

CHAPTER 8: INTERNET-USER POPULATION

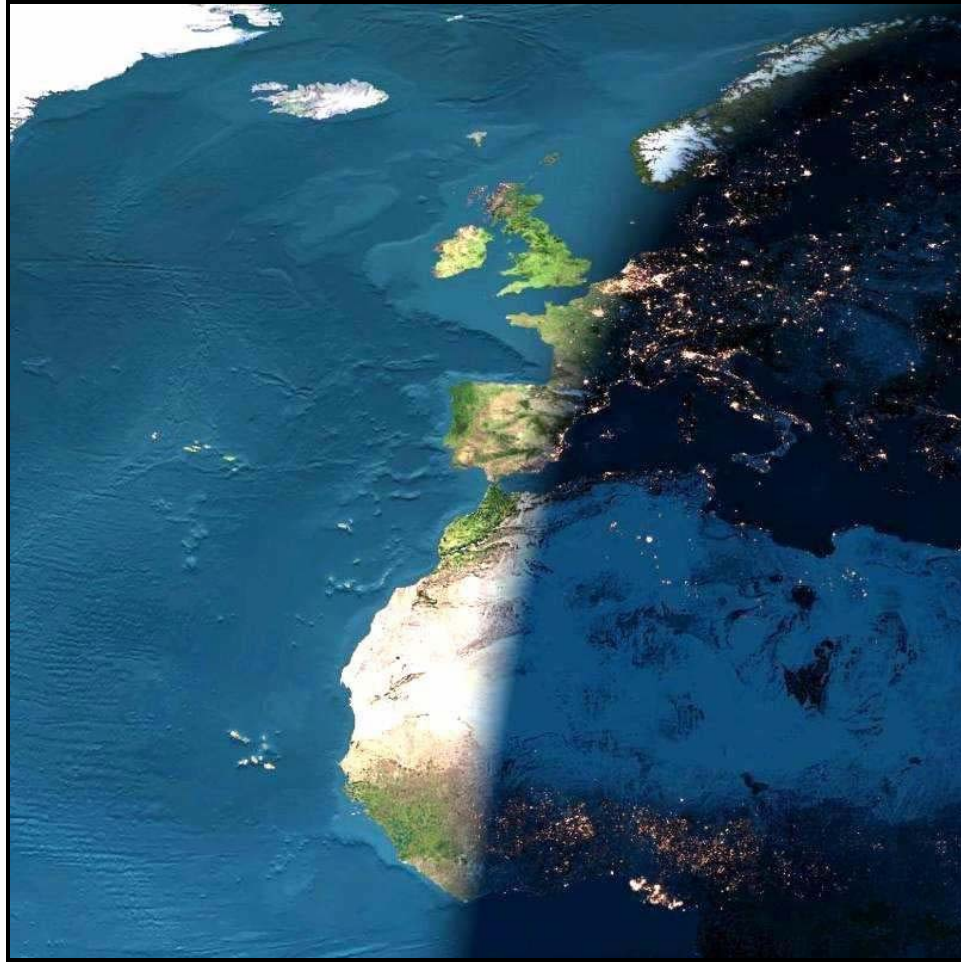


Figure 8.1: Sunset from space

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)
- 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) 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:

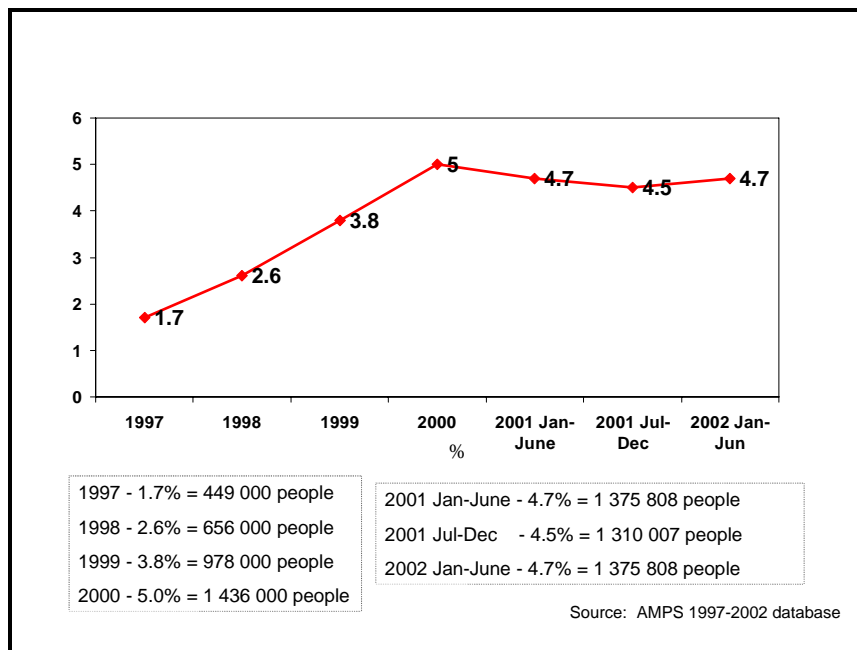
- The roll-out of competitive access services to businesses by a Second Network Operator (SNO), which has finally been granted a license to operate.
- The roll-out of high-speed or broadband wireless access by Sentech.
- The healthy Rand-dollar exchange rate, which has dramatically brought down the cost 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

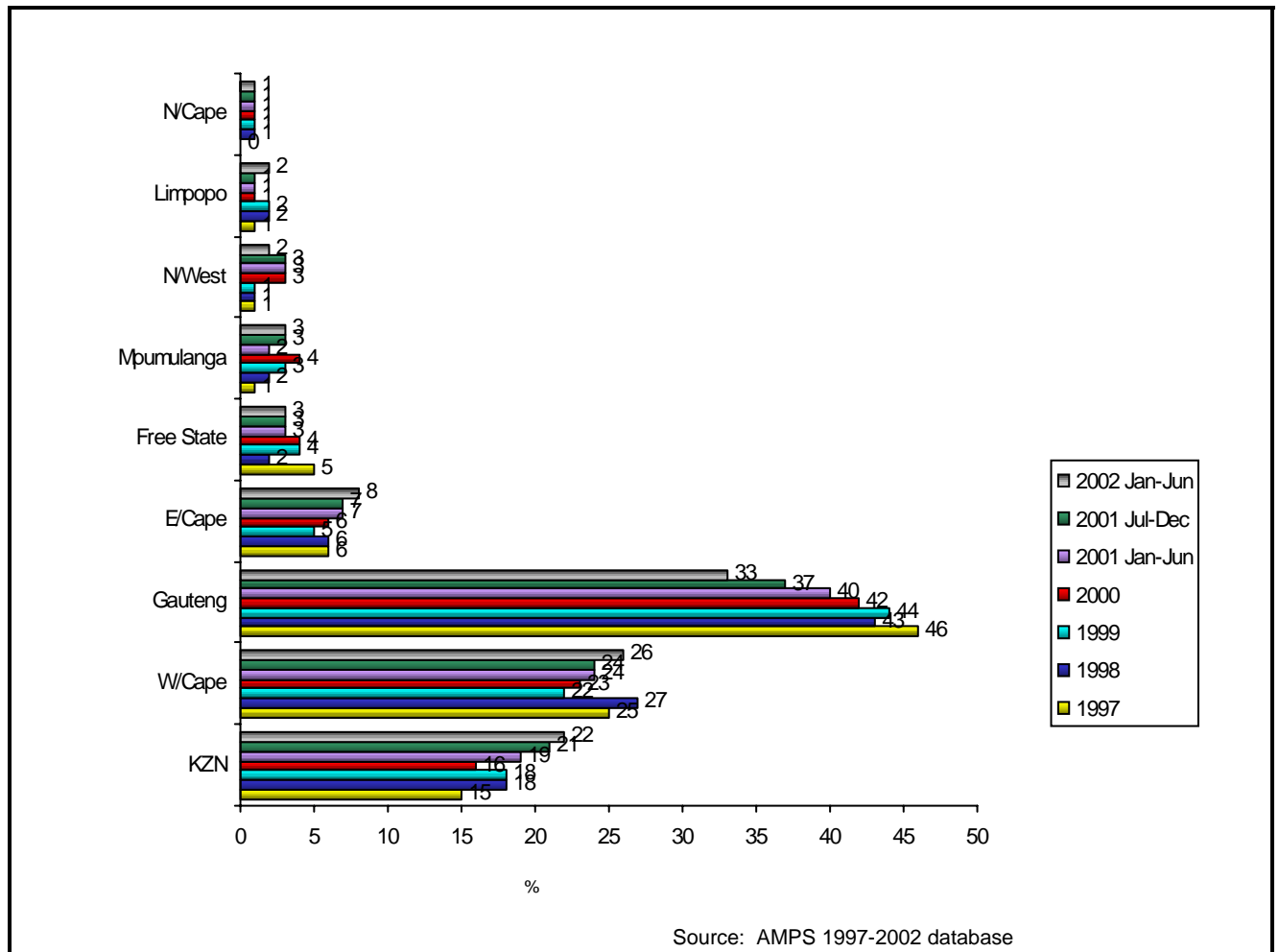
The AMPS survey provides a longitudinal database for analysing trends in Internet penetration and the information presented hereafter is based on the AMPS 1997 – 2002 database.



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

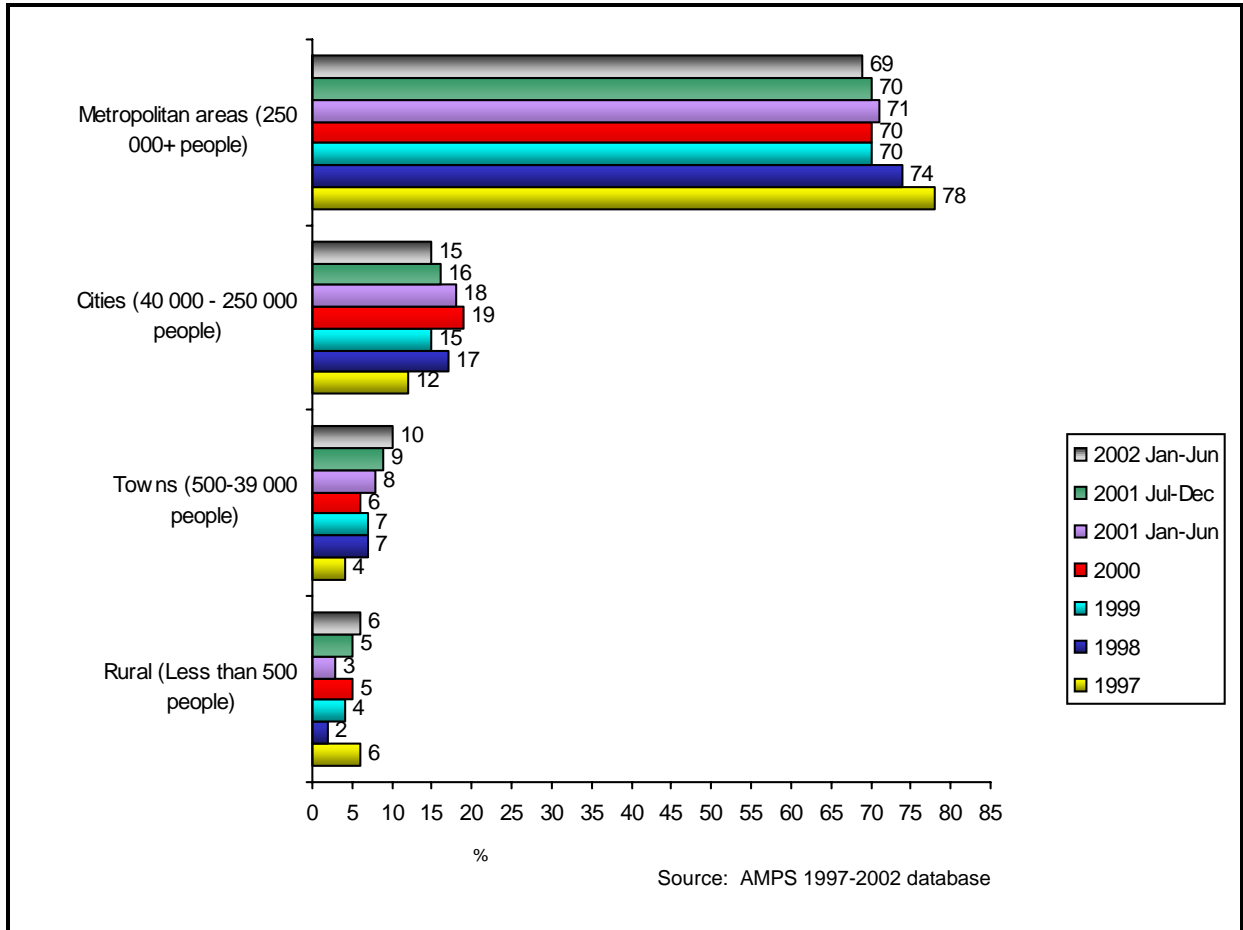
In terms of the geographical split, Internet usage are the highest in three provinces namely:

- 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

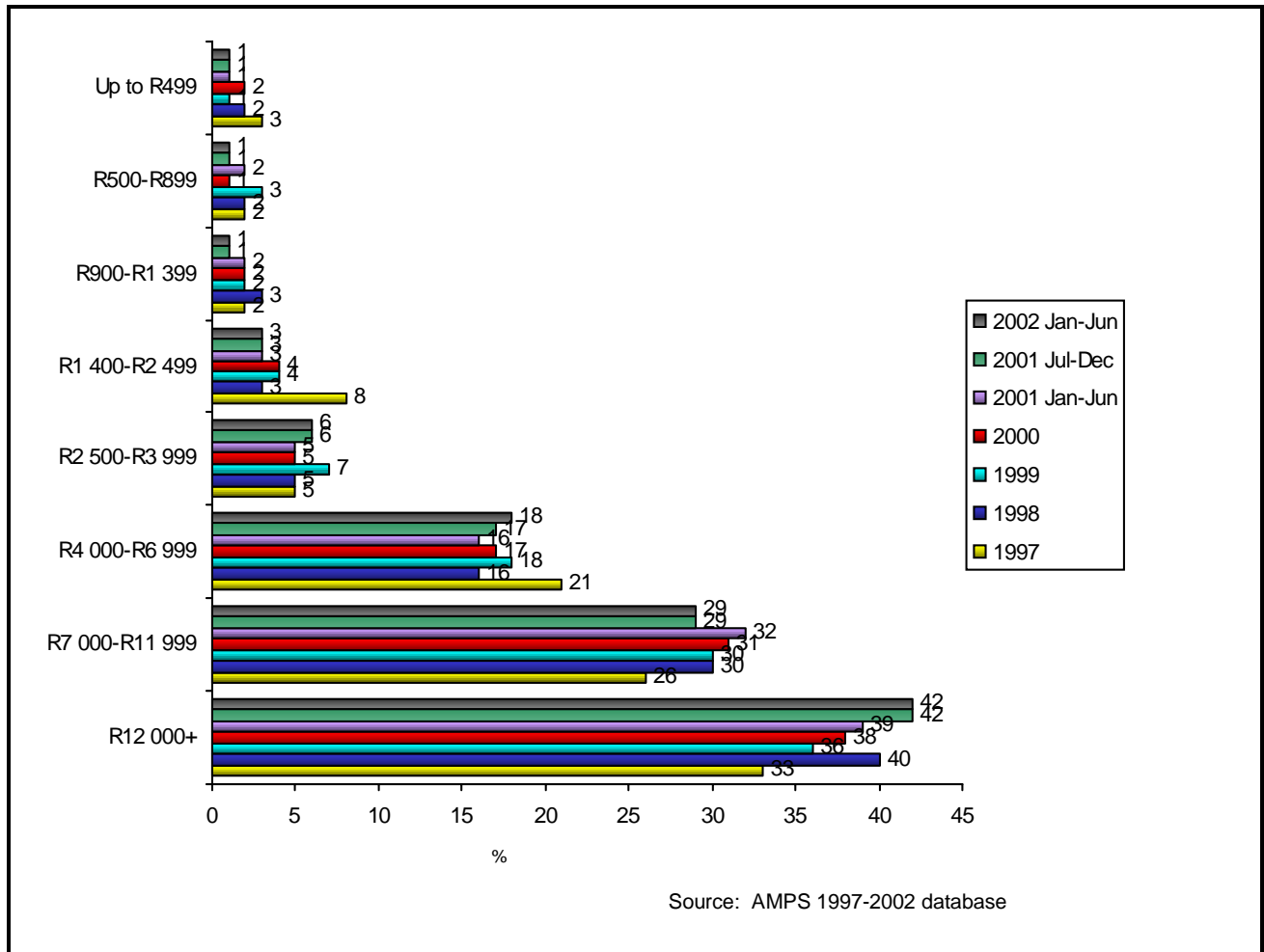
Interestingly enough, although Gauteng remains the frontrunner in terms of usage, figures dropped substantially from almost half (46%) in 1997 to a third (33%) in 2002. In KwaZulu-Natal usage figures increased from 15% in 1997 to 22% in 2002. The three provinces mentioned also include three of the major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

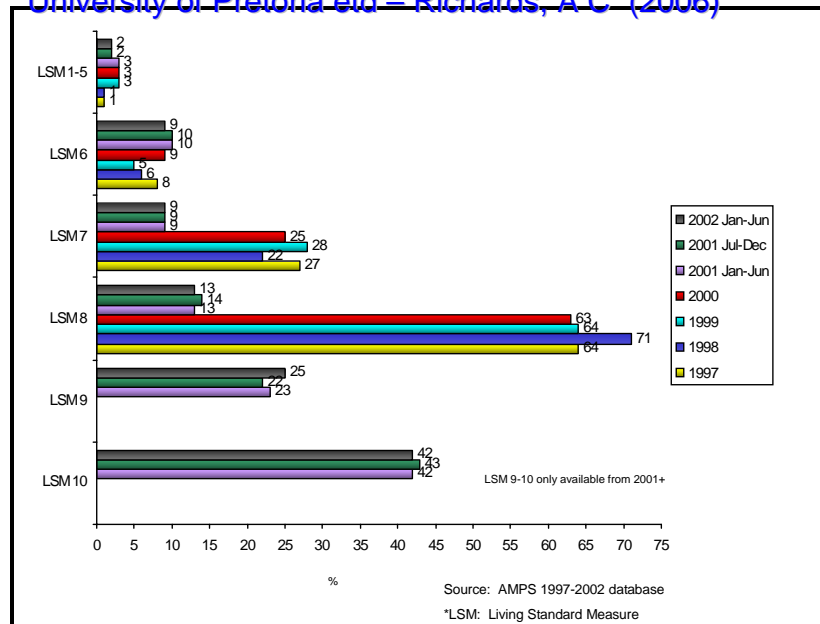
The above graph shows that within South Africa's borders the majority of Internet users reside in metropolitan areas. It compliments the figures in graph 8.2, since the main metropolitan areas are situated in three provinces namely Gauteng, Western Province and KwaZulu-Natal. Despite the fact that metropolitan 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.



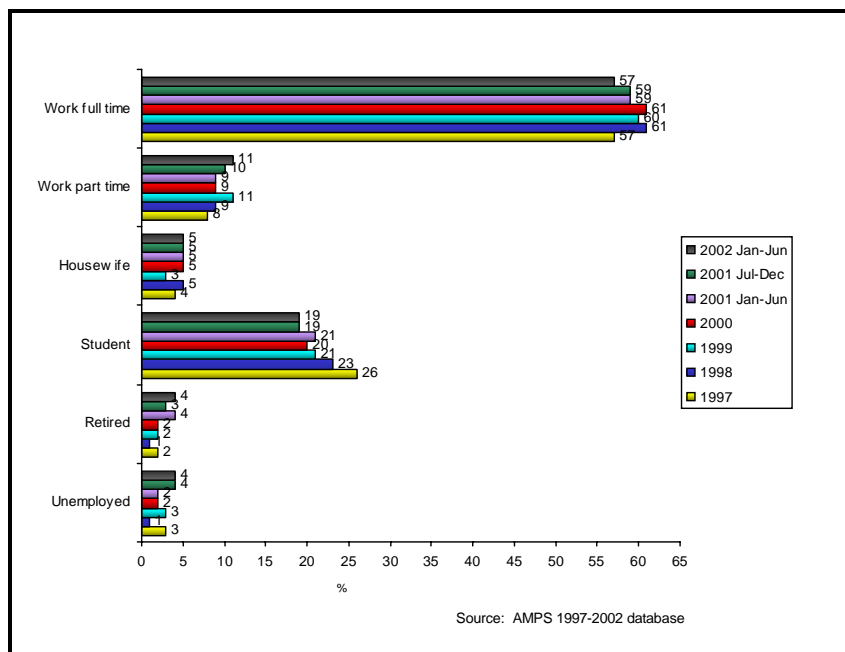
Graph 8.4: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by gross household income distribution

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.



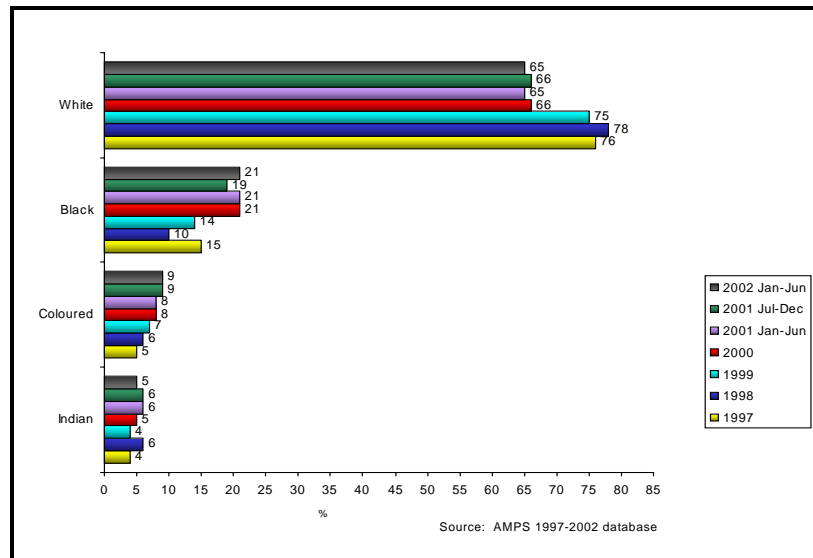
Graph 8.5: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by LSM distribution

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).



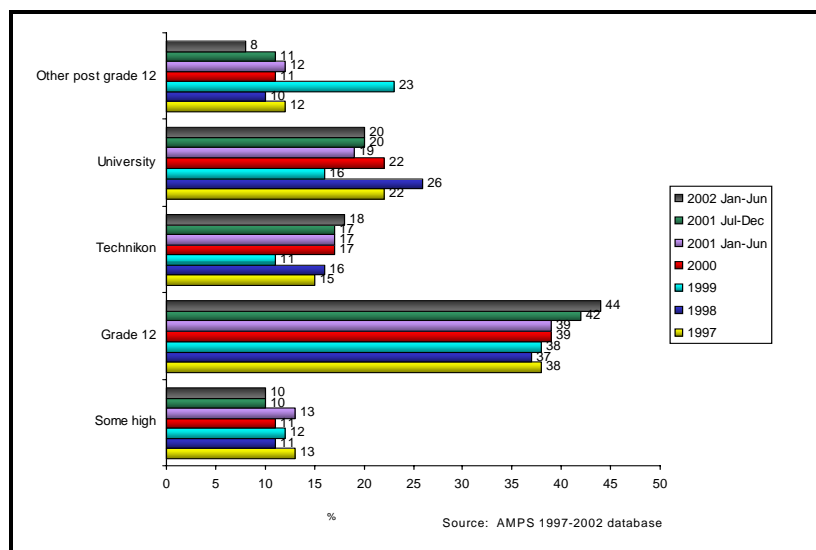
Graph 8.6: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by work-status distribution

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%.



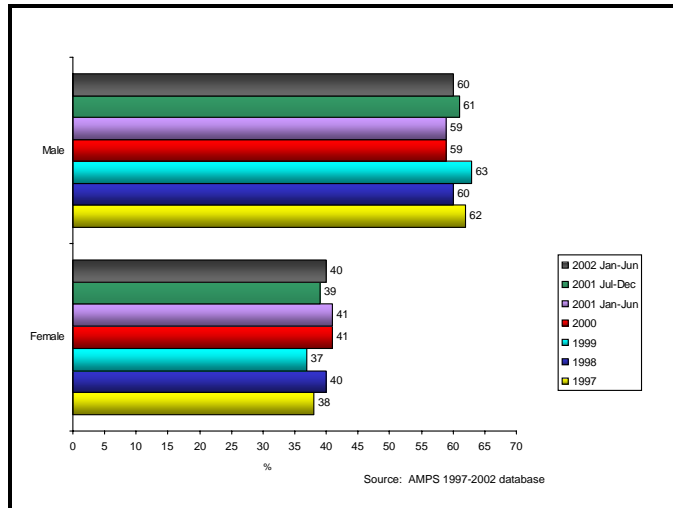
Graph 8.7: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by racial distribution

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.



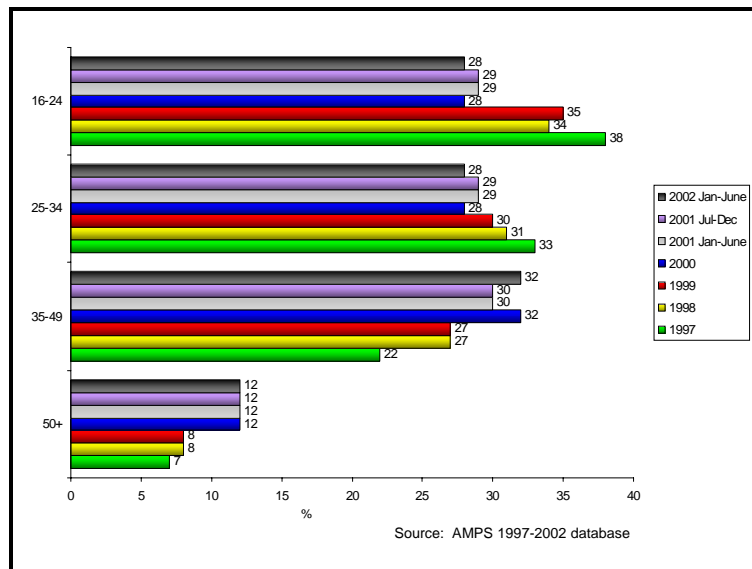
Graph 8.8: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by educational level

Research by Webcheck indicated that in January 2002, 49% of South African Internet users were women (www.nua.com). 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.

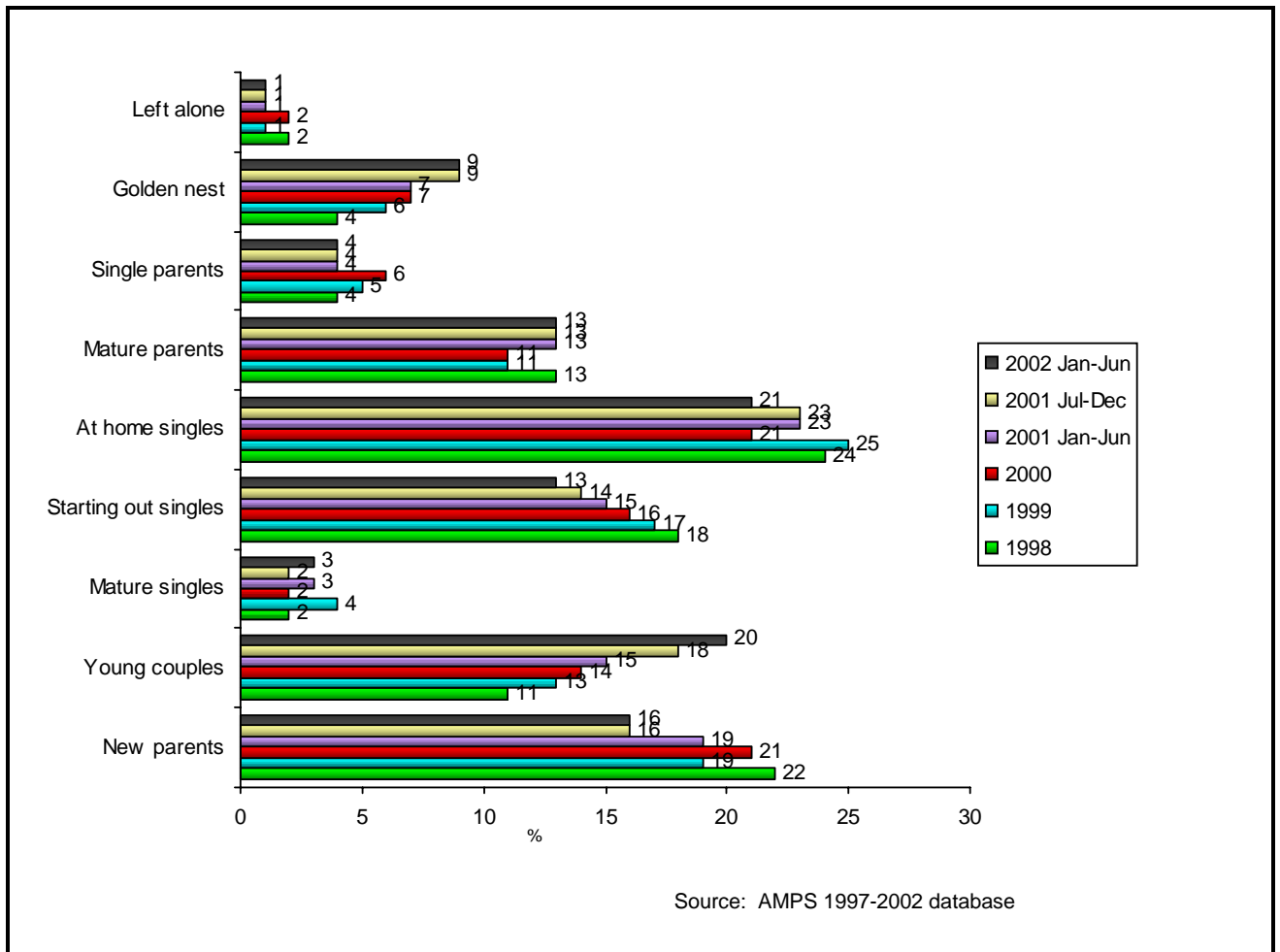


Graph 8.10: Percentage of population with Internet access during the past 4 weeks by age distribution

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

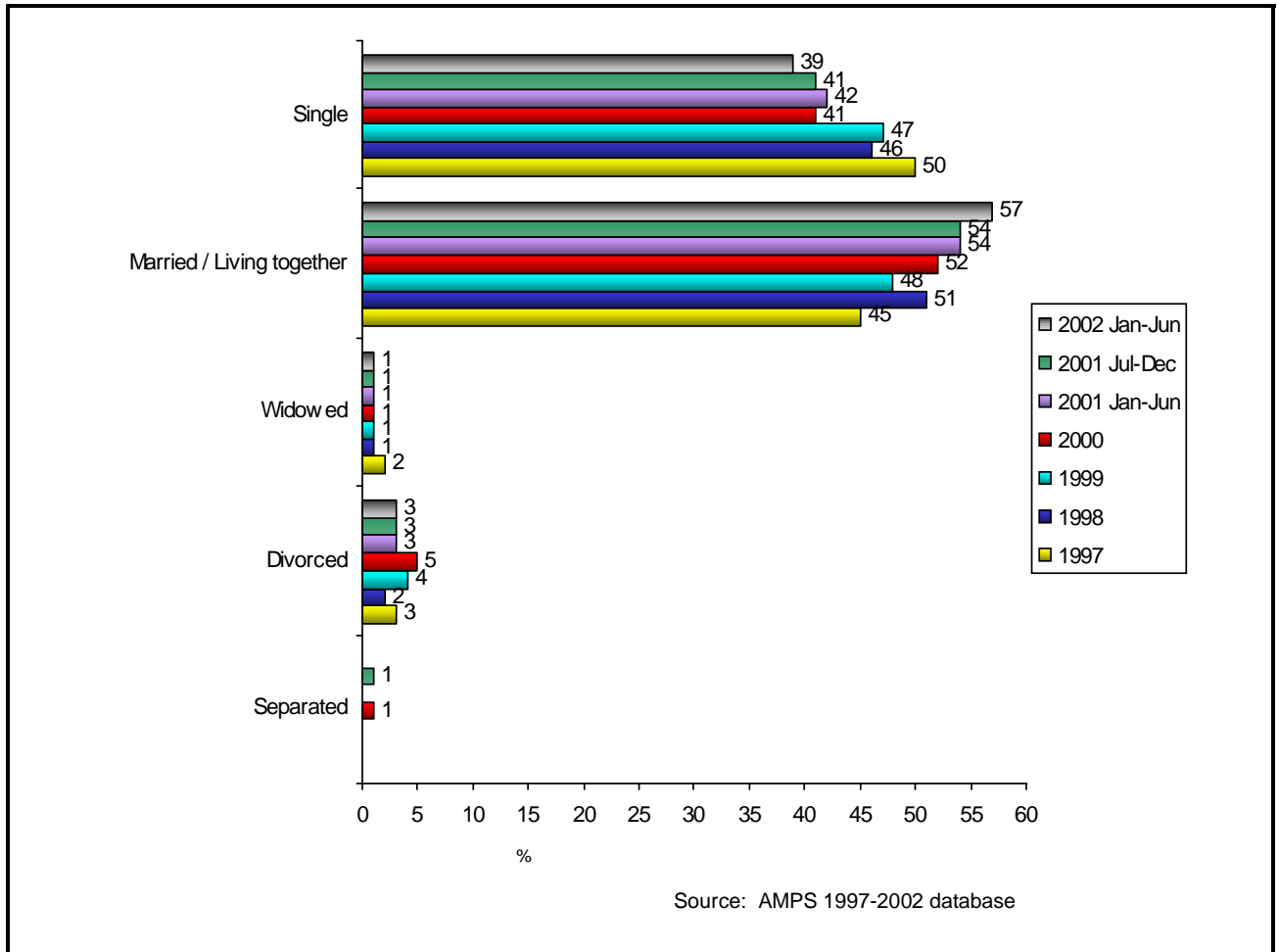
- At home singles: 20%
- New parents: 16%
- Starting out singles: 13%
- Young couples: 13%
- Mature parents: 11%.

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). 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

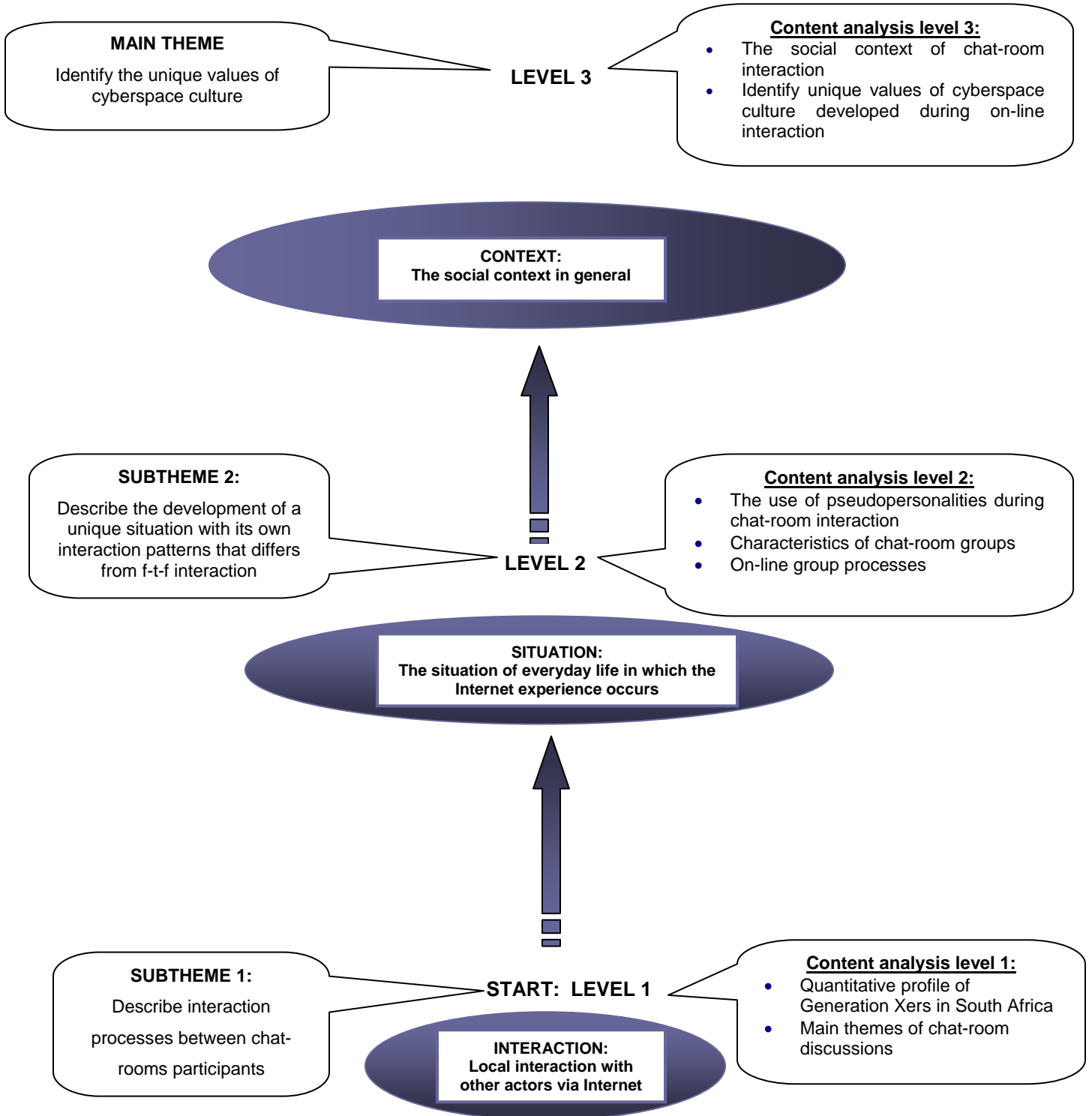


Figure 9.1: Complimentary Explorative Multi Data Analysis techniques applied in a three-level model of the Internet experience

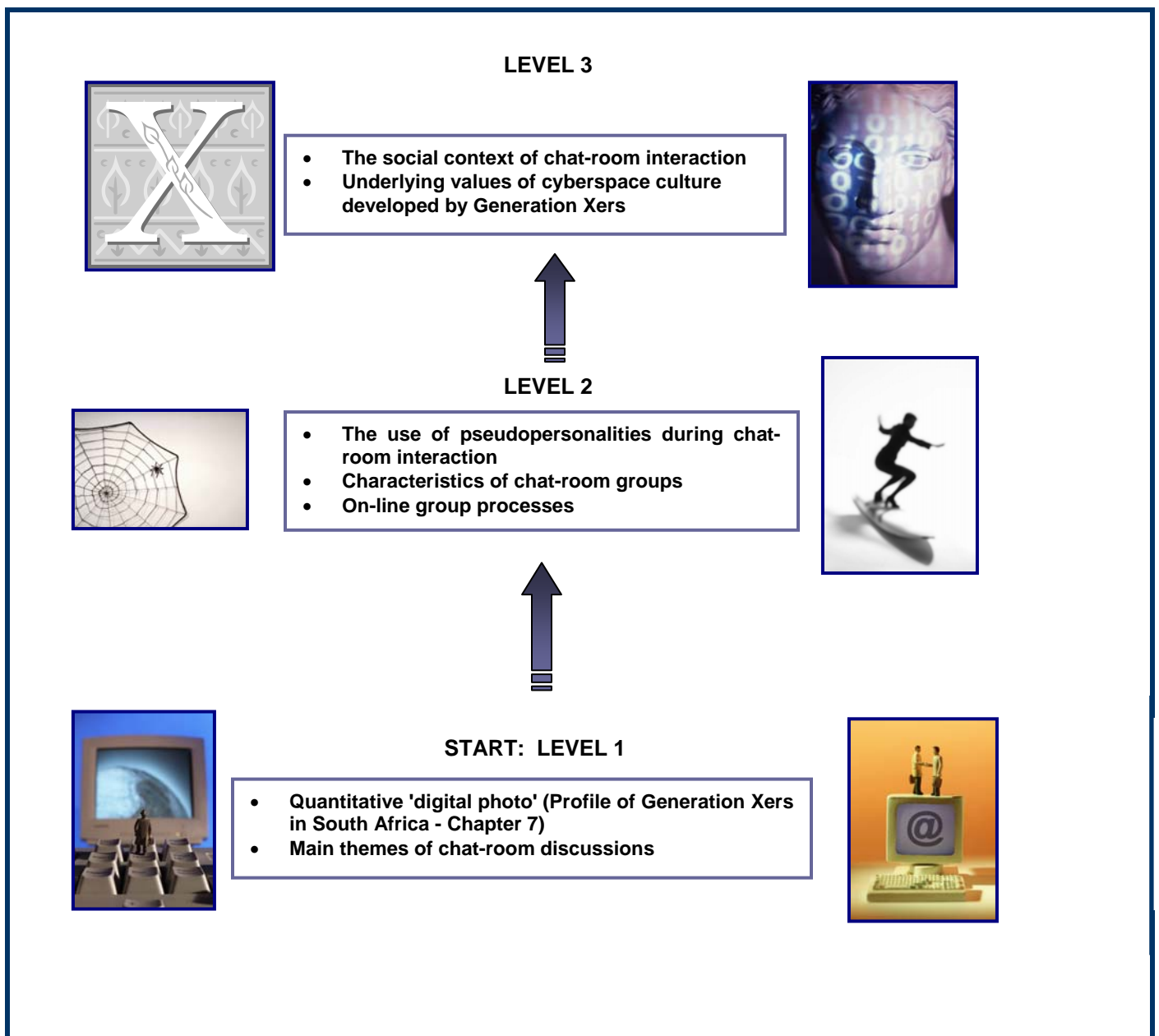


Figure 9.2: Graphical description of qualitative trends describing results at each level

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
TOTAL	384	100

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 under7 - 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-consciousley dont 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. Dont 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 fpr your family then, discuss alternative options like brief separation untill he see's 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

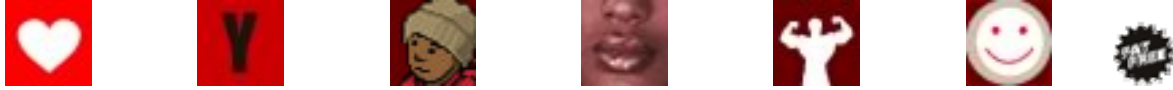
The discussion around pseudopersonalities will be structured as follows:

- 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)

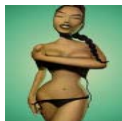


or

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

REAL PERSONALITY	LOOKING FOR PEOPLE	PSEUDOPERSONALITY IS USED TO ...	DOMINATING INTERACTION STYLE ON-LINE	DOMINATING INTERACTION STYLE OFF-LINE	CHAT-ROOM(S) THEY PREFER
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 'unnecessary'. Everyone has the right and the free will 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 TOOL 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

NarratorAlso.Known.As

LocationFree 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	-	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 Google 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 chill 🍷 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 Internet? 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).