 'cool image' that had to be projected at all times was very important. They also used 'rap battles' during on-line interaction, copying American rap artists as role models. With their existing identity crisis the title of 'EMENM-wannabee's seemed fitting. EMENM is a white male who is famous for his Rap-music wherein he questions and addresses society's problems, for example racial discrimination. It was clear that these adolescents did not have a need to meet those different from themselves. They only used their 'rap battles' to comment on each other's 'coolness' and they didn't really discuss issues such as HIV/AIDS, racial segregation.

*"geeezzz people doesn't anybody wanna discuss the actual topics posted here? This is a great medium for you all black privileged youth with access to the internet and you're not using to change anything. It's a damn shame!"* (Radio station A chat-room).

*"Whats going on in these chat-rooms, or is me new, all i hear or read are crazy comments, stupid amerikan wanna b's common lets keep under the topic, traight up yo!! nothan wrong with, slangs but, speaking in jibrish isnt welcomed are we tight there? Im looking forward to have a cool and strong convesaxion, meeting new friends across da globe, rembember not all of us sise-Mningizim. and mostly by coming here is bcoz I feel like Im in South Africa or should I say "Azania" ndiqhawukile!!!!!"* (Radio station A chat-room).

b. Newspaper A chat-room

This chat-room also attracts the '.co.za-voter'. Participants openly criticise political figures and are mainly white and black males. They proudly emphasise their own individuality and group affiliation. Although these .co.za-voters also use the chat-room to interact with people 'different from me' as is the case with the 'Newspaper B' chat-room, flame wars are common. It can be attributed to rigid personality traits that do not leave any room for respecting people with different views or opinions. They often reverted to stereotypes that resulted in personal attacks and insults. Online conflict situations are not resolved, thus making the whole process a futile exercise when trying to break barriers between heterogeneous groups.

In 2005 some additional chat-rooms were introduced based on specific interest or hobbies, for example for Formula 1 enthusiasts. The 'leisure time expert' found another meeting space within .co.za-borders and one could argue that the international chat-rooms might lose their .co.za-tribe visitors.

*"I feel the same way about Shell!!!! (nm) / Do you know something the rest of us I mate? I was under the impression Flavio was contracted to the end of 2005 for Renault, and they had been saying yesterday that on current form, they would offer him 2006 as well? / I heard a rumour on the SPEED channel up here that Flavio was asked to leave to make space for Prost and that many people are questioning this since Prost was not a very good people person and they saw it as one of the reasons his team folded. But he's got money, and that is what most of these teams need. / My sentiments exactly!...The only way he's ever won a race is when MS had a problem or had made a mistake. Winning one or two races in a season does not put you on an even footing with the worlds best ever F1 driver! In fact there are probably 4 – 5 other drivers that will drive circles around Rubens if you put them into a Ferrari! / MS and Ralph not talking Does anyone know why Ralph and Michael aren't speaking to each other? / Rubens - Coultly, What happened? During the race there was mention that the crash will be investigated. Nothing since. Anybody know what the result of the investigation was? / It was deemed a race incident - no one was to blame. / Yea Right Thanks " (Newspaper A chat-room).*

c. Newspaper B chat-room

In this chat-room, lonely individuals or wallflowers seek companionship and friendship that they lack in their off-line lives. This chat-room also created a safe space for marginalised social groups that consisted of society's misfits, to be 'myself among others like me':

*"Hi guys, Need some advice, Im nearly 30 and am not out yet, have been with a lovely guy for over a year now and am happy. Some of his friends know but mine and my family don't yet. I wish I would of come out when I was younger but I know its not going to go down too well with my family. Any advice would be great on what to do. Im finding it hard to know how to do it / And do you feel that you need to tell your family that you are gay because of your long term relationship and just need him to be part of your family? You may also find that some of your family had an idea anyway. / Anyway good luck with whatever you decide. One thing is that you are not alone, every gay man and lesbian have or are going through the same dilema as you are!!!" (Newspaper B chat-room).*

Another group of people attracted to the particular chat-room was the 'informed taxpayer', the well-informed educated individual, of a higher income group interested in debating issues in newspapers, on-line in a chat-room and during debates hosted by radio stations:

" ...as seen through the eyes of the expats and other 'international' forumites. Ok so it goes something like this: \* we're a lot like violent ostriches - a scarey, aggressive people but usually with heads up our collective a\*\*es, or in the sand, whichever applies at the time; \* oversensitive to criticism - whether it be constructive or full blown exaggerated lies; \* we mock/ignore certain forumites just for the fun of it - not because they talk utter \*&^\$#@; \* go out of our way to deny the crime issue, yet spend hours discussing it at dinner parties; \* spend too much money on ourselves, should be tithing at least (...) of our income on the poor - middle classes in Africa are just NOT cool; Feel free to add to our fascinating and complex profile... 🗨️-----" / on the motring side: -we don't like walking, hence cram the area surrounding the entrance to a shopping mall, in the hope of finding parking; -we refuse to exercise good manners on the road by, for example letting someone change lanes in front of us; - in the words of barry hilton: the closest most of us, who have 4x4's have got to nature is the salad bar at Woolworths / \* we all live surrounded by barbed wire and if we don't - we're in denial; \* we're overt racists - across the board - subversive racism US style is much more acceptable; \* our government is corrupt, we know this and abhor it. western governments are also corrupt but no one knows how much - of course this would be a far better policy for SAN's to adopt" (Newspaper B chat-room).

Another group that is active in this chat-room is the 'young-at-heart adventure seekers'. They perceived the Internet as an opportunity or vehicle to explore unresolved issues for example sexuality and racial issues. It is a safe space where the process of 'growing into yourself' can continue:

*"I can't wait for second childhood. I blinked and missed it first time around"* (Newspaper B chat-room).

Another dominating trend (visible across all the chat-rooms) was the emerging the '.co.za-voter'. They openly criticise political figures and visibly react to the past where voters were described as passive followers.

#### d. Newspaper C chat-room

The traditional, conservative, right-wing Afrikaner interacted here and many of the 'co.za-dictionary' words spontaneously developed in this chat-room. Here racist remarks were the norm, as well as underlying sexual tensions and conflicts especially about the role of women. Many 'sex traders' from

both gender groups spent time here openly looking for partners that are available for cyber-sex. Like the Black young yuppies, this group was also not interested in meeting others 'different from me'. They also know each other off-line and communicated on a daily basis.

*"BEER, JOU MOFFIE! Kom DC toe - hulle se ek is `n rasis, maar ek probeer om vir hulle te se dis nie so nie - ek is `n ARROGANT rasis. Kom se vir hulle, seblief? / Jy kan ontspan!!!!!!!!!!!! Hulle sê voëlgriep is net beperk tot ouens met groot voëls. / WAT hap jy vir ... so baie (swearing)? / Sommer Hy soek vir (swearing) om te hap. / Ontspan!? / Sou jy ontspan met `n bloedrooi KWARENTYN - VOËLGRIEP bordjie om jou nek? / Sit op jou bril man daai bordjie om jou nek lees g`n KWARENTYN - VOËLGRIEP nie. Dit lees KWARTDUIM - PIEPKLEIN VOËLTJIE BINNE. / BWAHAHAHAHAHA....."* (Newspaper C chat-room).

e. International chat-room

The 'International' chat-room is based on a television channel on DSTV is one of the popular television channels enjoyed by upper LSM groups, resulting in website and chat-room usage as well since the content on both media types compliment each other. The 'leisure time expert' found another meeting space outside .co.za-borders where he or she can meet people with similar interests and hobbies since not one of the co.za- sites had interest-specific groups catering for unique hobbies and pastimes. Participation in conversations on unique interests or topics created room for marginalised social groups to meet each other as evident in the next quote by a scientist:

*"Science is not a democratic process - which is why great scientists are so often social outsiders"* (International chat-room).

Here the '.co.za-voter' meet their international partners since they also openly criticise political figures and their decisions. As their 'National' chat-room counterparts, they focus on specific self-help groups, for example drug addicts where group members support each other, provide information, advice as well as providing a basic level of on-line group therapy.

f. National chat-room

This chat-room compliments a television programme that is broadcasted each Sunday night and attracts the concerned taxpayers for example well-informed educated individuals of the higher income groups. In contrast to the multiracial 'Newspaper B' chat-room participants, these participants were mainly white. The emerging '.co.za-voters' are also very active here applauding celebrities and political

figures that 'chat' to the public on a horizontal level of equality. Another spontaneous trend visible in this chat-room was a 'self-help group' with a focus on society's misfits, for example drug addicts, HIV/AIDS patients and so forth. Since this television programme at times reports on highly sensitive topics at times, the chat-room provides a space for people experiencing similar problems to communicate, for example parents experiencing parenting-problems. This trend was identified during the quantitative analysis where one saw an increase in Internet usage among new, mature and single parents. They used the forum as a space to meet others 'like me', for example men dealing with the stereotype of being 'uninvolved fathers', white men between 40-50 facing retrenchment, or fathers battling to discipline their children.

#### 9.5.4 On-line group processes

Now that some of the different types of chat-room groups were discussed the behavioural patterns and group processes will be emphasised in this section by focussing on the following trends:

- a. Power plays or struggles in cyberspace
- b. Altruistic behaviour in cyberspace
- c. Public debates
- d. Formal letters
- e. .co.za-dictionary.

##### a. Power plays or struggles in cyberspace

Although the majority of chat-room hosts encouraged respect for individual differences and diversity, the typical 'bully' as they are called in everyday life, also joined chat-rooms. Wherever these individuals were present, chances for the eruption of flame-wars were very good. In order to dominate others in a group bullies resorted to effective behaviour such as:

- Ignoring postings of a specific individual in order to show him or her that his or her idea is not important enough to comment on:

*"You`re a very patronising little rat, thats why, we have issues, thats all I was trying to bring your attention to, but as usual you remain ignorant and arrogant, and you`re wonderign why I react towards you the way that I do. I gave you chance to come clean mbungulu ke wena!! / Arrogant, maybe ignorant but no the sense you mean... I chose to ignore you... It just makes it easier to get you into a fluster.." (Newspaper A chat-room).*

- Copying their own postings several times and ignoring the rest of the group members' comments on disruption of the continuing flow of the conversation for example:

*" Can you please stop copying and pasting the same information on all the discussions, if you don't know what to say, Just say Yello Y and we'll understand." Who are you to tell me what to do, I have some to say... a.k.a: Y'ello Y" (Radio station A chat-room).*

- In the case of 'rap battles' as one 'Radio station A' chat-room participant described it 'boogy boogy on the keyboard' and this person ranked individuals in terms of their effectiveness during the 'rap battle':

*"Final Narration- 'the last episode' 7pm News: - Head-lines: Fake rapper 'thuli tillis aka TOOLS' was murdered beyond recognition, blown to smithereens by M'rapper Vdub. An investigation concluded that Hard-core lyricist Vdub the best on this site was guilty of the lyrical murder. Out of respect for his lyrical genius, No charges were brought forward against the 'lyrical Mistro' Vdub. Due to evidence gathered from an 'Undertaker' & 'Jehovahs Witnesses & co' all claiming it was pure self defense. The case was dropped at the 'Radio station A' High Court. The body of fake rapper 'thuli tillis aka TOOLS' and his TOOI Box are no where to be found. If you have any information about this case, please don't bother bringing forward the information. There is strong UnderGround noise that they may be a Pre-sequel, Episode 3hree, the Resurrection. We'll keep you posted. Watch the space This is 'A.K.A:' for the 7pm News. Number One fan of Mzansi M'rapper's. Duplication kills creation. Please enjoy the chatroom. Signing Off*

*The End*

*Fin*

*.....Cast in order of appearance .....*

*.....Starring.....*

*Vdub.....as Himself*

*thuli tillis aka TOOLS.....as Himself*

*Undertaker.....Also.Known.As*

*Repport A.K.A:.....Also.Known.As*

*Narrator .....Also.Known.As*

*Location .....Free Your Mind*

*Director ..... Radio station A (AbsolStats)*

*a.k.a: ' Kill Who, Thulis , Volume 2" (Radio station A chat-room).*

The 'virtual' Johari window emphasised the increased amount of personal power an individual has during on-line interaction to project an 'ideal-self' that is often far removed from reality. Unfortunately exertion of individual power has limited impact on reactions of the rest of a group. In one case the remaining group members treated 'God of da Net' as an equal, not making a fuss about him or putting him on a pillar above the rest.

In the 'Radio station B' chat-room, one male used a KTV-cartoon character to illustrate his 'power'. The next verbatim quote shows how a boy without self-confidence becomes larger than life in cyberspace:

*"im like a small fish in the big sea, who gets pissed of when ever i get picked on.. have been winnin ma battles since tha day i was born.. kick a rhymes and freestyle from dusk till dawn.. you need a multi-million army to even the odds.. when i come for the attack,tha wack shake on thier knees speakin in destorted vocal cords.."*



He tried to force his opinion onto others but failed. Nobody responded and he interpreted it as that the others are afraid of him, thus rationalising his social rejection:

*"What no bady sayin anythin ha.. its okay ill wait for tomorrow..besides you still have to go home and meditate on this sh!t.. will be waitin on ma antagonists[ addict and the rest of the crew] for now the verb is out.."*

#### b. Altruistic behaviour in cyberspace

In many chat-rooms the empathy individuals expressed towards each others' real-life situations and problems were striking. By sharing problems with one another, many of these chat-rooms developed characteristics similar to that of a typical self-help group. There were many chat-room participants who needed to remain anonymous but not silent. These individuals were usually active participants but they chose pseudonyms like 'unknown' to protect their identity since they were often described as 'society's misfits' for example drug addicts, HIV+ patients or homosexual men. Many chat-rooms dealt with these topics by means of themes such as: 'Is being gay fashionable?' and thereby providing a channel for these groups to deal with their problems, share experiences with others 'like me' in a safe space without the fear of being stereotyped, insulted or degraded.

*"Any advice on kicking my cocaine addiction. My habit is getting absolutely out of hand, and I feel I don't have the finances/stamina to keep this up. Cheers. / there are a lot of you who deal with this now, try looking them up on the drugscope web-site. Also you're GP may be of help as more and more of them are training on this subject (RCGP guidance is just being published). / Hi, sorry to hear that you are addicted. I do coke but am not addicted it is more recreational for me! My advice would be to get some pro help. I go into the never ending spiral were you have to beg and steal money just to get a fix! Hope this helps Take care / Hi its good to see that you've got things in perspective. But being a user its always good to do a self-check every now and then. If you look on the cocaine anonymous site they have a self questionnaire that's worth taking a look at. / Hi How do you take it? sniff, chip, freebase, inject, drink, smoke, swallow or blown into orifice. How much do you use? where have you asked for help? What other drugs do you use for the comedown?" (International chat-room).*

*"Hi ..., first of all I'd like to commend you on your courage - in dealing with the disease from day to day, and for your open dealings. I'd like to ask a couple of things : 1. Do you currently experience negativity from your colleagues and members of the public because you have AIDS? 2. Do you regret revealing your HIV status to the public? / Thank you - my colleagues in the Appeal Court, High Court and Constitutional Court, and in fact all lawyers that I deal with, have been incredibly accepting and supportive. I have been deeply moved by the support that I have been able to claim from them. 2. My public disclosure was the most important and positive step of adult life. I have received only love and affirmation and strength from it. Of course I was priveledged by many protections. Only when we create such protections for all people can we hope for more people to speak out. / If a person is HIV positive does it mean that you automatically pick it up if you have sexual contact with them? / Definitely not. There has to be penetrative sex and probably ejaculation, except in a small number of other types of risk situations: kissing, fondling, manually satisfying each other and so on (I am not a sex specialist!) are quite safe. / Sir how do you remain so positive I feel I am depressed the whole time and feel very suicidal / Thank you for asking the most vital question of the evening - how can we restore hope in this epidemic of pessimism, despair and hatred? I believe that you have friends and family who want to love and help you if you can find ways of accessing their support. I know this isn't easy - perhaps the programme tonight may have helped" (National chat-room).*

Chat-rooms played a very important role in the lives of those individuals who possessed concealable stigmatised identities. It is difficult to find other similar identities in real life because of the potentially embarrassing nature of an identity and fear of possible consequences of disclosure. Anonymous on-line chatting provided a protective cloak what was needed by these individuals to admit to having marginalised or off-mainstream proclivities that must be kept a secret in real life. During on-line conversations an individual felt less isolated and gained much needed emotional support. There were many examples where individuals provided emotional support to each other for example:

*"Just checking in to see if you're OK. Know this is a very difficult time for you. Let us know how you're doing. Love xxxx / Thanks guys. I don't really know what to do! I have approached him and told him I wanted to seek help for my sake and that of the children, but he just laughed and said it wasn't a problem and I was over reacting. I'm going to take everyone's advice and stop clearing up after him, I need to let him see how much of a problem it is. I'm just trying to keep the children out of it -which is tricky! He has said he will stop drinking during the week - but is that enough? am I not just masking the problem if he does this? I am really confused. / Thank goodness you've come back, I was getting concerned that we'd chased you away. There are a couple of things I want to respond to you in your post"* (International chat-room).

c. Public debates

Many chat-rooms, especially the ones hosted by newspaper groups encouraged public debates on racial issues, politics, economics, education, international news and so on. People from diverse backgrounds were given the opportunity to openly agree or disagree about societal problems and issues. Although sensitive topics were discussed, for example politics and sexual diversity, flame wars were not part of the process since these individuals interacted in a social framework where each individual had the freedom to express his or her real views on matters and be respected for it. In many cases lonely individuals that desperately seek social interaction also took part in these debates. Their involvement could have been the reason why heated debates didn't turn into flame wars where individuals attacked and insulted each other's personalities. Individuals were respected as people even though they disagreed in terms of opinions. One of the intrinsic values directing on-line interaction, especially in the 'Newspaper B' chat-room, was the 'respect for individual differences and diversity, that so often is lacking in off-line behaviour.

d. Formal letters

An interesting trend was identified among the 'International' chat-room participants where they preferred the traditional formal-letter approach wherein the following rules applied:

- They used a formal introduction, for example: Hello John;
- As well as a formal closure, for example: Regards Mary

- Topics were discussed in a factual manner with limited emotional arguments, for example:  
*"I found the remark a little distasteful" / "thanks for your question and apologies for the delay."*
- Limited grammar and spelling errors. Some displayed an irritation when spelling errors occurred, for example:  
*"The word is sympathy, with a y. You know, this site needs a spell checker ..."*

e. .co.za-dictionary

A lot has been said about the need for creativity in order to grow and adapt to different circumstances. This section will deal with creative ways in which people expressed emotions in cyberspace as well as the new words that were created within these chat-rooms.

*"Humankind is divided by ideas, but find common ground in what they feel"* (Author unknown).

Many social psychologists argue that written language in a sense is limited so that non-verbal contact is hardly possible while the sharing of emotions is only possible to some extent. Although individuals differed in opinions and perceptions during on-line debates, they shared emotions in chat-rooms by means of 'smiley faces' or emoticons. Emoticons are symbols or abbreviations that one uses to describe emotions to bring back feeling in conversations. In the 'Radio station B' and 'Newspaper B' chat-rooms, people had a choice of various **smiley faces** to express emotion for example:

	- Laugh out loud		- Sad
	- Happy		- Insecure
	- Happy		- Wink smiley
	-		- Embarrassed
	- Friendly greeting		- Insecure
	- Angry		- Scary
	- Shouting		-
	- Teasing		- Unsure, confused
	- Aggressive mocking		- Emphasize a point
	- (Get a life...SUCKERS!)		- Naughty
			

In addition to the above, chat-room participants often used the following **abbreviations**:

LOL	-	Laugh out loud
LMAO	-	Laughing my a*s off
ROTFL	-	Roll on the floor laughing
IMO	-	In my humble opinion: used when being sarcastic
lol@your desperate face	-	Mock.

Various **punctuation marks** were combined to illustrate specific emotions:

:D		
:-D	-	Tongue in the cheek smiley
:o))	-	Surprised
:P	-	Tongue out smiley
!	-	Shout together with capital letters
;-)	-	Winking and smiling
):-	-	Sad
....	-	Symbolising silence to either show respect or sarcasm
Xxx	-	Kisses
^^!^^	-	Devilish remark
ozzzz	-	Snoring and bored
<b>B</b>	-	Bold words to emphasise a point
3x	-	Copy messages 3 or 4 times to emphasise a point.

Where **words** were used to show emotion, two asterisks \*---\* distinguished it from the rest of the conversation, such as:

\*with a big voice\*  
\*hiehie\* / \*wahahaHAHAHA\* / \*MASSIVE LAUGHTER\*  
\*amusing\*  
\*EEUUWWW!!\*  
\*sigh\*  
\*yawns\*

These creative efforts provided chat-room participants with different options to communicate with emotion and thus bringing non-verbal communication back in the written language. They were able to express emotion freely in different ways.



Table 9.3: List of .co.za-words and phrases

English translation	.co.za-word/phrase
Because	Becoz
Before	B4
Bicycle rage (similar to road rage - only directed towards cyclists)	Fietsrage
Boyfriend	Bf
Brother	Bra
Cape Town	CT
Chat-room participant	Forumites / Vergadermater
Definitely	Deffentaly
Did everybody go home?	Effrry1 gonne houme
Emigrants	SA expats
English	Ingils
Enough	E-nuf
Favourite	Fav
Girls	Cherries
Greeting	'Ta' = Greet / 'Cya laer??' = See you later / Going for 🍷 and a 🍷 Back in a bit / Hola / Howat in the hooood!!! / Yo ... yo ... yo
I still love you	I still laf u
Is that so?	Izzzzit
It were	Twere
Johannesburg	Jozi
Male chauvinistic pig	MCP
Mean while	Mienwaail
Music	Muxic
Nothing more to say	Nm
Number	#
Number one	Nambawan
On-line search	"A quick <b>Google</b> on ostrich diet reveals...."
PC	Piesie
People	Ppl
Please	Ppl
Poor ability to rap	"You rhymes be weak like a decaff black tea..."
Probably	Prbly
Relax	I, am in need of a <b>chill</b> 🍷 got a heck of a week coming up...
Shame	Sjym
Sister	Sistah
South Africa after 1994	Transformania
Taxi drivers	Teksi-drivers
University	Varsity
Weed	Dagga joint / Holly weed
What	Wot
Zimbabwe	ZIM

### 9.5.5 The social context of chat-room interaction

This section of the discussion focuses on the contextual level of chat-room interaction at macrolevel and is categorised as follows:

- a. Local context (Within South African borders)
- b. International context
- c. Personal context
- d. African - with a focus on Zimbabwe
- e. African - In general
- f. The context of a self-help group.

#### a. Local (Within South African borders)

In most cases discussions took place within the local South African context, with a focus on local politics, news events and social problems for example:

*"Journalist Jonny Steinberg traveled to the KwaZulu-Natal midlands to investigate a growing phenomenon of farm invasions. He wrote a book called 'Midlands' about his findings in the area. / Therefor it goes one step further. The family and workers then has a possible case for further compensation based on income aquired by farming activities which grind to a halt.. / The truth is that there are over 20 000 murders in this country every year and every single one of those murders leads to a loss of economic activity and if the state were to compensate every cent of that lost of economic activity, the state would go bankrupt. The state should be allocating more money at preventing murders than compensating for it. But I think that a symbolic gesture of compensation to illustrate that it understands the gravity and the tragedy of a murder is important. / The Constitution Requires Government to protect a persons life and freedom of violence. However, 3 Natal Midlands Farmers are killed per week in violence and crime incidents. An excellent motivation for Government to ensure the rights as mentioned, will be to exempt such estates, of people getting killed as a result of violence and crime, from estate duty obligations? Your opininion? / I think that the idea of victim compensation is good one. I'm not sure if that is the form it should take. In relation to farmers, that proposal sounds worth exploring but I havne't thought about it enough. Sometimes after a murder, the farm land is not used often due to financial reasons" (National chat-room).*

b. International context

When the discussion crossed South African borders, it involved emigrants from other countries interacting with locals to discuss international news events such as the Iran/America situation, the American elections etcetera:

*"Will (politician) be given a second term in office, and this time be elected fairly, or will (politician) win? / (Politician) is an excellent and clever campaigner, even if he is a very stupid and dangerous man, while (Politician) seems to have undergone a personality bypass operation, but otherwise seems fairly sound. Americans seem to like charisma, and prefer applauding it to thinking about issues. (Politician) has charisma (of a sort!) but (Politician) does not. Also, if (politician) wins, will his foreign policy change? If not, which country will be the next to be invaded by the US? / God I hope not. If ever there was a need for America to look behind the glitz and glam and see the inside of someone it's now with (politician). I consider (politician) to be the most dangerous man in the world. A second term in office could do real damage to the world's power structure that would take lifetimes, and a lot of unnecessary innocent blood, to put right"* (International chat-room).

c. Personal context

Where chat-room participants were close to each other, they shared personal problems with friends that they have met on-line:

*"thanks for all your messages of support. I do appreciate it and it is making me feel a little less like I'm going mad. However, I still have the problem that my g/f is convinced herself that she needs to leave me in order to decide what she wants to do with her life - bizarre as that may sound given the fact that she has been happy with me for the past 3 years / Hi, I don't know if you've read my discussion from a friday but I'm in a very similar situation to you.... Basically I'm happy to talk about this stuff more with u if u want, to be honest it would be a help to me to get my feelings off my chest with someone in the same boat!"* (Newspaper B chat-room).

d. African context - In general

In those cases where the discussion took place within a broader African context, the emphasis was placed on South African neighbouring country Zimbabwe as well as political and social problems related to South Africa. Little interest was shown in the rest of Africa. In these rare discussions the focus was placed on the negative issues concerning Africa in general such as problems with regard to illegal immigrants in South Africa. Generation Xers did not feel part of the rest of Africa but felt more connected to the global village, with a focus on 'SA expats' currently residing in Europe and other parts of the world.

*“geez Chrisee can u just one day post something that will not highlight some of the negatives of South Africa and Africa?”* (Newspaper B chat-room).

e. The context of a self-help group

Lastly, as was discussed previously, some chat-room interaction took the form of a self-help group that provided a space for people experiencing similar problems, to communicate, for example parents experiencing parenting problems. They used the forum as a space to meet others 'like me', to gather information on off-line help centres and/or other electronic avenues dealing with a specific topic such as alcoholism etcetera.

*“ I find it very upsetting to read such negative ( brainwashing ) twaddle. It can/may lead to drug mis-users loosing motivation to seek help, reduce or give up. Let alone the will to live eh? For future refferance; please could you refrain from posting up such comments as I will point out that your just off-loading your baggage in a negative way that may/could psychologically harm other people who visit this message board for help and information”* (International chat-room).

### **9.5.6 Unique values of cyberspace culture that developed during on-line interaction**

On this (macro) contextual level, a quantitative analysis was needed off all the different values that were identified during the content analysis of the chat-room interaction. The following table will provide a list of all the different values that were identified.

Table 9.4: All the values identified during the chat-room interaction

VALUE	n
Career	8
Change - survival	37
Communication: Aggression	25
Communication: Debate	43
Creativity: Emotions	11
Creativity: Language	17
Crime / Violence	29
Death	50
Economy - Finance	21
Economy - Personal financial situation / work	14
Family	30
Friendship	49
Future	17
Health	43
Leisure	48
Military	9
Nationalism / Patriotism	15
Nature	1
Physical appearance	15
<i>Political - Bad politician</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Political - Good politician</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Race: Positive (integration/transformation)</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Race: Racism / Negative (conflict/segregation)</i>	<i>57</i>
Religion	60
Safety	21
<i>Sexuality: Homosexuality</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Sexuality: Anatomy</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Sexuality: Degrade / insult / stigmatise</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Sexuality: HIV/AIDS</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Sexuality: Male/female relationships (flirting, marriage)</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Social values e.g. human rights, morality</i>	<i>92</i>
Technology	32
Unspecified	7

Please note: n = number of times a value was counted during chat-room interaction.

Dominating value counts highlighted in blue.

From the quantitative analysis the following four values dominated the chat-room discussion and will be described in detail:

- a. Social values
- b. Sexuality
- c. Race
- d. Politics.

a. Social values

One underlying social value of the cyberspace culture is respect for others. Whether chat-room participants were involved in a heated debate or discussing drug addiction, the value of respect for others different from one was important although not everybody adhered to it. Flame wars usually erupted when heated debates turned into personal insults, degrading and stigmatising of another person. Since chat-rooms give voice to marginalised social identities and minority groups, individuality, diversity and eccentricity ought to be respected rather than criticised. Cyberspace provides Generation Xers with the liberty (with a social responsibility) to base decisions on personal meaning rather than on peer-group pressure.

*"... in the words of Rodney King "Can't we all just, get along?" could be possible if we all realized that we really are one race. That we really are one species, one people. What we lack is empathy, understanding and compassion for anyone who is the least bit different from us. This includes, but is not limited to, 'race', religion and economic or social status." (International chat-room).*

b. Sexuality

Sexuality was already identified as one of the major themes in chat-room discussions and will be described in more detail in terms of values connected to sexuality. Although cyberspace is synonymous to being a theatre, a realm where one is invited to perform a variety of roles, the key is to reach the achievement phase in the 'MAMA-process', for example by integrating newly acquired knowledge of the self into one integrated, intact, responsible self. One dominant theme that was evident across chat-rooms, was sexual maturity. Chat-rooms provided people with a safe space to discover parts of the sexual self that they would not have found in everyday life. Due to their on-line anonymity, females perceived chat-rooms as a safe platform to openly be sexual, and discuss sexuality without the fear to be labelled as 'cheap and easy'. The off-line 'LoveLife' campaign aims to break down traditional communication barriers around sexuality and promotes open forums where males and females are allowed to discuss their sexuality openly, thereby breaking down myths and stereotypes. Some on-line discussions reiterated this goal, for example:

*"men r jealous coz they r insecure. IF U I MAKE HIM SECURE...u r gonna share him...the man is showing u dat he is losin u bt u I react to stop it. MEN ACT AND TALK LESS...IT I MATTER WHAT U SAY ...WHAT COUNTS IS WHAT U DO..." (Radio station B chat-room).*

*“most guys are clueless when it comes to expressing themselves in writing - they just DO project that cheesy confidence when you`re in their presence. So, it must be doubly hard for them to get down about what they`re all about. I mean, think about it, amongst 100`s what WOULD you say to NOT come across as copy city”* (Newspaper A chat-room).

Linked to the first value of respect, many homosexual individuals saw and used cyberspace as a platform to emphasise importance of respecting sexual diversity, everything that is often lacking in the face-to-face world.

*“To add to what you say, if more people grew accustomed to embracing diversity, in so far as that diversity were not posing a real threat to their lives, I think that this country could progress even further than it has in the past 10 years.” / “THE MOMENT YOU GIVE YOURSELF A CHANCE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GAYS AND LESBIANS THE BETTER AND UNDERSTANDING YOU WILL BE. FOR ONE I DO NOT UNDERSTAND YOU WHEN YOU TALK OF HAVING GAY BEHAVIOUR OR ACTIONS THROWN AT YOUR FACE. PERHAPS YOU NEED THAT DONE MORE THAN NOW FOR YOU TO REALISE, MREALITY AND STOP BEING JUDGEMENTAL OR WORSE ILL MINDED. QUITE RIGHT YOU ARE SEXUALITY IS PERSONAL AND PRIVATE ISSUE, THEN I ASK WHO LET IT ALL OUT?”* (Newspaper B chat-room).

*“why does society insist on putting people into boxes? Straight, gay, bi, or whatever? Isn`t it just possible that we are all moving in between each of the 3 main categories during our lives? Personally I feel that I do. Sometimes I feel gay, other times straight. Does that make me bisexual? Or does it mean that I am confused? Personally I couldn`t care less because I am happy with whatever I feel. All I am trying to say is that when I read about other people who are worrying about what sexuality they are, I ask myself "Does it really matter?" Who actually cares what sexuality we all are. It doesn`t affect our daily lives, or the way we live those lives. We are all human after all! / I've never given myself a category, and as a result (or maybe not giving myself a category was a result of this, I don't know) I've never felt I fitted into any particular social group or scene if you like, and I've always been reluctant to define myself into a category. As I may have suggested, I don't really care about categories anyway”* (Newspaper B chat-room).

Unresolved conflict arising from sexual relationships were also revealed during on-line interaction. Some individuals have never learnt effective and respectful ways to deal with sexuality when members of the opposite gender are present. This was evident in their distasteful, vulgar approach to sexuality such as:

*"Beer ou doos kan jy bloos eers noem jy my `n koekie nou klee jy my weer in broekie. Lyk my jy weet nie wat jy soekie. Sien ek rym ou (swearing) pruim / Aarbei ou lat. Ek kan jou klee in wat ek wil. Sluk jy nou maar daai bitter pil. Aarbei! Is jou voetjies nat? / hehehehe ek dink Aarbei moet oppas vir voetskimmel of kry vruggies roes? / As jou vruggie roes moet jy dit nie hier kom uitblaker nie. Ons stel nie belang in vrot vrugte nie"* (Newspaper C chat-room).

In other cases sexuality was used to degrade and insult one another as well as political figures, for example:

*"That`s what your mother tells your... hang on you I know who you father is, so I guess that`s what she used to tell her latest pomp every night... / I know who my daddy is... ..Wanna know who your is? Huh? Who`s your daddy boytjie? Thabo, that`s who! Whether in London, or Orania, makes no difference. Don`t you forget it baby. Now fly away tweety-bird.. Go advertise you racist ignorance to someone who takes you somewhat seriously. Seriously dude. / Haha... Boytjie nogal... Die ousie is siek hoor"* (Newspaper A chat-room).

*"(Swearing) (political figure) Can't y'all, see that he's fake, Won't break you a crumb of the little bit that he makes And this is with whom you want to place your faith? Cause the (swearing) wear a coofie, it don't mean that he bright Cause you don't understand him, it don't mean that he nice It just means you don't understand all the bull (swearing) that he speak. (Swearing) (political figure). to u flipchik: I'm a legend, you should take a picture with me You should be happy to be in my presence, I should charge you a fee I'm Big Dog, listen (political figure) you a flea And the little phoney (political figure) is a garden to me What's the problem (political figure)? You not as hard as me"* (Radio station A chat-room).

Black females participating in 'Radio station A' and 'Radio station B' chat-rooms were more outspoken and open about their sexuality compared to other women in other chat-rooms. They used and almost flaunted their sexuality overshadowing other personality traits or characteristics for example, intellectuality during debates. It might be that this group were highly influenced by Black female singers such as Beyoncé, Jennifer Lopez (JLO) and Janet Jackson, all well known for sexually daring behaviour and music videos:

*"Radio station A.co.za are you for real Where are you coming from with this Stone aged thinking that women want and need to be dominated. The revolution clearly wont be televised, Im talking about women who have played a crucial roles not common whores Im talking about (female political figure) who got out of a marriage with the (male political figure) coz she I want to be part of that shit, Im talking (local*

*Black female singer) even though she I know it she was part of the sexual evolution and the way women thought of themselves sexually. You cannot be real saying women I know what they want, which or where are these women that need to be burnt at the stake for not living our dream the dream of the Global Village which has seen the woman rise from the kitchen to the boardroom.... fill a sista up and give me stats Bend your IQ and (swearing) me \*Vini Vidi Vici\**" (Radio station A chat-room).

For various reasons, on-line dating was also a popular past time for South African Generation Xers:

- Some enjoyed the humour attached to the process:

*"It's the dating thing on Newspaper A.... But if you want a really good laugh, say that you'r a woman looking to meet men, and check out the pics and pick-up lines. It's really ba-a-a-a-d!"* (Newspaper A chat-room).

- Others, especially women preferred on-line dating since it provided them with the freedom of an 'emergency exit' from an uncomfortable situation with a stranger:

*"Honey, it's better I see them there... ..than hear that schmuk while enjoying a drink at the bar! At least now I can gag, without wasting a perfect good drink..." / "And yeah, better there than in a restaurant where you`re trapped. I read an article though about a cellphone service where they actually phone and get you out of a bad date! I think they`ll make a lot of money. / You`re not obliged to meet them or invite them to your home, so what can be more safe than that, and if you I `like what you haer/see you simple logout. Safe way to break up too. / I`d just feel creeped out putting myself out on the `net like that. / You I` need to put yourself out "like that" you meet person, maybe you like or I`, you dump person and keep surfing till you find someone you`re feel most compatible I, I stress free and painless exercise, cuase when you`re do on screen dumping, you I` have to feel guilty or sorry about, minimize risks of being emotionally blackmailed and end up feeling guilty and carrying on in a relationship you I` want to be in, cause of guilty feelings"* (Newspaper A chat-room).

- A pseudopersonality, fluid and multiple, transformed by language, was also used by both gender groups:

*"Notice, though, how few women place their pics there, as opposed to the guys? with girls its not so much about the looks I heart!! pliz keep that in mind / Noticed that...Hmmm. Men lie? Average body = beer boep"* (Newspaper A chat-room).

- Those engaging in on-line dating were aware of the risks involved:

*“But one`s radar must be in top condition when engaging in a Net love affair. Too many horror stories. Fraud. Heartbreak. Murder. Worse- Seeing a pic of a delectable dish of a male specimen, only to get a Quasimodo”* (Newspaper A chat-room).

- Despite these risks many took the on-line dating game seriously, aiming to meet partners for life and often succeeding therein:

*“You know one always knows that you`re taking a risk with these things whether on/off-line, whatis to guarantee me that a guy I met in the pub is not a serial killer? I was also skeptical when this girl contacted me from SA and told me about her on-line romance, but when she eventually married and I got to meet her beau, she is really happy, I what counts, and this guy is very good to her kids, that for me is the main thing. / No, well that`s cool. It`s great when you hear things like that, because it shows you that there are such things as `fateful` encounters, and that obviously there are people out there finding happiness that way. I gamble if you don`t take risks you will never know whats waiting.....and its always best not to invite them to your home immediately take time, that way there`s a huge chance of your heart not being ruined, if you catch my drift.”* (Newspaper A chat-room).

### c. Race

Given South Africa's segregated past, it was no surprise that the racial issue came up as another dominating theme. People from different racial dominations still battle to integrate different belief systems and still revert back to degrading, stigmatising and insulting of each other. In the majority of cases the focus was placed on racially conflicting views and segregation with only a handful of participants focussing on issues surrounding nationalism and patriotism. Many argued that sport could be a catalyst for bringing racial groups together in South Africa, for example the 2010 Soccer World Cup hosted on local soil. However in this study, sports discussions were limited and also focussed on segregated views thus separating the winning and losing teams even further. Despite these findings, chat-rooms were used as public forums that stimulated interaction between heterogeneous groups since cyberspace is controlled by individuals and not by political parties and governing bodies.

*"? How would this forum be different had apartheid never ended?*

1. *Do you think the government would have allowed uncensored access to the Interent? Would a forum where foreigners could participate be okay?*

2. *Do you think most people here would be defending apartheid or not?*
3. *Would there be discussions of immigration, sanction-busting, violence in the homelands, or would most people not know that there were any problems at all?*
4. *Would there be any blacks/coloureds/non-whites? Would the government have declared the 'net slegs vir blankes or discriminated de facto, not de jure? PLEASE give me your thoughts - this fascinates me.*

*Yes, things would be a lot different. In response to your questions, in order....*

1. *The government would never have allowed uncensored access. I believe that foreigners may be allowed to post, but with restrictions, ie. posts vetted before being allowed to be "shown"*
2. *Yes, most people. You see, so many many of us didn't really know what went on... I had a taste of it as a white person... threats against me for associating with black people, for defending them, for expressing my disgust.. it was horrible, but I can still never ever grasp the enormity of the cruelty inflicted against my people. It's overwhelming and so very very sad, and although I never harmed anyone with either word or deed, I do feel bad because I did not know enough/do enough, to protect the people I love so much.*
3. *Discussions perhaps, but limited to knowledge... there was a great deal of censorship and propaganda.*
4. *I don't know if they had the capabilities to determine that, but if they did, they would probably have said.. net blankes... I, as a white, female adult, am so distressed at what went on, and still goes on. I've witnessed it often, and would want to wish it away. The nice thing though, now, is that if I do witness it, I can speak out without fear of getting arrested or beaten up. -Despite all allegations to the contrary, a true and honest patriot. Go put that in your pipe and smoke it, detractors! "*  
(Newspaper B chat-room).

#### d. Politics

The political situation in the country was complimentary to the racial issue. The .co.za-voter openly criticised political figures both national and international ones. Although very outspoken about various issues such as economics, education and health, political leaders were constantly being evaluated in terms of their actions on a personal and public level by making clear distinctions between the 'good' and the 'bad' politician, for example:

- The 'good' politician:

*"Dear (Female South African politician), it is only fantastic to see a woman stands up for herself, wish more politicians could follow your example. All the best for the future!"* (National chat-room).

*"(Politician) my friend and I are so heartened by the fact that you have always walked the talk of your integrity, and we agree with out integrity no change can take place. We are both ex Capetonians living in Johannesburg and would be thrilled to assist you with the upcoming elections in terms of back ground work. You are very welcome to contact us on this e-mail address"* (National chat-room).

- The 'bad' politician:

*"The present thinking, enjoyed by our dear world leaders among others, has not worked. Violence will never be eradicated by more violence.*

*I consider (political leader) to be the most dangerous man in the world" / (Political leader) is an excellent and clever campaigner, even if he is a very stupid and dangerous man, while (Political leader) seems to have undergone a personality bypass operation, but otherwise seems fairly sound* (International chat-room).

*"... as hiv is not linked to aids, did you notread what our educated (political figure) had to say on the matter.... 😞"* (Newspaper B chat-room).

*"A politician is a person who can't get a real job"* (Newspaper B chat-room).

Politicians and their decisions were questioned continuously against the background of their respect for the simple-man-in-the-street. The .co.za-voters put politicians on the same level as the public, acknowledging the mutual respect between them as humans. As discussed before, respect for individual integrity and honesty where one has to be true to one's own beliefs and value system were very important to .co.za-voters. Politicians operating within cyberspace culture must be willing to come closer to the people on the ground, narrowing the gap that exists between authorities' societal structures and the voters (public) on the ground. The .co.za-voter will respect a politician instead of fearing his or her authority.

*"(Local political party) wants African people to join it but it does not respect their cultures and values"* (Newspaper A chat-room).

*"What IS wrong with us. The simple answer, I suppose, is fear. Regardless of our age, sex or race, we are scared of our leaders. We are scared of their guns and soldiers, their militia and power. In four years we have watched the price of a single loaf of bread go from ten to three thousand dollars and yet we are too scared to do anything about it"* (Newspaper B chat-room).

*"With HIV/AIDS being a major killer in South Africa, do you feel that only once Government and, more importantly (political figure) get his act together can we start to do something constructive about it? / As a judge I have to be careful about entering the political arena but national leadership from the president's office downwards is obviously of life and death importance to millions of South Africans. In this sense the government's and the president's roles are absolutely crucial"* (National chat-room).

e. Other themes and values

Specific themes and associated values that were not discussed were the following:

Economy - In the few cases where economic issues were dealt with, people focussed on financial decisions taken by 'good' and 'bad' politicians followed by an analyses of their own personal battles to survive financially.

Education - Another theme that was *not* top-of-mind was education despite the fact that South Africa currently has a shortage of teachers and major changes to tertiary educations systems are taking place. One could argue that the 7-8% of the population participating in these chat-rooms was not really affected by these problems since they have already completed their personal education and having provided for their children's educational needs.

Crime - Despite the fact that South Africa's crime statistics are of the highest in the world, relatively limited time was spent on the crime problem. It might be that participants felt it to be a well discussed topic not worth spending any further time on.

HIV/AIDS - Although a serious problem in South Africa, HIV/AIDS was also not top-of-mind as far as chat-room participants are concerned. It might be due to the fact that it has been dealt with in detail in the past on other societal platforms.

## 9.6 Concluding summary

In conclusion although a small portion (7-8%) of South Africans use the Internet as an alternative and complimentary interaction medium it will continue to play a major role in their lives. South African Generation Xers perceive themselves as part of a global cyberspace culture, creatively changing their environment that is influenced by digital technology in a globalising world. The .co.za-dictionary reflected the creative way in which .co.za-emotion and memory was expressed and negotiated. Any distinction between the virtual and the real, does not imply a privilege to either, but rather a connection between the two. Pseudopersonalities that are at play in the borderless world of cyberspace continuously reflect issues, problems and struggles of everyday life in South Africa such as racial tension, political struggle and sexual interaction. These interactions reflect new social networks that are governed by cultural values of:

- Respect
- An openness to the unknown
- Looking towards to the self (not governing bodies) for direction, resulting in;
- Liberty with responsibility towards the common good, the core of every society across the globe.

In the words of Mark Shuttleworth, the first South African that reached space:

*"The Net is still on course to become the fundamental platform for all communications... from your cellphone to your fridge, they will all talk TCP/IP. But the net makes competition brutal, so expect to work hard for those profits. The mistake was in thinking that something that removed all barriers to entry could also be a source of infinite profitability! I don't think we'll see any new Yahoo! or Es-Bay emerge, but we'll see great new ideas like Slashdot.org that find a place for themselves, driven by people who love what they are doing and do it better than anybody else as a result, using the net to reach their listeners at the lowest possible cost"* (National chat-room).

## CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS: FROM VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES TO CYBERSPACE CULTURE

**Internet-junkie (die co.za-noster gebed)**

Ek's 'n internet-junkie, ekke surf oppie web  
Ek kan kuier is Korea 'wyl ek lê op my bed  
In die chat-rooms kan ek ure, dae, weke omklets  
Op QQ, IRC, ICQ en MSN

Ek's 'n internet-junkie, op 'n kuberreis  
Deur Google en Yahoo word ek alles wys  
En dan koop ek elektronies by die Pick 'n Pay  
Kan my groceries afgelewer by my voordeur kry

Ek's 'n internet-junkie, ekke surf oppie web  
Ek kry vir my 'n boek by Kalahari.net  
By "Die Knoop" kry ek die hoop dat Afrikaans sal bly oorleef  
En by "otnet" kan en dot-net oor die Bybel gaan lees

Ek's 'n internet-junkie oppie www  
Ek's 'n internet-junkie – hier is ek alweer  
O weë of weë – die www

Ek's 'n internet-junkie en Telkom is my lyn  
By "roekeloos" se raadsman deel ek my pyn  
My koerante duik daaglik op my laptop op  
Die geldmark en casino's hou ek angstig dop

Ek's 'n internet-junkie, ekke vry oppie web  
Ek beskryf myself aantreklik, maar ek's lelik en vet  
Ek verlei stoute vrou tjies na 'n koffiekafee  
Of 'n aanlyn-vry vir 'n uur of twee

Ek's 'n internet-junkie oppie www  
Ek's 'n internet-junkie – hier is ek alweer  
O weë of weë – die www

Ek's 'n internet-junkie, ek aanbid oppie web  
Ek skryf my eie .co.za-noster gebed  
Die e-kerk bid: laat U koninkryk.com  
Maar tog net nie voor ... my e-pos inkom

Ek's 'n internet-junkie, ek swerf oppie web  
Ek ken hackers, cranckers, wanckers- ja, die hele ou set  
Al my toere na die hoere wat hulself vir my ontbloot  
En die manne met lang slange laat my skaamteloos bloos

Ek's 'n internet-junkie – hier is ek alweer  
O weë of weë – die www

-Dr. Christo Lombaard-

Figure 10.1: The Internet junkie (die .co.za-noster gebed)

## **10.1 Introduction**

In order to integrate relevant theories, literature and research results, chapter 10 will focus on cyberspace culture, specifically the development process that starts with interaction between individuals in chat-room groups that develop into virtual communities culminating in cyberspace culture. The discussion will firstly focus on the relationships and similarities local Generation X members have with their global counterparts on other continents. Hereafter specific characteristics of virtual communities will be discussed for example the principles that underlie a definition of cyberspace as common space and developmental processes related to it. Principles that are embedded in the Symbolic Action Theory will highlight the development process of cyberspace culture and the unique symbolism that is attached to it. The chapter will be concluded with a discussion on how cyberspace culture influences different spheres of off-line living.

## **10.2 Generation X**

The definitions provided in chapter 1 already proved how various theorists struggled to clearly define this group of people. According to the 21st Century Dictionary of Slang the term Generation X is "applied to those born after 1965 who have proven to be an indefinable block in many socio-economic sectors..." (Watts 1994: 9). According to Codrington and Grant-Marshall, Generation Xers complain that they are defined by what they are not, and yet they are not pleased if one attempts to define them at all by protesting that they will not be boxed or labelled. Bart Simpson is their most famous cartoon character, irreverent, self-reliant and he does not care what adults think about him" (2004: 50). One of their outstanding characteristics is the courage to take enormous risks, a motivation for their invention of extreme sports such as bungee jumping and consumption of accompanying energy drinks such as Red Bull. The previous generation namely the 'Boomers' were not famous for good parenting skills and their divorce rates were very high. As children Xers were left to their own devices and were thus labeled as the "lonely, latchkey generation, who let themselves into empty homes after school" (2004: 75). This can be the reason why it is very important to them to have a balanced lifestyle between work, leisure and family responsibilities. They provide the following summary of Generation Xers:

"An Internet e-mail sums up today's Xer lifestyle:

- Your reason for not staying in touch with your family is because they do not have e-mail addresses.
- You have a list of fifteen phone numbers to reach your family of three.
- Your grandmother asks you to send a JPEG file of your newborn so she can create a screen saver.
- You pull up in your own driveway and use your cellphone to see if anyone is home.
- Nearly every commercial on TV has a website address at the bottom of the screen.
- You buy a computer and six months later it's out of date and sells for half the price you paid for it.
- Leaving the house without your cellphone is a cause for panic and you turn back immediately.
- You've just tried to enter your password on the microwave oven.
- Courier services that don't do same-day delivery are too slow.
- You hear most of your jokes via e-mail instead of in person.
- When you disconnect from the Internet, you are left with the sensation of having pulled the plug on a loved one.
- You get up in the morning and go on-line before getting your coffee.
- You have started tilting your head sideways to smile :-).
- Girls ask boys to go out with them. They ask boys to dance with them and if the answer is 'no' they will dance on their own anyway with everybody else on the floor. Dating lost what was left of its 'innocence' as date rape and date rape drugs arrives. Xers began using the Internet for dating purposes" (2004: 55, 103).

Complimentary to this description, the present research results will attempt to look at personal characteristics that tie this unique group of people into a single group, since they are a diverse group of people if one focuses on their demographical characteristics.

The results of this study showed that the term Generation X is a fitting one since the generation represents a heterogeneous group of people in terms of their demographic profile as discussed in chapter 7. More and more people are using the Internet in South Africa, but the overall access figures remain low at around 7-8% of the total population. Generation Xers in South Africa can be described as a diverse group of people representing different segments in the population. They are the richer and more affluent part of South African society, living in major metropolitan areas, earning R12 000+ per month, are categorised as members of LSM groups 7-10 especially category LSM 8. They are white males who work on a full- or part time basis as well as students. Although different age groups ranging from 16 to 49 years access the Internet, higher access figures were reported among adolescents, young adults, many of them having married for the first time as well as being new parents.

The term Generation X implies diversity and uniqueness and evidence supporting this concept was also found in the different personality types that are active in chat-rooms. These groups of people were:

- Bullies
- Concerned taxpayers
- EMENM-wannabee's
- Informed realists
- Leisure-time experts
- Sex traders
- Society misfits
- Wallflowers.

Furthermore the results have shown that Generation Xers use the Internet extensively in their work and social lives and view it as a much needed tool to communicate with others wherever and whenever the need arise. Generation Xers used chat-rooms as platforms to discuss themes like politics, racial issues, religion as well as health related problems pertaining to alcohol and drug abuse. Evidence have been provided to show the extent to which they use the Internet for dating purposes and on a social level small groups of friends viewed a chat-room as a regular meeting place on a daily basis, for example the Newspaper C chat-room. In summary Generation Xers within .co.za-borders is a heterogeneous group of people in terms of their demographic profile and personality traits. They, however are united in terms of values they conform to and share within cyberspace culture. Their on-line interactions reflected social networks governed by specific cultural values that are also shared by their global counterparts.

### ***10.3 Values in cyberspace culture***

In chapter 4, Carl Rogers' views on the individual characteristics needed for constructive creativity were described. These characteristics were also identified in this study during the analysis of chat-room behaviour and world views of Generation X members. The characteristics were:

- A desire for authenticity
- A desire for wholeness
- A freedom of choice

- A respect for multiple and diverse perceptions of reality
- An internal locus of control based on the norm of 'authority comes from within'
- An openness to the unknown
- Sharing power and leadership with others.

It also complimented Codrington and Grant-Marshall's lists of important Generation X values namely:

- Cautiousness
- Creativity
- Pragmatism
- Realism
- Innovation
- Flexibility
- Independence
- Adaptability (2004: 197).

These two lists of characteristics can be summarised in specific motivational and social values that are important in the cyberspace culture (Refer to chapter 7). In terms of the list of motivational values the following six values are important to Generation Xers:

- *Self-direction:*

The results in chapter 9 have shown how important independent thought, creativity and freedom of expression are to Generation Xers. This is also one of the motivations why they chose to use the Internet as platform for communication since it provided them with the freedom to be who they want to be and say what they want to say.

- *Hedonism and stimulation:*

It was also very important to them to have fun during the process of self-exploration. The interaction between members of the radio station A and radio station B chat-rooms were good examples of expressing these two motivational values. The on-line dating game was also seen by many of the participants as a fun pastime and an alternative route to enhance boring off-line social lives by meeting new people.

- *Universalism:*

The tolerance and respect for others different from oneself was also one of the key values of cyberspace culture. In many of the chat-room groups respect for authenticity and diversity were

reiterated. Social justice and equality in chat-room groups were vital for sustainable group contact in the long term. Therefore individuals have the freedom to be unique but within a broad framework of respect for others. Power struggles and flame wars did take place between those individuals who aimed to control and dominate others in a chat-room group. In many cases these individuals were ignored by the rest of the group in order to illustrate their resistance against such behaviour. The same principle was evident in those groups where flame wars erupted between individuals from different racial groups, for example in the Newspaper A chat-room. Here again people aimed to dominate each other in stead of debating racial issues with a respect for differences in opinion that was evident in the Newspaper B chat-room.

- *Benevolence:*

The self-help groups that developed spontaneously on the Internet were built on this value specifically where the goal was to preserve and enhance the welfare of those marginalised group of people that could not find this in the off-line world. Here alcoholics, drug addicts and homosexual individuals found refuge in chat-rooms where they could be honest about themselves and receive much needed forgiveness and assistance so often lacking in their off-line lives.

Taking the discussion to the next level of analysis, it is clear that the following dimensions based on value groups are important in cyberspace culture:

- *Openness to change:*

Made up of three values namely self-direction, stimulation and hedonism, this dimension was one of the important ones in cyberspace culture and it also correlated positively with out-group contact (Seligman, Olson & Zanna 1996). Although Generation Xers are often mistaken for not being team players, Codrington and Grant-Marshall argued that teams comprised of Generation Xers encourage each other to share unique differences of opinion but reaching consensus is not the goal (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004: 153). This trend was emphasised during chat-room interaction as discussed in the chapter 9 where individuals focused on their unique qualities and arguments rather than conforming to group views.

- *Self-transcendence:*

This is made up of two values namely universalism and benevolence and this dimension was the second important one in cyberspace culture. By having a broadminded view of the world, equality is viewed as a need to respect the individual intrinsically, not the title, position or rank. Generation Xers take their time to develop respect as they get to know the person, his ethics and integrity.

They expect people to work for that respect" (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004: 220). It was also reflected in the discussion around the .co.za voter in the chapter 9. Generation Xers respect politicians who are: "truthful, believable, inclusive, technologically wired, pragmatic and relaxed" (2004: 221). "They are on the whole not interested in politics which they see as a manipulative process. Xers recognised and dismiss slick, clever presentations that pass for political debate ... In the 1999 South African general election, youthful turnout at registration points was so low that the National Youth Commission approached twenty-five sports, music and business personalities to endorse its voter registration campaign" (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004: 228-229).

In terms of the social values discussed in chapter 7 it was clear that Generation Xers value a sense of belonging as very important, again since many of them did not experience it in their off-line lives. In many of the chat-rooms friendships were build thus making the value of having warm relationships with others also important. As discussed earlier the fun and enjoyment in life was not left behind during the process of achieving self-fulfillment and self-respect. This concludes the discussion on the characteristics of Generation Xers and the values that are important within cyberspace culture. The next part of this chapter will deal with the process whereby these chat-room groups develop into long term sustainable virtual communities.

## **10.4 Virtual communities**

### **10.4.1 Definition of virtual community**

In chapter 7 Rheingold's definition formulated in 1993 was quoted when he stated that the concept 'virtual community' is applicable when a social aggregate emerges from the Internet when enough people carry on public discussions with significant human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace. This definition can almost be seen as the dinner table being set without dinner being served. It provides some basic elements attached to the concept of virtual community and should be used in collaboration with the following additional elements:

- A virtual community is based on the philosophy of empowering others through cyber- or virtual networks of people with common interest.
- The virtual community is controlled by members and not by outside parties. Community members perceive themselves as part of a self generating knowledge base.
- Within virtual communities, uniqueness, individuality and eccentricity are respected.

#### 10.4.2 The process of virtual community development

Literature available for this study could not shed light on this process but from the analysis of the different chat-room protocols the following development process was identified. At first individuals gather around a topic or theme all of them have interest in. During this process the virtual community gains and loses members continuously. These members differ in status, some will only be 'lurkers' passively observing interaction and others will be active participants. Short-term projects in terms of specific topics are executed, for example a discussion about a specific political party. When the project outlived its usefulness to members it dies and another develops either spontaneously or is introduced by chat-room hosts. Specific cultural norms and values as discussed in chapter 8 govern interaction which in turn implies a flat hierarchy in terms of individual status and community membership. Those users who become involved on a long term basis have a sense of personal investment for example the small group of friends interacting on a daily basis in the Newspaper C chat-room hosted on the news24.co.za website.

This process implies specific characteristics making the virtual community a unique system:

- Creativity (as discussed in chapter 4) forms the foundation for the virtual community since no outcomes or membership longevity can be predicted.
- Community members continuously balance (a) simplicity, (b) access to information and (c) personal power. They do this by (a) avoiding long postings, (b) using hyperlinks to additional information and (c) interacting by means of their social bodies.
- On-line interaction fits in with the normal daily routine of the virtual community members.
- These chat-rooms aim to empower its users and not the service providers by constantly listening to individual needs and promoting heterogeneous group membership.

Expanding on the norm where heterogeneous groups respect diversity, the quote used in chapter 5, paragraph 5.4.2, referring to the Lao-tse principle is applicable:

"If I keep from meddling with people they take care of themselves. If I keep from commanding people, they behave themselves. If I keep from preaching at people, they improve themselves. If I keep from imposing on people, they become themselves" (Rogers 1961: 178).

With this principle in mind, Generation Xers strive towards flexibility, away from rigidity with a focus on process living and not static living with a goal towards autonomy away from dependence. Rogers promoted the idea of building person-centred communities. The virtual community reiterates this idea where a community is being built without sacrificing the potential and creativity of the individual.

## **10.5 Symbolic Action Theory principles**

Specific principles formulated by Boesch in 1991 when he applied the Symbolic Action Theory to Cultural Psychological thinking, are also relevant to the results and findings of this study.

### **10.5.1 Cyberspace culture is experienced by means of language**

Boesch (1991) stated that culture is experienced by means of language and a culture specific language is also the carrier of non-verbal cues. Examples have been given of the .co.za-dictionary where Generation Xers creatively developed new words and phrases during on-line discussions. Emotional interaction and the specific 'emoticons' used to express emotion was also part of the .co.za-dictionary and its denotative meaning is shared by Generation Xers within .co.za-borders. In many cases these country-specific words and phrases are also made available on-line to 'newbies' or Generation Xers from other countries prior to entering a South African chat-room. Alexa Wagener aged 16 has been awarded a third place in the Expo for young scientists hosted by the University of Pretoria. She has developed a programme to translate .co.za-words so that all generations can understand it for example "Dq viri gr8 dagi, CUL" - "Dankie vir die great dag, see you later" (Koekemoer 2005).

### **10.5.2 The symbolism of cyberspace culture**

The research results yielded many examples of the different forms of symbolism Boesch described in chapter 7. Some examples:

- *Situational symbolism:*  
A chat-room in cyberspace becomes a meeting place for people similar to a coffee shop or a public platform for political debates.

- *Functional symbolism:*

A personal computer, if analysed by means of Symbolic Action Theory, becomes a link between individual action areas. The results have shown that a personal computer is more than the sum of its parts. It is perceived as a vehicle to communicate ideas, thoughts and attitudes thus transcending its instrumental use, for example the input and output of datasets. It is an object that produces social effects where strangers meet, where political issues are debated and individual personalities adapt and change. The software package 'Windows' widely used across the globe, becomes a metaphor for thinking about the self as a multiple distributed system (Turkle 1995). In the past a personal computer was used to project and extend one's intellect, now it links cognition with emotion and Generation Xers use it to project and extent social relationships in cyberspace. It offers them new opportunities that embody their ideas and express diversity thus becoming an electronic mirror of their daily lives.

- *Analogical symbolism:*

Some people chose pseudonyms for example 'DONOTDELETE' since it reminded them of their interactions with other people in past.

- *Ideational symbolism:*

Many males based their choices of pseudonyms on the idea that women prefer males with a strong physique and used pictures of body builders to introduce themselves to the group.

- *Otherness symbolism:*

From a psychological perspective various conclusions have been drawn in chapter 9 about the symbolic meaning of pseudonyms in individual lives. Pseudonyms like 'God of da Net' symbolises the person that he is **not** in real life.

## **10.6 Cyberspace culture and its influence on off-line living**

As stated in chapter 7, since culture develops and changes as a results of individual actions and interaction, the opposite is also true; culture also influences behaviour. The final part of this chapter will deal with cyberspace culture's influence on everyday off-line lives. Specific issues will be dealt with for example:

- Changing perceptions of the traditional physical body
- The end of geography
- Hierarchies toppled downwards
- The computer underground
- A new definition of literacy for example 'e-literacy'
- Techno-living.

### **10.6.1 Changing perceptions of the traditional physical body**

Research results have shown that the traditional physical body becomes immaterial in cyberspace although it remains important for many Generation Xers to project physical attributes of their pseudopersonalities. In cyberspace they see themselves translated into a form of information moving towards a technological extension, not replacement, of consciousness. The physical body is left behind and supplanted by communication and they translate more of themselves into other forms of expression that exceed their physical selves. In summary technology might not change humans in terms of their basic genetic make-up but it shapes the fabric of the social body with which they live in cyberspace (Herman & Swiss 2000).

### **10.6.2 The end of geography**

Based on the previous discussions cyberspace can be conceptualised as a social and cognitive space wherein networks and daily contact with others, albeit by means of technology, becomes crucial. People and their relationships whether it is formal in a corporate structure or informal friendships across continents, are maintained on a daily basis by means of e-mail communication and chat-room interaction. This reiterates the fact that within the cyberspace culture, technology is used as an extension and not a replacement for face-to-face interaction.

Many international companies capitalised on this phenomenon by setting up 'virtual' offices creating a flexible work force that is not bound by geographical boundaries and can have discussions and working groups functioning effectively across continents. When looking at major shifts in the formal sector by 2015 Gartner (2005: 14) predicted: "Global sourcing will reach the top of the food chain because 30% of the most influential CEO's will not hail from the United States". For the individual this means a more

structured approach to time management since the idea of the virtual office implies flexible working hours bringing the different spheres of life for example work, family and leisure closer to each other (refer to figure 10.2). Within the South African context many 'transnational' families with children who emigrated to other parts of the world use cyberspace as a much needed tool to keep in contact with family members on different continents.

**FAST FORWARD**



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Handy free app means you will never get away from work again. Ever.

In a working world where the concept of a full-on holiday has all but disappeared, we've all been in a situation where you need to access something on your PC even though you're technically supposed to be doing nothing other than sipping margaritas by the sea. If that's what you get for a) bringing your cell phone with you and b) letting the boss know exactly where you were going, you're going to love this free program...

LogMeInFree offers users full remote control of their PC free of charge, gratis and for nothing. Although this basic version of the software (you can have the Pro versions for a fee) doesn't allow for the transfer of files to and from the remote PC, you can open and view files. It's very quick (especially over slow connections, which is likely to be an issue for you if you holiday in the Himalayas), easy to use and you can always remotely-control your email to transfer files between machines. Best of all, it's extremely secure – offering a security framework that includes end-to-end SSL encryption as well as multi-level authentication systems. The free version also allows users to open remote files, check mail, run programs and run system diagnostics. You can access it through any browser or from your wireless PDA.

If you like the free version but want more power and don't mind paying around R80 for it, LogMeIn Pro offers file transfer, synching and remote printing (in case you need to fax in your resignation), while LogMeIn IT Reach offers systems administrators a tool for providing preventative maintenance or support to remote or mobile PCs on DHCP addresses with a minimum of input required by the end user.

We like it and we think you will too. ☺

[www.logmein.com](http://www.logmein.com)  
[https://secure.logmein.com/go.asp?page=products\\_free](https://secure.logmein.com/go.asp?page=products_free)

Figure 10.2: Access your PC from Anywhere, for Free (Intelligence: The magazine for a new breed of business leader July 2005)

### 10.6.3 Hierarchies toppled downwards

In the cyberspace culture, Generation Xers look toward the self (not governing bodies) for direction. This results in a liberty with responsibility towards the common good, the core of cyberspace culture across the globe. It can also be described as an internal locus of control where the individual and not outside circumstances, govern motives and behaviour. This influenced the corporate world where power hierarchies were replaced with global networks that are flat and open corporate structures (Tapscott 1998). Corporate monopolies became financial burdens and currently the business sections of newspapers are continuously reporting on industry giants joining forces, for example Barclays Bank buying shares in ABSA (South Africa).

#### 10.6.4 The computer underground

By adopting an internal locus of control during on-line interaction another problem is created since it results in the Internet not being governed and regulated by a governing body. No specific laws govern on-line behaviour thus opening up a new world for the virtual criminal. Internet fraud is a major problem and currently companies are spending millions to keep their on-line databases, information and networks hacker-safe. Mizrach (2005) provided a list of seven groups describing the current computer underground:

- **"Hackers** (Crackers, system intruders) - These are people who attempt to penetrate security systems on remote computers. This is the new sense of the term, whereas the old sense of the term simply referred to a person who was capable of creating hacks, or elegant, unusual, and unexpected uses of technology. Typical magazines (both print and on-line) read by hackers include *2600* and *Iron Feather Journal*.
- **Phreaks** (Phone Phreakers, Blue Boxers) - These are people who attempt to use technology to explore and/or control telephone systems. Originally, this involved the use of "blue boxes" or tone generators, but as phone companies began using digital instead of electro-mechanical switches, the phreaks became more like hackers. Typical magazines read by Phreaks include *Phrack*, *Line Noize*, and *New Fone Express*.
- **Virus writers** (also, creators of Trojans, worms, logic bombs) - These are people who write codes which attempt to a) reproduce itself on other systems without authorization and b) often has a side-effect, whether that be to display a message, play a prank, or trash a hard drive. Typical magazines read by Virus writers include *40HEX*.
- **Pirates** - Piracy is sort of a non-technical matter. Originally, it involved breaking copy protection on software, and this activity was called "cracking." Nowadays, few software vendors use copy protection, but there are still various minor measures used to prevent the unauthorised duplication of software. Pirates devote themselves to thwarting these things and sharing commercial software freely with their friends. They usually read *Pirate Newsletter* and *Pirate* magazine.
- **Cypherpunks** (cryptoanarchists) - Cypherpunks freely distribute the tools and methods for making use of strong encryption, which is basically unbreakable except by massive supercomputers. Because the NSA and FBI cannot break strong encryption (which is the basis of the PGP or Pretty Good Privacy), programs that employ it are classified as munitions, and distribution of algorithms that make use of it is a felony. Some cryptoanarchists advocate strong encryption as a tool to completely evade the State, by preventing any access whatsoever to financial or personal information. They typically read Cypherpunks' mailing list.

- **Anarchists** - are committed to distributing illegal (or at least morally suspect) information, including but not limited to data on bomb making, lock picking, pornography, drug manufacturing, pirate radio, as well as cable and satellite TV piracy. In this parlance of the computer underground, anarchists are less likely to advocate the overthrow of government than simple refusal to obey restrictions on distributing information. They tend to read *Cult of the Dead Cow* (CDC) and *Activist Times Incorporated* (ATI).
- **Cyberpunks** - are usually some combination of the above, plus interest in technological self-modification, science fiction of the *Neuromancer* genre, with interest in hardware hacking and 'street tech'. It is a youth subculture in its own right, with some overlap with the 'modern primitive' and 'raver' subcultures" (<http://www.fiu.edu/~mizrachs/hackethic.html> 1 Aug. 2005).

On-line privacy and the extent thereof remains an integral problem attached to cyberspace that is currently creating a lot of debate around the world. It seems that the trust and power given to the individual will always be exploited by selected individuals within any system counteracting the goal of working towards a common good.

#### 10.6.5 A new definition of literacy namely 'e-literacy'

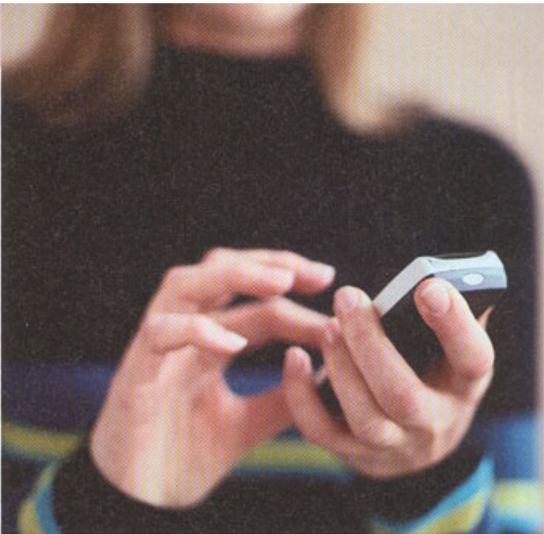
One of the rules of thumb incorporated in the .co.za-dictionary was the trend of spelling, tense and grammar errors implying that the traditional grammar, punctuation and syntax rules are not applied during on-line interaction. Herman and Swiss (2000) argued that 'e-literate' individuals are discouraged from 'deep reading' but focus on the ability to digest and make sense of different sets of information at one time. The various hyperlinks attached to an electronic document develop readers with the ability to employ focused critical reading skills with a specific goal in mind. "Computer and media centres are replacing old 'books only' libraries in schools. (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004). When books are compared with on-line manuscripts, the traditional passive relationship between authors and readers change into an interactive continuously changing relationship based on the real time exchange of information. Unfortunately Internet spam becomes a problem and creates a system overload at times where the reader is bombarded with unwanted mails and pop-up screens.

Bringing the concept of e-literacy closer to .co.za borders, new words and phrases are developed and are based on a minimum of three languages, for example Afrikaans, English and one other African language used in one message. Reviewing South Africa's political segregated past, cyberspace culture created the .co.za voter who interacts with different racial groups and comes into contact with a foreign

language on a daily basis. When looking at it from another angle, e-literacy implies high levels of traditional literacy most definitely lacking in South Africa. Since the country has eleven official languages, IT developers are developing innovative ways to give more people, from diverse backgrounds access to technology and knowledge. The Human Language Technology (HLT) unit at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is one of the largest initiatives in Africa aimed at bridging the digital divide within .co.za borders. One of their biggest success stories is the highly efficient system for the creation of pronunciation dictionaries for the eleven official languages. Another is the Shuttleworth Foundation financed by Mark Shuttleworth, that uses open-source software principles to provide access to technology to South African youth's from various cultural backgrounds (Paterson & Weaver 2005).

#### **10.6.6 Techno-living**

Technology moved from a 'nice to have' to a necessity when it comes to everyday living in cyberspace culture. One of the main goals of technological inventors is to link the different pieces of technology with one another, thereby creating even shorter interaction pathways and communication networks. A recent example is 3G or third generation technology in wireless communication (refer to figure 10.3). It is an initiative where cellular phones and personal computers become one unit with interactive abilities. "South Africa is set to achieve nearly 870 000 broadband access subscribers by 2009" (Senne 2005: 13). The Internet is nothing if it is not linked to off-line living continuously looking for new ways to see, to talk, to love, to live. Generation Xers make use of technology to balance different parts of their lives. Technology enables them to work from home creating more time to spend with their families (Codrington and Grant-Marshall 2004).



## Digital Television For Your Cell Phone

Now you can be a couch potato anywhere.

Just when you thought your cell phone couldn't possibly do anything else without needing a battery the size of a small Pacific Island, Texas Instruments and Samsung have announced their plans to unleash Digital Media Broadcasting (DMB) on the mobile phone market in Korea. Using Texas Instruments' OMAP-DM multimedia processor technology, Samsung is producing a range of digital TV mobile phone models capable of receiving signals from satellites or a network of terrestrial transmitters.

The pace at which cell phone technology and applications are developing is mind boggling, and digital television looks set to become the next red-hot application for phones, with Korea leading the way. Mobile digital television with DMB services are already feeding Korea's goggle-eyed a daily dose of their favourite programmes straight to their cell phones. Channels included are ones dedicated to sport, comedy, news, music, movies and, of course, games. The Korean government is lending its support to the spread of the technology in the form of six new DMB licenses, issued in May.

To keep the picture quality high without requiring the services of a nuclear power station to keep the phone running, Texas Instruments' processors are geared specifically towards multimedia use and promise powerful application processing. The Korean government is particularly keen on the safety aspects of the technology – terrestrial digital multimedia broadcasting (T-DMB) can be used as a high-quality disaster warning system, giving users an emergency signal whether their phone is on or off. This would allow for large-scale evacuations ahead of something like the recent South Asian tsunami, in which over 170,000 people lost their lives and a further 125,000 are missing, presumed dead.

The first of the Samsung/Texas Instruments phones is already available to Korean consumers.

[www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)  
[www.ti.com](http://www.ti.com)

Figure 10.3: Digital television for your cell phone (Intelligence: The magazine for a new breed of business leader July 2005)

## 10.7 Concluding summary

This chapter aimed to integrate literature, theory and research results by focusing on cyberspace culture on the macrolevel. The results of the study reiterated many authors who stated that cyberspace culture is synonymous with collapsing boundaries. Cyberspace cultures is, as the fall of the Berlin wall that divided East- and West Berlin for years, a symbol of collapsing boundaries between human and machine, genders groups, global geographies, racial groups, political parties, the past and the future. Generation Xers view their cyberspace culture as the keeper of an open world where the mind is the only limitation in the borderless world of cyberspace.

## CHAPTER 11: THE CHAT-ROOM AS A RESEARCH TOOL

*"I would say it's pretty clear to all folks involved that the Internet is going to be the future backbone of our consumer research activity"*

(Mark Shcar, Vice president for iVentures Procter & Gamble 2000).

### **11.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to address the last two secondary themes formulated for this research project namely:

- Exploration of the Internet chat-room as new research tool for example on-line focus groups
- Describing ethical standards applicable to Internet research in the South African context.

The discussion will start with a description of the process of on-line focus groups illustrated by practical examples. The advantages and disadvantages imbedded in the research technique will be dealt with followed by a summary of the ethical guidelines for conducting Internet research. The chapter will close with the views and thoughts of South African researchers and psychologists on the applicability of Internet research in the South African market.

### **11.2 Process and procedures during on-line focus groups**

There are various ways to conduct on-line focus groups:

Table 11.1: Internet-mediated communication technologies useable for on-line qualitative research (Clarke 2000).

CLASSIFICATION TYPE	ON-LINE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD	
<b>Asynchronous</b>	<b>E-mail</b>	Suitable for 1-1 on-line interviews. Communication based on messages and file attachments.
	<b>E-mail list(servs):</b>	Suitable for on-line focus groups and on-line observation. Communication based on list processing software and distributes e-mail to subscribed users.
	<b>UseNet/News groups</b>	Suitable of on-line focus groups and on-line observation. Communication based on newsgroups hosted on servers and the temporary storage of information.
<b>Synchronous</b>	<b>Internet Relay Chat (IRC)</b>	Suitable for interviews, on-line focus groups and on-line observation. Communication based on interactive, text-based discussion system delivered via a networked computer chat server.
	<b>Multi-user Dungeons/Domains (MUDs) and MUD Object-Oriented (MOOs):</b>	Suitable for on-line participant observation. Communication is based on the gaming environment where participants have the potential to set up virtual places to facilitated collaboration.

Once the choice has been made to use on-line focus groups as research method the respondents are recruited via traditional off-line methods as well as e-mail. Prerequisites for recruiting respondents are:

- They must have access to the Internet
- Participation must be voluntary
- They must be fluent in the language the group will be conducted in for example English (Clarke 2000)
- They must be 'e-literate' for example be comfortable with typing responses and communicating in an electronic environment. They should be knowledgeable on unique terms/phrases/emoticons for example co.za-dictionary
- They must be willing to exchange personal information to the recruiting agency/researcher required for the specific profile needed to take part in the discussion (Rezabek 2000).

Respondents are given a date and time that the group will be conducted and are requested to download free IRC chat software. If needed additional reading material about the topic and details on how to log into the chat-room usually hosted by the research house must be sent prior to the group proceedings. Each respondent must sign an Informed Consent Form asking for voluntary participation providing as much or as little input they feel comfortable with (Rezabek 2000). At the designated time everybody including the client (as observer) can log in. It is possible for the client and researcher/moderator to have a private chat during group proceedings. This provides the observing party with the ability to direct the moderator's questioning as the discussion continuous. The moderator introduces the discussion and gets chatting as in a traditional group setting. On completion the chat and transcripts are saved electronically making it available for content analysis at a later stage (<http://www.biz-communicity.com/article/Print> June. 2005).

### **11.3 Examples of on-line focus groups**

- International corporate players in the retail market invest in buying specific on-line qualitative research tools for example Procter & Gamble bought a tool set created by a company called Recipio. If you visit Pg.com and click on the "Try & Buy New Products:" link or the "Help Us Create New Products" link, you will be transferred to virtual real-time focus group. Consumers express their opinions and rate the opinions of others about various P&G brands. According to Schar: "You can see literally as a consumer goes through a concept and gets instantaneous feedback about what they liked, what they didn't like in ways you could never do in a paper-based environment" (Ellis 2001: 92). Other companies that followed suit were General Motors, NBC and Whirlpool.
- Similar to this project, Sharf in Clarke (2000) reported to successfully collecting research material by 'lurking' on a newsgroup created for the support of those individuals with breast cancer.
- Another example is the one depicted in this advertisement included as figure 11.1:

Worldwide network, moving cameras,  
broadcast quality equipment...

With FocusVision **International**  
the difference is perfectly clear.

*Only FocusVision has live camera operators, dedicated equipment, and a 24 hour technical support center to monitor projects anytime and anywhere in the world. International users also benefit from the ability to hear the live simultaneous language translation at their viewing location.*



**Global Researchers,** view your live focus groups from around the world without travel. FocusVision is the world leader in the live transmission of qualitative research from a network of over 300 top-rated, independent focus facilities. The same facilities you probably use now.

Whether it is FocusVision VideoConferencing or VideoStreaming (or both) your projects will benefit from the increased participation that real-time, remote viewing makes possible while saving time and reducing the costs and hassles associated with travel.

<p><b>WESTERN EUROPE/UK</b></p> <p><b>BELGIUM</b> Antwerp Synovate Belgium</p> <p><b>DENMARK</b> Copenhagen GfK Denmark A/S</p> <p><b>ENGLAND</b> Birmingham Midlands-On-View Second City Studios Cheshire Aspect Viewing Facilities East Molesey Viewpoint Studios II London All Global Viewing City Financial Focus-City Focus Ltd Field Facts Worldwide London Focus The Treehouse Wyoming Studios Manchester (Cheshire) Fast Forward Research Oracle Market Research Sambury-on-Thames Viewpoint Studios</p> <p><b>FRANCE</b> Lille Agora/CARE Lyon Marketing Espace Synovate France Paris Alaska Catherine Delannoy &amp; Associates Field Facts Worldwide GfK/Sofema S.A.R.L. La Maison Du Test MVZ Conseil Novatest Passerelles Puzzle Reunions Services</p> <p><b>GERMANY</b> Berlin Answers Test Studio GmbH Freyer Marktforschung GmbH Interview + Exploration</p>	<p>Marktforschung Berlin GmbH Cologne JIM Marktforschung Frankfurt Field Facts Worldwide GD Medizinische Marktforschung GmbH Interview + Exploration Julia Otte GmbH IstraTeam GmbH Objective Consumer Research &amp; Consulting GmbH Hamburg Answers Test Studio GmbH GfK Data Services Interview + Exploration Julia Otte GmbH Schwieger Marktforschung Munich Freyer Marktforschung GmbH Interview + Exploration GmbH Konzepth Nurnberg Concentra Wiesbaden/Frankfurt Synovate Germany <b>ITALY</b> Milan ISI International Surveys in Italy Istituto Piepoli Spazio Milano Naples ADACTA Rome A.M.T. Consulting GfK-ASM PRAGMA SGR International Studio Nardo Torino Quality Medical Field <b>THE NETHERLANDS</b> Amsterdam Synovate The Netherlands <b>SCOTLAND</b> Taylor McKenzie Ltd. <b>SPAIN</b> Barcelona Delta Market Research Estudio Silvia Roca Synovate Barcelona</p>	<p>Madrid Delta Market Research Escario &amp; Associates Merka Star Research Nueva Investigacion Nueva Sala QUIO Investigacion de Mercados Sales Castello-23 Synovate Madrid <b>SWEDEN</b> Stockholm IMRI-International Marketing Research Institute <b>EASTERN EUROPE</b> <b>CZECH REPUBLIC</b> Prague GfK PRAHA <b>POLAND</b> Warsaw EEI Market Research GfK Warsaw <b>M. EAST &amp; AFRICA</b> <b>MOROCCO</b> Casablanca Synovate (MEMRB) <b>NORTH AMERICA</b> <b>CANADA</b> Montreal Contemporary Research Toronto Consumer Vision Contemporary Research Toronto Focus Vancouver Consumer Research <b>ASIA PACIFIC</b> <b>AUSTRALIA</b> Melbourne Viewpoint Group Rooms Sydney MRA Marketing &amp; Research Assoc. <b>CHINA</b> Beijing Acorn-Vantage Marketing &amp; Research Co. Guangzhou Acorn-Vantage Marketing &amp; Research Co. Hong Kong Acorn Marketing &amp; Research Consultants Shanghai</p>	<p>Acorn-Vantage Marketing &amp; Research Co. <b>JAPAN</b> Osaka Japan Statistics &amp; Research Co. Pulse Co., Ltd Tokyo Infonian Inc. IMRB Research International Japan LYNCS - Market Focus <b>KOREA</b> Seoul Acorn Marketing and Research Consultants Gallup Korea <b>MALAYSIA</b> Kuala Lumpur Acorn Marketing &amp; Research Consultants <b>PHILIPPINES</b> Manila/Makati City EB Consumer Research Services <b>SINGAPORE</b> Singapore Acorn Marketing &amp; Research Consultants <b>TAIWAN</b> Taipei Acorn Marketing &amp; Research Consultants <b>THAILAND</b> Bangkok Consumer Insights Co., Ltd. <b>LATIN AMERICA</b> <b>ARGENTINA</b> Buenos Aires Infoquality <b>BRAZIL</b> Sao Paulo Demanda EP Escritorio de Pesquisa LARC Pesquisa de Marketing Target Pesquisas E Servicos de Marketing LTDA <b>MEXICO</b> Mexico City Facta Research Investigacion Integral de Mercados S.C.-Intermerk NODO (Pearson) <b>VENEZUELA</b> Caracas Esmefar-Estime Marketing Research Venezuela</p>
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Figure 11.1: Focus Vision advertisement for on-line focus groups (Intelligence: The magazine for a new breed of business leader July 2005)

### **11.4 Advantages of on-line focus groups**

Gaiser in Clarke (2000) discussed the nature of the on-line focus groups and documented the following advantages:

- On-line focus groups provide a naturalistic setting for studying group dynamics in cyberspace. (The results of this study reiterated this finding).
- On-line focus groups represent diverse groups across the global cyberspace culture.
- More time is available for interviewing than what is possible in face-to-face groups.

Hamman in Clarke (2000) contributed the following advantages based on his research on cyber-sex in America On-line (AOL) chat-rooms:

- Researchers have access to a considerable pool of potential respondents. This is obviously dependant on the topic and profile needed.
- Access to respondents become easier since they are available 24 hours a day regardless of physical locations.
- The physical interviewer has limited influence on responses, implying that responses are more trustworthy and real.

Elaborating on the pool of potential respondents Coomber in Clarke (2000) stated that:

- The Internet is useful especially in those cases where research has to be conducted under rare groups of people. One example is CEO's that are never available for a personal or telephonic interview, let alone a focus group. As in this research project, valuable information was retrieved from on-line groups for drug addicts and homosexual individual for example marginalized social identities.
- Asynchronous communication systems allow people separated by continents, time zones and work schedules to interact in cyberspace. This is possible since the textual record of the conversation is available to everybody despite of group entrance time.
- Due to the anonymity of on-line focus groups, open and honest responses are more common especially around sensitive topics.
- The faceless encounters in cyberspace provide equality among respondents.
- Electronic communication provides the respondent with the opportunity to reflect before sending a posting implying the production of a closer fit between ideas, intentions and written expressions.

In addition to the above various cost related benefits also apply to on-line focus groups (Stewart in Clarke 2000):

- Reduced travel, venue and transcribing costs
- Reduced need for synchronous interview times
- Easy storage and archiving
- Ease of distribution of discourse interpretations to participants for evaluation
- Ease of publishing and updating results electronically on-line.

### ***11.5 Disadvantages of on-line focus groups***

Gaiser in Clarke (2000) noted the following disadvantages:

- Sampling difficulties related to demographics of the Internet audiences since it changes continuously
- Possible bias if on-line interest groups are used when recruiting respondents implying an over representation of individuals holding a specific perspective
- Difficulties around privacy of on-line research results
- Participants can view themselves as co-authors of material
- Challenges related to group moderating with servers/network downtime
- Lack of body language
- Difficulties to follow a discussion when postings are not always sequenced chronologically
- Problems to follow up with respondents that went off line
- In many cases the time of on-line focus groups are under predicted
- It can be difficult to ascertain the real group size due to 'lurkers' only observing the conversation
- As discussed earlier individuals can take up additional pseudopersonalities to disguise their characteristics and facilitate deception
- Although faceless encounters facilitate openness and honesty it can result in flame wars and personal insults if not controlled and moderated effectively.

## **11.6 ESOMAR guideline for conducting Internet research**

*"Every click you make - They'll be watching you" (Clarke 2000)*

### **11.6.1 What is ESOMAR?**

ESOMAR was founded in 1948 as the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research. European by origin, global by nature, ESOMAR unites 4 000 members in over 100 countries - both users and providers of opinion and marketing research. The organization is a pioneer in protecting the privacy of respondents. Its Codes of Conduct are constantly reviewed to ensure that researchers guarantee respondent' privacy irrespective of the techniques or technologies used to carry out research. Within .co.za borders ESOMAR guidelines are implemented and used throughout the industry and it is for this reason that the 'Guideline on conducting Marketing and Opinion Research Using the Internet' is applicable within the chapter's context.

### **11.6.2 Basic principles guiding Internet research techniques**

- *Co-operation is voluntary:*  
Respondents must give their consent for retrieving personal information as well as for participation in the study. Researchers must not mislead them about the nature of the research and the uses of the findings for example use it for direct marketing or other sales approaches. They must always be informed about cookies or other cover software that will be used during the research project so that they can turn them off or remove them at any time. Respondents must be made aware of any costs related to the study and can at any stage retract from the study. They are entitled at any stage to request that part or all of the records/interview material be destroyed.
- *The researcher's identity must be disclosed:*  
Respondents must be able to contact the researcher during and after the research project.

- *Respondent's anonymity must be safeguarded:*

Respondents must at all times give permission for data to be passed on in a form which allows them to be personally identified. In the case of public domains and newsgroups, respondents are aware of the fact that if they send postings it will be in public domain and can be viewed by everybody. However as is in the case of this study should there be direct referrals to postings and comments *no information* may be disclosed that can allude to the identity of the individual without their prior consent. In this particular study where individual verbatim quotes have been included no pseudonyms have been included, only the chat-room wherein this individual interacted where noted.

- *Private policy statements:*

A guide has been provided to researchers for on-line private policy statements that must accompany the document, on-line research site or group.

- *Data security:*

Researchers must have the necessary precautions for example fire walls in place to protect the security of sensitive on-line data.

- *Reliability and validity:*

Research users and the public should not be misled about the reliability and validity of results. This implies that any results made public should be well explained in terms of its limitations, scientific sampling method including a description of the population involved and research methodology used.

- *Interviewing children and young people:*

All the relevant laws and national codes specifically relating to minors must be adhered to. Within .co.za borders a legal guardian/parent must sign an informed consent form on behalf of the child (younger than 18). On-line research projects aimed at children must require a child to give their age before any other personal information is requested. If the age is below the nationally agreed threshold, the child should be excluded from the survey and all personal information gathered up to that point should be discarded until the appropriate consent has been given. At any stage during the research process the legal guardian/parents can observe and/or accompany the minor.

- *Unsolicited e-mails:*  
(Also referred to as 'spam'.) Researchers should not send unsolicited messages on-line to respondents who have indicated that they do not wish to receive such messages including follow up correspondence.

## **11.7 On-line focus groups in South Africa**

To elaborate on the applicability of on-line focus groups in the South African market, 10 South African researchers and psychologists were interviewed.

### **11.7.1 The questionnaire**

The following open-ended questions guided the interview process:

- Does the (company) conduct on-line focus groups? (Yes/No)  
(IF NO) Why not?  
(IF YES) In which industries?
- What are the typical research topics that fit well with on-line focus groups?
- In your opinion what are the three main advantages of on-line focus groups?
- In your opinion what are the 3 main disadvantages of on-line focus groups?
- In your opinion is there a future for on-line focus groups in South Africa and why?

### **11.7.2 Summary of results**

The majority of them felt since the Internet is only being used by a small market segment it is not a very popular research tool in South Africa. Many institutions for example the SABC cater for all population

and income groups and do not budget for unique, small and focused market segments. However other media owners such as MNET embarked on Internet research methods only recently since their market focus specifically on the higher income earner who has access to the Internet.

Examples of research topics that fit well with on-line focus groups are sensitive topics for example sexual behaviour. In other cases chat-rooms related to specific television programmes for example 'Pop Idols' also attract Internet audiences that can be explored for research projects.

When looking at the advantages of on-line focus groups:

- The majority felt that readily available electronic transcripts were the biggest and most important advantage.
- Secondly they felt that people tend to be more open and honest with on-line responses.
- Thirdly they agreed against the backdrop of tight deadlines it is always beneficial to have the research results available immediately.

The other side of the coin for example disadvantages can be summarised as follows:

- On-line results will always reflect views and opinions of a specific captive target market.
- Since it remains unexplored territory for the majority of South African researchers they feel the text is limited in the sense that it becomes difficult to load video clips, audio etc. onto the on-line focus group.
- The lack of identifying non-verbal behaviour was also mentioned as a disadvantage.
- The South African business market is moving towards self employment and small businesses. These people don't see the feasibility in staying on-line for an hour or more, since many of them have an Internet connection at home via a Telkom line which they have to pay for.

### **11.7.3 Contributing external factors**

Since on-line focus groups are only applicable to roughly 8% of our general population in South Africa that has access to the Internet, Clarke (2000) argues that other factors also limit the use of this particular method in the local research industry. She discussed issues around bandwidth or the amount of information that can be transmitted across a network in a given amount of time. Currently in South Africa available bandwidth is related to cost. This implies that those services that require less

bandwidth for example asynchronous e-mail and news groups (as in the case of this study) are often more popular to researchers than the counterparts for example expensive video and audio based methods.

## **11.8 Concluding summary**

This chapter addressed the applicability of the chat-room as an ethical research tool specifically in the South African context. It seems that although an effective tool for international surveys on sensitive topics, the South African research market is not ready for this tool to be implemented. It is only applicable in those cases where there is a specific captive Internet audience. Since it is only the minority of the South African market who has access to the Internet, limited budgets are available for Internet research in general. Internet research especially on-line focus groups are something for the future since the current need currently within South Africa is to focus more time, money and effort towards addressing social problems such as HIV/AIDS, illiteracy and unemployment.

## CHAPTER 12: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*"What ever you are be a good one"*  
Abraham Lincoln

### **12.1 Introduction**

For the past four years, this has been a scientific journey aiming to provide a description of a particular group of people, defined as the 'Generation Xers', who is believed to have and still is developing a new 'cyberspace culture' by way of a fourfold process:

- Firstly through intensive interacting in cyberspace chat-rooms;
- Secondly developing cyberspace personalities or 'pseudopersonalities' that are different from their individual 'normal' personalities;
- Thirdly by sharing unique values, opinions and attitudes with other Generation Xers globally; and
- Fourthly, by developing a distinct new cyberspace culture from cyberspace interaction.

The study initially was broadly aimed at participants in chat-room discussions. The eventual focus was placed on Generation Xers living in a modern world delineated by .co.za-borders. The existing body of knowledge, literature and research that were available during the course of the research project, were limited in describing this unique group of South African Internet users and some of the dynamics behind their usage patterns. In order to scientifically investigate this phenomenon the CEMDA research method was selected to combine quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in order to analyse the Internet experience on three different levels.

### **12.2 Military-civilian IT interface**

The Internet began in 1969 as a USA Department of Defence project called ARPANET. In a very short space of time it developed into the World Wide Web, used by a multitude of people on a global basis. What started out as a military communications project specifically designed for a military environment, now covers the globe and represents the digital revolution that has had and still are having an impact on traditional communication methods, Generation Xers' perception of the 'self', traditional cultural values and several other social phenomena.

Traditional person-to-person communication changed to cyber-communication where the individual has access to local and global audiences whilst interacting and sharing information. Chat-rooms and other web spaces act as environments where members of 'virtual' communities meet to share interests, ideas, values, perceptions and by doing so shaping each other's attitudes. The Internet is used by ordinary people on a daily basis to interact and communicate with others whether it is via e-mail communication, chat-room interaction, virtual conferences or webcam interaction.

### ***12.3 Unique features of the research process***

The researcher made a brave choice in delineating the chosen topic since she reconnoitred uncharted research territory by being venturous in penetrating cyberspace. The research project was unique since it converged IT, psychology and other scientific disciplines. The research field proved to be multifaceted having had to account for a large number of variables, parameters and levels of research interaction as well as analyses. Cyberspace redefines, destructs and even eliminates the boundaries of human existence and different research disciplines, thus explaining why the executed research project merged various disciplines such as Psychology, Information Science and Technology as well as Sociology. Writing the thesis required a new creative and crispy style of writing and presentation of visual, graphic and other materials. New terminologies such as "slanguage", .co.za-borders and .co.za tribal community were required. Lastly the research project pitted Victorian or conservative closure against cyberspace openness. Literature is full of examples of scientific failures where behavioural scientists entered these uncharted territories equipped with rigid, causal, predefined processes and methods that 'forced' everything into becoming 'nails' since a 'hammer' was the only tool available in the researcher's toolbox. Research in cyberspace requires a flexible approach.

For this psychological research venture into the uncharted territory of cyberspace, the Humanistic paradigm was chosen as theoretical framework, guiding the design of appropriate research methodology. By looking through a Humanistic lens, cyberspace culture and its developmental process, was described as it was **experienced** by Generation Xers with a specific focus on chat-room interaction. The researcher decided on the role of a "passive observer" which implied no contact at all with chat-room participants during and after conversations. It nevertheless proved to be a successful method to remain close to the 'real' virtual experiences of the individuals.

By adopting this approach the 'research territory' dictated and ultimately led to a selection of appropriate 'tools' that was used during the scientific investigation. This is an example of a flexible approach wherein the researcher continuously had to check whether the research tools still accurately addressed the targets(s)/objectives formulated in the initial designing phase of the project. In this project the principle of flexibility was also put to practise by including two distinct 'exit routes' in between research phases (called pit stops or off-ramps) namely:

- The first off-ramp or 'Generation X off-ramp' was aimed at evaluating how well the research sample or chat-room participants represented the population defined as Generation Xers.
- The second off-ramp was called the "CR off-ramp' or 'Chat-room off-ramp' that evaluated the effectiveness of the chat-room as research tool within the South African research context.

Future researchers should always choose a flexible methodology when embarking on either charted or uncharted scientific investigations that are innovative since diverse views and points of departure will have to be accounted for. The CEMDA research method implemented in this project was effective in addressing the research objectives and results confirmed the existence of a cyberspace culture specifically within .co.za-borders. The flexibility imbedded in the method made it possible to combine quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in order analyse the Internet experience on three different levels.

## **12.4 Main research findings**

Everyday use of the Internet as communication medium contributed to renewed thinking in both civilian and research environments about personality as a phenomenon of multiplicity. The concept of multiple selves has been viewed by many psychologists as dysfunctional and abnormal. The results of this study have shown that the development of pseudopersonalities in cyberspace is a functional way of Generation Xers to adapt to a rapidly changing, complex world. Cyberspace is a cognitive and social space, an extension of the physical world, an electronic reflection of the world people currently inhabit. In the virtual world information is more important than physical appearance and therefore the possibility exists to create multiple pseudopersonalities. Unique characteristics of Internet interaction, for example individual anonymity and individual control over revealing information, attract those people who find it difficult to express the 'real-me' in face-to-face encounters. Pseudopersonalities are temporary "vehicles" constructed by people for the journey of actualisation.

Although Generation Xers represent a minority (7-8%) of the total population, they have a monopoly in terms of economic wealth and buying power. They do not consider themselves as part of the Third World as they generally reside in major metropolitan areas that are fully equipped with First World resources and infrastructure that they operate with and within. They have developed a unique .co.za tribal community and welcome 'newbies' in .co.za chat-rooms. They have developed a .co.za-dictionary that provides assistance in understanding the 'slanguage' used in .co.za chat-rooms, since it is based on a combination of at least three of the eleven official South African languages. It doesn't take long for a 'newbie' to realise that unique creative .co.za tribal rituals and practises reflect diverse but real life experiences of South Africans in all parts of the country. Heated debates on societal problems such as racism, politics and sexuality between a young black person that grew up in a township and a conservative right-wing, Afrikaans-speaking male were common in these chat-rooms.

South African Generation Xers could be described as a diverse group of people representing different segments in the general population. They generally were the richer and more affluent part of South African society, mostly living in major metropolitan areas, earning R12 000+ per month and were classified as LSM 7-10, especially LSM8. The group was predominantly but not exclusively white, male and participants working on a full- or part-time basis. Although people from different age groups between 16 and 49 years from the general population access the Internet, higher access figures are reported among adolescents, young adults, many whom have married for the first time as well as being new to parenthood.

During on-line interaction in chat-rooms, Generation Xers developed their own unique on-line language namely the .co.za-dictionary (refer to table 9.3) as well as an unique value system that characterised cyberspace culture shared by virtual communities on a global basis. These values could be summarised as follows:

- Should these Generation Xers become future economic and political leaders, independent thought, creativity and freedom of expression would be important to them. Social justice and equality together with a respect for authenticity and diversity characterised their on-line interpersonal relationships. The .co.za-voter reiterated this group's broadminded view of the world where equality is the result of respecting the individual intrinsically and not the title, or position or rank.

- Computer hackers form a subsection of the Generation Xers. Despite the illegal and destructive activities mostly associated with computer hackers, they also fulfil a unique, positive social preservation function in the cyberspace culture value system. By hacking into computer networks of governments and large corporate companies, they counter the modern undesirable trend of governing bodies to increasingly control individual thought and behaviour (the Big Brother approach) in cyberspace. In a positive sense, hacking is an attempt to counter threats to the human rights of freedom of speech, association, religion and privacy. In this sense it also attempts to lessen state autocracy and foster individual and group democracy. A virtual community is based on the philosophy of empowering others through cyber or virtual networks, especially people with common interests. The virtual community is controlled by its members, and not by outside parties; members of virtual communities perceive themselves as part of a self-generating knowledge base.
- The 'Big Brother' paradigm as part of South Africa's history, being both present in the current and previous government, was or still is constantly regulating individual actions. The previous government left a legacy of apartheid and segregation. Today Generation Xers in the .co.za-tribe do not always view hackers as criminals, instead these activities are applauded by many since they view it as taking an active stance against the Big Brother approach of the previous Nationalist government, giving individuals back their right to freedom of expression and choice. In cyberspace, traditional, conservative cultural values such as apartheid, the strengthening of walls to keep 'them' separated from 'us', and gender inequality are replaced with a respect for diversity and an openness to the unknown. These values are the foundations of attempts to 'build' and not 'burn' bridges between segregated groups by directly targeting traditional cultural taboos such as sexual secrecy and today males and females discuss sexuality openly in chat-rooms. Most Generation Xers (noticeably the young Black Yuppies) also target the existing government in South Africa. The same government that returned freedom of expression, other human rights and true democracy, is the one that is slowly but surely eroding these universal human rights and other benefits by resorting to a dated ideology by increased centralised government, resorting to unwise, impractical and expensive political policies, decisions and actions, provision of a grossly inadequate educational system that leads to a lack of appropriate technological skills in a rapidly expanding IT environment, and the use of force to repress dissatisfaction with non-delivery of services to under developed poor communities.

- Results from the qualitative analysis nevertheless showed a deep-rooted cultural connection to other Generation Xers specifically in terms of respect for similar values systems that are shared in modern cyberspace culture. A Generation Xer even composed his own 'cyber-anthem' illustrating this new-found patriotism for a unique virtual community that are connected to the global network of Generation Xers.
- While sexuality was not discussed openly across gender groups in traditional more conservative cultures, Generation Xers value heterosexual principles and discuss their preferences openly in chat-rooms.
- Despite the importance of values such as an openness to change and respect for diversity, people from different racial dominations still battle to integrate different belief systems. Despite these findings, chat-rooms were used as public forums that stimulated interaction between heterogeneous groups since cyberspace is controlled by individuals and not by political parties and governing bodies.

These values coupled with the importance of the process of self-exploration are the foundation of virtual social networks whereby Generation Xers gain deeper insight into the meaning of human existence, interaction and everyday life.

Generation Xers as members of virtual communities are rooted in and operate from an underlying philosophy of empowering others through cyber or virtual networks of people with common interests. Values that were not regarded as really important to Generation Xers were:

- Economic - In the few cases where economic issues were dealt with, people focussed on financial decisions taken by 'good' and 'bad' politicians followed by analyses of their own personal battles to survive financially.
- Education - Another theme that was *not* top-of-the-mind was education despite the fact that South Africa currently has a shortage of teachers and major changes to tertiary education systems are taking place. Suggestions to improve, enhance and advance educational training in South Africa were made.
- Crime - Despite the fact that South Africa's crime statistics are of the highest in the world, relatively limited chatting time was spent on this topic.

- HIV/AIDS - Although a serious problem in South Africa, HIV/AIDS was also not top-of-the-mind as far as Generation Xers were concerned.

Although many of these values are currently pressing problems, discussed and dealt with by government and the public in general, Generation Xers did not share these views and issues and to a certain extent separated themselves from it. In future this can widen the gap between those that have access to technology and those that do not, also called the 'Digital Divide'. Despite governmental and institutional efforts to provide previously disadvantaged communities with computers and access to the Internet, the ranks of Generation Xers could become even smaller, secluded, exclusive and segregated groups of people making them even more inaccessible for interaction with the lesser educated masses since they have learnt to rely on their own unique .co.za-dictionary while they communicate and interact in selected chat-rooms on the Internet. Despite efforts from the government and private sector to improve e-literacy levels amongst the youth, the major part of South African society continues to be the poor section of the nation. These people have to earn adequate incomes in order to have access to computers. In a Utopia all human beings are created equal, in terms of literacy, and economic means. Shortcomings such as a lack of linguistic and mathematical skills, innumeracy, dependence on and use of a second language rather than home language, and other modern demands compound the inability of unskilled people to bridge the 'Digital Divide'. These individuals should obviously be motivated by giving them better access to the Internet and by making it an integral part of their daily style of living. If these challenges are not met, growth in Internet user figures will remain low; a privilege enjoyed by a minority group of wealthier South Africans. Lastly, a modern up-to-date information technological system is heavily dependent on a continuous, uninterrupted and affordable supply of electricity. In this respect the new South Africa of 2006 is found wanting.

## ***12.5 Enforced digressions***

Reference to Figure 1.1 is a useful guideline for the following discussion. The blue steps in this graphic presentation referred to those facets that formed the main research process. The green components in turn referred to the outcomes of the research that was undertaken and thus covered the results of the investigation. All remaining elements were digressions or "off-ramps" which indicated at least temporary digression from the main research activities to clarify important matters. Nine off-ramps were taken all-in-all:

a. Creative researcher (First yellow off-ramp)

Since the researcher ventured into uncharted territory during this project, she used her own creativity as an important research tool throughout the process. This was evident in the crispy style of writing in the manuscript. A need for new concepts continuously cropped up during analyses whilst existing literature and theories failed miserably in describing and explaining these concepts and processes effectively. The reader was entertained right through the manuscript with new, crispy and sometimes brutally honest descriptions, concepts and chat-room discussions, sometimes quoted verbatim. Keeping the Humanistic paradigm in mind the researcher successfully reported research results that remained close to the actual virtual experiences of Generation Xers. Although entertaining to the reader and despite being an accurate description of chat-room experiences, these new concepts, however, require a solid theoretical base that only further thorough scientific research can provide. This variation of writing style opens up a wide field for future researchers to focus on new terminology, scientific criticism and reformulation of these, development of new theories around them, and continuation of the creative process as essential part of practising science in future.

b. Literature (Second off-ramp)

Topics such as social interaction, pseudo- and constructive personality, communal life and culture have been thoroughly researched. Thus an abundant source of literature on these and related topics had become available over years. Sources on these and other topics within the context of cyberspace are relatively limited. The brevity list of references in this thesis confirmed this.

c. Research methodology (Third off-ramp)

The research design mainly was qualitative by nature. A method that would enable the researcher to analyse the data set on different levels such as the interactive level between individuals in chat-rooms, everyday-life situations such interaction brought about in chat-rooms and the level of a unique community in a virtual context, was obviously needed. The CEMDA method or Complimentary Explorative Multilevel Data Analysis approach was particularly suitable for this research purpose.

d. Methodological considerations (Fourth off-ramp)

Besides the need for a multileveled method of data analysis, the researcher of human behaviour in a cyberspace context, adopted a "participant observer" role in a virtual or faceless series of interactions between chat-room participants who were unaware that their participation were being monitored. This of course has ethical implications.

e. Consideration of research ethics (Fifth off-ramp)

The chat-room environment in a cyberspace context is unique. Participants usually are heavily engaged in social interaction that are not face-to-face contacts as in everyday life, but completely or nearly completely anonymous. The central research questions in this study were twofold:

- Who are legally responsible and accountable for chat-room proceedings?
- Who are morally responsible for social interchange (or exchange) and outcomes with undesirable consequences?

The situation in practice is quite complex. All in all five parties are involved in chat-room presentations during attempts to research this phenomenon. The first accountable and responsible party is the IT host which may be a radio station, a national or local newspaper or a media service provider. The second party is the provider of the Internet service that has contractually been commissioned by the IT host to provide an Internet facility. The third party is the communications authority that provides telephone lines and wireless signals to Internet providers and who makes connection to global world-wide networks possible. The fourth party of course is the chat-room participant. In the case of behavioural research the participating and observing researcher is the fifth responsible and accountable partner. This labyrinth of interested and accountable parties need to be considered in issues of cyberspace ethics.

f. Sampling (Sixth off-ramp)

Sampling required upfront inputs with regard to sample size for research purposes, and an appropriate sampling frame for probabilistic and non-probabilistic selection of chat-rooms and the actual sampling of chat-room protocols within the respective chat-rooms.

g. Representative sample (Seventh off-ramp)

Representivity of the sample was important for four distinct reasons. Was the sample that was actually taken representative of South African Internet users? How did the South African population compare to the global Internet population? How certain was the researcher that the Generation X population was part and parcel of the South African population of Internet users? What confounding role did the presence of and contact with other subcultures and counterculture groups have in the assessment of the Generation X segment?

h. Internet Cyber population (Eighth off-ramp)

A research step that is linked up with the representivity of the sample is the issue of the relevance of the sample as mirror image of the South African population of Internet users, particularly Internet users from the Generation X subculture. Because of the unique set-up and characteristics of the chat-room cyberspace sampling was not done by hands-on procedures but rather by procedures at arm's length, that is by procedures requiring action from a distance which is an unique approach to participant observation as an important prerequisite for qualitative research.

i. Cyberspace culture (Ninth off-ramp)

The final issue focused on analysis of symbolic cyber action and cyber behaviour that enabled the researcher to draw inferences and conclusions with regard to moral regeneration, cyber attitude, cyber values and group cohesion. These issues redirected the focus of the research activities that were necessary to obtain the stated research objectives and provided the outcomes that constituted the main thrust of the research activities that contributed to the compilation of this thesis.

From the above description it is obvious that these digressions be made timeously and that careful consideration be given to each of them in terms of the profound impact that they might have on the researcher's research processes and activities.

## **12.6 Limitations of the survey**

As is the case in any other research project, the limitations of this particular study could be summarised as follows:

- The existence of important counterculture groups within .co.za-borders that fell outside the scope of the current set of scientific research objectives.
- Unclear ethical principles guiding Internet research methodologies, resulting from the multitude of questions related to ownership of chat-rooms, possible abusive behaviour that could only be traced electronically to specific individuals, abuse of recognition of human rights as well as the electronic interface between the researcher and the researched. Who is responsible for and maintains moral discipline in a chat-room environment?

- Another limitation was being a passive observer of on-line behaviour.
- Although use of the 'virtual' version of the Johari-window was exciting knowledge of its impact in cyberspace is still lacking.

Each of these limitations is set out in more detail.

a. The existence of counterculture groups within .co.za-borders

Although the aim of the survey was to focus on Generation Xers, results indicated that not all South African Internet users and chat-room participants fitted the profile of a typical Generation Xer and that they might be seen as members of other counterculture groups. More specifically they were individuals who propagated homosexuality, drug addiction and even racism. Aggressive individuals often attempted to break down on-line group cohesiveness and harmony by their pleas for tolerance towards fellow members of countercultures and their preferred personal lifestyles. They did not have a respect for diversity, nor did they share in Generation Xers' broadminded view of the world in general. Instead their own needs for power and control over on-line group members were evident in the pseudopersonalities they created, as well as their on-line behavioural patterns. When these individuals entered a chat-room, flame wars often erupted and in many cases the on-line conflict situations were not resolved. This group of people as well as the dynamics of their behaviour need to be researched and further explored in future projects.

b. Unclear ethical principles guiding Internet research methodologies

This study illustrated how quantitative and qualitative research methodologies could be combined when a complex phenomenon such cyberspace culture is explored but it could not report convincingly on clear indications and directions that researchers need in terms of the ethics surrounding Internet research. In this survey chat-rooms within the public domain were chosen contexts and this by implication meant that participants were unaware that someone was viewing their postings. Although the ethical code of conduct in normal social research clearly prescribes that participating individuals' identity not be revealed without their prior consent, it was unclear whether or not the same principle applied to the identity of websites hosting these chat-rooms. Since the answer is unclear, the researcher decided not to reveal the names of the websites that hosted the chat-rooms that were included in this survey. Problems pertaining to the implementation of ethical Internet research practices could be explored further by other researchers.

c. Limitations of being a passive observer of on-line behaviour

In many cases senseless chatting characterised chat-room conversations. The researcher decided on a passive observer role which implied no contact with chat-room participants during and after conversations. The limitation imbedded in this approach was the loss of valuable information on chat-room participants and chat-room behaviour. If a researcher could partake in conversations he or she could post specific questions or make remarks that could motivate group members to increase participation and in doing so provide richer data for content analysis.

d. Limitations of the 'virtual' Johari-window concept

The normal or so-called off-line Johari window aims to describe the process whereby *group cohesion* is improved by sharing more information about oneself with others, thus trusting others enough to develop stronger interpersonal relationships with group members. This underlying principle was lacking in the investigation of the 'virtual' Johari-window since the aim now became an attempt to describe the influence of personal power on group interaction. Furthermore the role of the group moderator in contributing to the process of enhancing group cohesion, not always visible in or during participation in chat-room discussions, was also left out of the equation. It could also not provide answers for other group processes such as the impersonalised interactions that did take place during computer-mediated communication. This concept and how it influences on-line group cohesion still needs to be explored and developed in more detail.

## **12.7 Views on future research possibilities**

Scientific research will lose its excitement and appeal if researchers do not discover new paths and venture on new research routes along the way. The CEMDA research process recommends or even demands that new hypotheses based on current research results be formulated in order to ensure that the research cycle is kept alive, continuing its exploration for new frontiers in future research by asking more questions and by generating more knowledge. Resulting from this particular study the following hypotheses were formulated:

- The body of theoretical knowledge around Cyber-Psychology needed to be expanded on all three levels of the Internet experience. The applicability of existing psychological knowledge needed to be tested, adapted and new theories developed based on the limitations of existing knowledge. Further research on this is a necessity.
- Specific 'personality types' have been identified in this study namely:
  - a. Bullies
  - b. Concerned taxpayers
  - c. EMENM-wannabee's
  - d. Informed realists
  - e. Leisure-time experts
  - f. Sex traders
  - g. Society misfits
  - h. Wallflowers.

These specific personalities and their personality traits needed future exploration by means of standardised personality tests in order to draw valid and reliable conclusions about the presence of common or differential personality traits.

- Issues pertaining to the 'Digital Divide' within South Africa as well as in other developing or Third World countries could be explored further. Within .co.za-borders the issues around the 'have' and the 'have not' groups regarding Internet access should be monitored closely, continuously evaluating the impact and success of efforts to bridge this gap. Research on Internet usage and its dynamics in developing countries or Third World countries is limited. Valuable insights can be provided when Generation Xers residing in different Third World countries could be compared with each other.
- The phenomenon of the .co.za-voter and .co.za-culture within the .co.za-borders needed more exploration. Since politics will always be an important building block of South African society, emerging .co.za voters represent a challenge to and a change in the way in which political leaders and the public view them, their cultural rights and their unique and outspoken but constructive political needs. Multidisciplinary research teams could provide valuable insight into the dynamics behind .co.za-voters' perceptions, attitudes and behaviour.

- Sexuality was one of the themes that dominated on-line conversations because chat-rooms are perceived as a 'safe space' where individuals can address unresolved sexual conflicts. Since sexual research is sensitive and a difficult phenomenon to explore, psychologists with an interest in sexuality could use on-line chat-rooms as an effective medium to reach and interact with people with cyberspace versions of sexual problems. The anonymity of on-line participants and the use of pseudopersonalities motivate people to be more honest and open regarding their own personal feelings, attitudes and views on sensitive topics such as this.
- The phenomenon of 'transnational' families, that is families with members that are living on different continents, and the importance of Internet communication in their lives to rapidly cross geographical boundaries could also be explored further.
- The .co.za-dictionary shed some light on issues surrounding 'e-literacy'. Valuable insight is needed into the relationship between traditional literacy and 'e-literacy'. E-literacy, of course, is also decidedly linked to good verbal and neurophysiologic skills, non-verbal skills such as perception of symbols and multilingualism.
- The 'virtual' Johari window addressed the issue of personal power and control in cyberspace. Within this specific theoretical framework various research themes could be explored such as:
  - a. The psychological profile of the cyber-criminal
  - b. The positive and negative effects of the 'hacker' subculture within .co.za-borders
  - c. The prevalence of Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) among chat-room participants within .co.za-borders. This theme was also not addressed in the present study.
- Although on-line focus groups were not popular within .co.za borders, in future more research could be directed towards the effectiveness of on-line self-help groups during psychological therapeutic interventions. Many .co.za chat-room participants favoured self-help groups to discuss problems, receive help and interact with 'others like me'.

## **12.8 *The Internet chat-room as research tool***

The chat-room as research tool, equivalent to an on-line focus group is a 'foreign' concept to local researchers. These researchers thus still prefer traditional face-to-face focus groups, even when targeting .co.za-tribal members. Few traditional researchers will see it as a necessity for innovative local research projects. Comments by cyberspace researchers operating in the local research market suggested that the '.com-research toolbox' is a nice-to-have tool but is expensive and difficult to implement. They also felt that it was an appropriate methodology in research aimed at a specific captive Internet audience or where international clients insisted on its use. The majority still felt that crucial information on non-verbal behaviour was lost whilst e-groups did not effectively project emotions and other non-verbal gestures. Authenticity and representivity of on-line samples are still being questioned due to the lack of appropriate measures and infrastructures to implement valid and reliable cross-checks.

The '.com-research toolbox' currently fails to reflect true real life experiences of South Africans (Is real life experience equal to cyberspace life experience?). E-mail surveys generally have a very low response rate, and many times, on-line questionnaires are printed and sent back to the researcher via the traditional route such as fax machines. Ethical Internet research practices remain a proverbial hot potato since the majority of the .co.za-tribal members still do not trust website owners with personal information such as account details and ID numbers. In fact, the debates around ethical human-electronic interface have been heard in many academic circles, but there still is a reluctance to test these theories in practise. There is still a long way to go before the '.com-research toolbox' is accepted by the .co.za-tribe. However the possibility does exist to use the chat-room as vehicle for establishing on-line self-help groups since .co.za-tribal members feel comfortable under the protective cloak of anonymity provided by on-line chat-rooms for open discussion of personal and other problems, destructive behaviour as well as dependencies. In summary the on-line chat-room will remain an important medium where minority groups in society can voice opinions lost in the voice of society as a whole as expressed in other forms of mass media.

## **12.9 *Concluding summary***

Although this is the end to a specific research project with specific objectives that had to be addressed, the researcher hopes that she has provided useful information that would stimulate further discussion and debate around the continuous presence of cyberspace in this digital era, making cyberspace a noteworthy electronic reflection of the way some segments of populations wish to communicate, interact, share and arrange their lifestyles.

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