

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

-Dr. Christo Lombaard-

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

10.1 Introduction

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

10.2 Generation X

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.3 Values in cyberspace culture

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

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

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

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

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

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

- *Self-direction:*

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

- *Hedonism and stimulation:*

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

- *Universalism:*

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

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

- *Benevolence:*

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

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

- *Openness to change:*

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

- *Self-transcendence:*

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

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

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

10.4 Virtual communities

10.4.1 Definition of virtual community

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

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

10.4.2 The process of virtual community development

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.5 Symbolic Action Theory principles

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

10.5.1 Cyberspace culture is experienced by means of language

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

10.5.2 The symbolism of cyberspace culture

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

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

- *Functional symbolism:*

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

- *Analogical symbolism:*

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

- *Ideational symbolism:*

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

- *Otherness symbolism:*

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

10.6 Cyberspace culture and its influence on off-line living

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

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

10.6.1 Changing perceptions of the traditional physical body

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

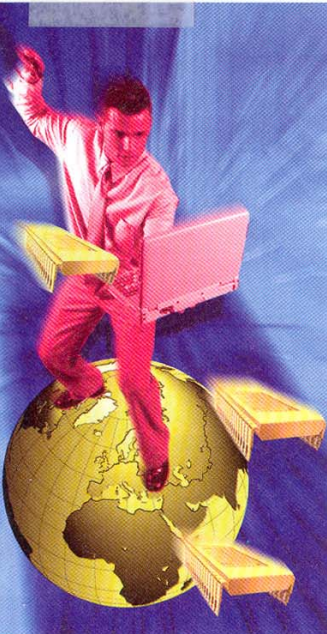
10.6.2 The end of geography

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

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

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

FAST FORWARD



Access Your PC From Anywhere, For Free!

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

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

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

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

We like it and we think you will too. ☺

www.logmein.com
https://secure.logmein.com/go.asp?page=products_free

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

10.6.3 Hierarchies toppled downwards

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

10.6.4 The computer underground

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

10.6.6 Techno-living

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



Digital Television For Your Cell Phone

Now you can be a couch potato anywhere.

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

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

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

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

www.samsung.com
www.ti.com

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

10.7 Concluding summary

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

CHAPTER 11: THE CHAT-ROOM AS A RESEARCH TOOL

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

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

11.1 Introduction

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

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

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

11.2 Process and procedures during on-line focus groups

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

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

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

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

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

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

11.3 Examples of on-line focus groups

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

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

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

11.4 Advantages of on-line focus groups

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11.5 Disadvantages of on-line focus groups

Gaiser in Clarke (2000) noted the following disadvantages:

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

11.6 ESOMAR guideline for conducting Internet research

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

11.6.1 What is ESOMAR?

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

11.6.2 Basic principles guiding Internet research techniques

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

- *Respondent's anonymity must be safeguarded:*

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

- *Private policy statements:*

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

- *Data security:*

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

- *Reliability and validity:*

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

- *Interviewing children and young people:*

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

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

11.7 On-line focus groups in South Africa

To elaborate on the applicability of on-line focus groups in the South African market, 10 South African researchers and psychologists were interviewed.

11.7.1 The questionnaire

The following open-ended questions guided the interview process:

- Does the (company) conduct on-line focus groups? (Yes/No)
(IF NO) Why not?
(IF YES) In which industries?
- What are the typical research topics that fit well with on-line focus groups?
- In your opinion what are the three main advantages of on-line focus groups?
- In your opinion what are the 3 main disadvantages of on-line focus groups?
- In your opinion is there a future for on-line focus groups in South Africa and why?

11.7.2 Summary of results

The majority of them felt since the Internet is only being used by a small market segment it is not a very popular research tool in South Africa. Many institutions for example the SABC cater for all population

and income groups and do not budget for unique, small and focused market segments. However other media owners such as MNET embarked on Internet research methods only recently since their market focus specifically on the higher income earner who has access to the Internet.

Examples of research topics that fit well with on-line focus groups are sensitive topics for example sexual behaviour. In other cases chat-rooms related to specific television programmes for example 'Pop Idols' also attract Internet audiences that can be explored for research projects.

When looking at the advantages of on-line focus groups:

- The majority felt that readily available electronic transcripts were the biggest and most important advantage.
- Secondly they felt that people tend to be more open and honest with on-line responses.
- Thirdly they agreed against the backdrop of tight deadlines it is always beneficial to have the research results available immediately.

The other side of the coin for example disadvantages can be summarised as follows:

- On-line results will always reflect views and opinions of a specific captive target market.
- Since it remains unexplored territory for the majority of South African researchers they feel the text is limited in the sense that it becomes difficult to load video clips, audio etc. onto the on-line focus group.
- The lack of identifying non-verbal behaviour was also mentioned as a disadvantage.
- The South African business market is moving towards self employment and small businesses. These people don't see the feasibility in staying on-line for an hour or more, since many of them have an Internet connection at home via a Telkom line which they have to pay for.

11.7.3 Contributing external factors

Since on-line focus groups are only applicable to roughly 8% of our general population in South Africa that has access to the Internet, Clarke (2000) argues that other factors also limit the use of this particular method in the local research industry. She discussed issues around bandwidth or the amount of information that can be transmitted across a network in a given amount of time. Currently in South Africa available bandwidth is related to cost. This implies that those services that require less

bandwidth for example asynchronous e-mail and news groups (as in the case of this study) are often more popular to researchers than the counterparts for example expensive video and audio based methods.

11.8 Concluding summary

This chapter addressed the applicability of the chat-room as an ethical research tool specifically in the South African context. It seems that although an effective tool for international surveys on sensitive topics, the South African research market is not ready for this tool to be implemented. It is only applicable in those cases where there is a specific captive Internet audience. Since it is only the minority of the South African market who has access to the Internet, limited budgets are available for Internet research in general. Internet research especially on-line focus groups are something for the future since the current need currently within South Africa is to focus more time, money and effort towards addressing social problems such as HIV/AIDS, illiteracy and unemployment.

CHAPTER 12: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"What ever you are be a good one"
Abraham Lincoln

12.1 Introduction

For the past four years, this has been a scientific journey aiming to provide a description of a particular group of people, defined as the 'Generation Xers', who is believed to have and still is developing a new 'cyberspace culture' by way of a fourfold process:

- Firstly through intensive interacting in cyberspace chat-rooms;
- Secondly developing cyberspace personalities or 'pseudopersonalities' that are different from their individual 'normal' personalities;
- Thirdly by sharing unique values, opinions and attitudes with other Generation Xers globally; and
- Fourthly, by developing a distinct new cyberspace culture from cyberspace interaction.

The study initially was broadly aimed at participants in chat-room discussions. The eventual focus was placed on Generation Xers living in a modern world delineated by .co.za-borders. The existing body of knowledge, literature and research that were available during the course of the research project, were limited in describing this unique group of South African Internet users and some of the dynamics behind their usage patterns. In order to scientifically investigate this phenomenon the CEMDA research method was selected to combine quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in order to analyse the Internet experience on three different levels.

12.2 Military-civilian IT interface

The Internet began in 1969 as a USA Department of Defence project called ARPANET. In a very short space of time it developed into the World Wide Web, used by a multitude of people on a global basis. What started out as a military communications project specifically designed for a military environment, now covers the globe and represents the digital revolution that has had and still are having an impact on traditional communication methods, Generation Xers' perception of the 'self', traditional cultural values and several other social phenomena.

Traditional person-to-person communication changed to cyber-communication where the individual has access to local and global audiences whilst interacting and sharing information. Chat-rooms and other web spaces act as environments where members of 'virtual' communities meet to share interests, ideas, values, perceptions and by doing so shaping each other's attitudes. The Internet is used by ordinary people on a daily basis to interact and communicate with others whether it is via e-mail communication, chat-room interaction, virtual conferences or webcam interaction.

12.3 Unique features of the research process

The researcher made a brave choice in delineating the chosen topic since she reconnoitred uncharted research territory by being venturesome in penetrating cyberspace. The research project was unique since it converged IT, psychology and other scientific disciplines. The research field proved to be multifaceted having had to account for a large number of variables, parameters and levels of research interaction as well as analyses. Cyberspace redefines, deconstructs and even eliminates the boundaries of human existence and different research disciplines, thus explaining why the executed research project merged various disciplines such as Psychology, Information Science and Technology as well as Sociology. Writing the thesis required a new creative and crispy style of writing and presentation of visual, graphic and other materials. New terminologies such as "slanguage", .co.za-borders and .co.za tribal community were required. Lastly the research project pitted Victorian or conservative closure against cyberspace openness. Literature is full of examples of scientific failures where behavioural scientists entered these uncharted territories equipped with rigid, causal, predefined processes and methods that 'forced' everything into becoming 'nails' since a 'hammer' was the only tool available in the researcher's toolbox. Research in cyberspace requires a flexible approach.

For this psychological research venture into the uncharted territory of cyberspace, the Humanistic paradigm was chosen as theoretical framework, guiding the design of appropriate research methodology. By looking through a Humanistic lens, cyberspace culture and its developmental process, was described as it was **experienced** by Generation Xers with a specific focus on chat-room interaction. The researcher decided on the role of a "passive observer" which implied no contact at all with chat-room participants during and after conversations. It nevertheless proved to be a successful method to remain close to the 'real' virtual experiences of the individuals.

By adopting this approach the 'research territory' dictated and ultimately led to a selection of appropriate 'tools' that was used during the scientific investigation. This is an example of a flexible approach wherein the researcher continuously had to check whether the research tools still accurately addressed the targets(s)/objectives formulated in the initial designing phase of the project. In this project the principle of flexibility was also put to practise by including two distinct 'exit routes' in between research phases (called pit stops or off-ramps) namely:

- The first off-ramp or 'Generation X off-ramp' was aimed at evaluating how well the research sample or chat-room participants represented the population defined as Generation Xers.
- The second off-ramp was called the "CR off-ramp' or 'Chat-room off-ramp' that evaluated the effectiveness of the chat-room as research tool within the South African research context.

Future researchers should always choose a flexible methodology when embarking on either charted or uncharted scientific investigations that are innovative since diverse views and points of departure will have to be accounted for. The CEMDA research method implemented in this project was effective in addressing the research objectives and results confirmed the existence of a cyberspace culture specifically within .co.za-borders. The flexibility imbedded in the method made it possible to combine quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in order analyse the Internet experience on three different levels.

12.4 Main research findings

Everyday use of the Internet as communication medium contributed to renewed thinking in both civilian and research environments about personality as a phenomenon of multiplicity. The concept of multiple selves has been viewed by many psychologists as dysfunctional and abnormal. The results of this study have shown that the development of pseudopersonalities in cyberspace is a functional way of Generation Xers to adapt to a rapidly changing, complex world. Cyberspace is a cognitive and social space, an extension of the physical world, an electronic reflection of the world people currently inhabit. In the virtual world information is more important than physical appearance and therefore the possibility exists to create multiple pseudopersonalities. Unique characteristics of Internet interaction, for example individual anonymity and individual control over revealing information, attract those people who find it difficult to express the 'real-me' in face-to-face encounters. Pseudopersonalities are temporary "vehicles" constructed by people for the journey of actualisation.

Although Generation Xers represent a minority (7-8%) of the total population, they have a monopoly in terms of economic wealth and buying power. They do not consider themselves as part of the Third World as they generally reside in major metropolitan areas that are fully equipped with First World resources and infrastructure that they operate with and within. They have developed a unique .co.za tribal community and welcome 'newbies' in .co.za chat-rooms. They have developed a .co.za-dictionary that provides assistance in understanding the 'slanguage' used in .co.za chat-rooms, since it is based on a combination of at least three of the eleven official South African languages. It doesn't take long for a 'newbie' to realise that unique creative .co.za tribal rituals and practises reflect diverse but real life experiences of South Africans in all parts of the country. Heated debates on societal problems such as racism, politics and sexuality between a young black person that grew up in a township and a conservative right-wing, Afrikaans-speaking male were common in these chat-rooms.

South African Generation Xers could be described as a diverse group of people representing different segments in the general population. They generally were the richer and more affluent part of South African society, mostly living in major metropolitan areas, earning R12 000+ per month and were classified as LSM 7-10, especially LSM8. The group was predominantly but not exclusively white, male and participants working on a full- or part-time basis. Although people from different age groups between 16 and 49 years from the general population access the Internet, higher access figures are reported among adolescents, young adults, many whom have married for the first time as well as being new to parenthood.

During on-line interaction in chat-rooms, Generation Xers developed their own unique on-line language namely the .co.za-dictionary (refer to table 9.3) as well as an unique value system that characterised cyberspace culture shared by virtual communities on a global basis. These values could be summarised as follows:

- Should these Generation Xers become future economic and political leaders, independent thought, creativity and freedom of expression would be important to them. Social justice and equality together with a respect for authenticity and diversity characterised their on-line interpersonal relationships. The .co.za-voter reiterated this group's broadminded view of the world where equality is the result of respecting the individual intrinsically and not the title, or position or rank.

- Computer hackers form a subsection of the Generation Xers. Despite the illegal and destructive activities mostly associated with computer hackers, they also fulfil a unique, positive social preservation function in the cyberspace culture value system. By hacking into computer networks of governments and large corporate companies, they counter the modern undesirable trend of governing bodies to increasingly control individual thought and behaviour (the Big Brother approach) in cyberspace. In a positive sense, hacking is an attempt to counter threats to the human rights of freedom of speech, association, religion and privacy. In this sense it also attempts to lessen state autocracy and foster individual and group democracy. A virtual community is based on the philosophy of empowering others through cyber or virtual networks, especially people with common interests. The virtual community is controlled by its members, and not by outside parties; members of virtual communities perceive themselves as part of a self-generating knowledge base.
- The 'Big Brother' paradigm as part of South Africa's history, being both present in the current and previous government, was or still is constantly regulating individual actions. The previous government left a legacy of apartheid and segregation. Today Generation Xers in the .co.za-tribe do not always view hackers as criminals, instead these activities are applauded by many since they view it as taking an active stance against the Big Brother approach of the previous Nationalist government, giving individuals back their right to freedom of expression and choice. In cyberspace, traditional, conservative cultural values such as apartheid, the strengthening of walls to keep 'them' separated from 'us', and gender inequality are replaced with a respect for diversity and an openness to the unknown. These values are the foundations of attempts to 'build' and not 'burn' bridges between segregated groups by directly targeting traditional cultural taboos such as sexual secrecy and today males and females discuss sexuality openly in chat-rooms. Most Generation Xers (noticeably the young Black Yuppies) also target the existing government in South Africa. The same government that returned freedom of expression, other human rights and true democracy, is the one that is slowly but surely eroding these universal human rights and other benefits by resorting to a dated ideology by increased centralised government, resorting to unwise, impractical and expensive political policies, decisions and actions, provision of a grossly inadequate educational system that leads to a lack of appropriate technological skills in a rapidly expanding IT environment, and the use of force to repress dissatisfaction with non-delivery of services to under developed poor communities.

- Results from the qualitative analysis nevertheless showed a deep-rooted cultural connection to other Generation Xers specifically in terms of respect for similar values systems that are shared in modern cyberspace culture. A Generation Xer even composed his own 'cyber-anthem' illustrating this new-found patriotism for a unique virtual community that are connected to the global network of Generation Xers.
- While sexuality was not discussed openly across gender groups in traditional more conservative cultures, Generation Xers value heterosexual principles and discuss their preferences openly in chat-rooms.
- Despite the importance of values such as an openness to change and respect for diversity, people from different racial dominations still battle to integrate different belief systems. Despite these findings, chat-rooms were used as public forums that stimulated interaction between heterogeneous groups since cyberspace is controlled by individuals and not by political parties and governing bodies.

These values coupled with the importance of the process of self-exploration are the foundation of virtual social networks whereby Generation Xers gain deeper insight into the meaning of human existence, interaction and everyday life.

Generation Xers as members of virtual communities are rooted in and operate from an underlying philosophy of empowering others through cyber or virtual networks of people with common interests. Values that were not regarded as really important to Generation Xers were:

- Economic - In the few cases where economic issues were dealt with, people focussed on financial decisions taken by 'good' and 'bad' politicians followed by analyses of their own personal battles to survive financially.
- Education - Another theme that was *not* top-of-the-mind was education despite the fact that South Africa currently has a shortage of teachers and major changes to tertiary education systems are taking place. Suggestions to improve, enhance and advance educational training in South Africa were made.
- Crime - Despite the fact that South Africa's crime statistics are of the highest in the world, relatively limited chatting time was spent on this topic.

- HIV/AIDS - Although a serious problem in South Africa, HIV/AIDS was also not top-of-the-mind as far as Generation Xers were concerned.

Although many of these values are currently pressing problems, discussed and dealt with by government and the public in general, Generation Xers did not share these views and issues and to a certain extent separated themselves from it. In future this can widen the gap between those that have access to technology and those that do not, also called the 'Digital Divide'. Despite governmental and institutional efforts to provide previously disadvantaged communities with computers and access to the Internet, the ranks of Generation Xers could become even smaller, secluded, exclusive and segregated groups of people making them even more inaccessible for interaction with the lesser educated masses since they have learnt to rely on their own unique .co.za-dictionary while they communicate and interact in selected chat-rooms on the Internet. Despite efforts from the government and private sector to improve e-literacy levels amongst the youth, the major part of South African society continues to be the poor section of the nation. These people have to earn adequate incomes in order to have access to computers. In a Utopia all human beings are created equal, in terms of literacy, and economic means. Shortcomings such as a lack of linguistic and mathematical skills, innumeracy, dependence on and use of a second language rather than home language, and other modern demands compound the inability of unskilled people to bridge the 'Digital Divide'. These individuals should obviously be motivated by giving them better access to the Internet and by making it an integral part of their daily style of living. If these challenges are not met, growth in Internet user figures will remain low; a privilege enjoyed by a minority group of wealthier South Africans. Lastly, a modern up-to-date information technological system is heavily dependent on a continuous, uninterrupted and affordable supply of electricity. In this respect the new South Africa of 2006 is found wanting.

12.5 Enforced digressions

Reference to Figure 1.1 is a useful guideline for the following discussion. The blue steps in this graphic presentation referred to those facets that formed the main research process. The green components in turn referred to the outcomes of the research that was undertaken and thus covered the results of the investigation. All remaining elements were digressions or "off-ramps" which indicated at least temporary digression from the main research activities to clarify important matters. Nine off-ramps were taken all-in-all:

a. Creative researcher (First yellow off-ramp)

Since the researcher ventured into uncharted territory during this project, she used her own creativity as an important research tool throughout the process. This was evident in the crispy style of writing in the manuscript. A need for new concepts continuously cropped up during analyses whilst existing literature and theories failed miserably in describing and explaining these concepts and processes effectively. The reader was entertained right through the manuscript with new, crispy and sometimes brutally honest descriptions, concepts and chat-room discussions, sometimes quoted verbatim. Keeping the Humanistic paradigm in mind the researcher successfully reported research results that remained close to the actual virtual experiences of Generation Xers. Although entertaining to the reader and despite being an accurate description of chat-room experiences, these new concepts, however, require a solid theoretical base that only further thorough scientific research can provide. This variation of writing style opens up a wide field for future researchers to focus on new terminology, scientific criticism and reformulation of these, development of new theories around them, and continuation of the creative process as essential part of practising science in future.

b. Literature (Second off-ramp)

Topics such as social interaction, pseudo- and constructive personality, communal life and culture have been thoroughly researched. Thus an abundant source of literature on these and related topics had become available over years. Sources on these and other topics within the context of cyberspace are relatively limited. The brevity list of references in this thesis confirmed this.

c. Research methodology (Third off-ramp)

The research design mainly was qualitative by nature. A method that would enable the researcher to analyse the data set on different levels such as the interactive level between individuals in chat-rooms, everyday-life situations such interaction brought about in chat-rooms and the level of a unique community in a virtual context, was obviously needed. The CEMDA method or Complimentary Explorative Multilevel Data Analysis approach was particularly suitable for this research purpose.

d. Methodological considerations (Fourth off-ramp)

Besides the need for a multileveled method of data analysis, the researcher of human behaviour in a cyberspace context, adopted a "participant observer" role in a virtual or faceless series of interactions between chat-room participants who were unaware that their participation were being monitored. This of course has ethical implications.

e. Consideration of research ethics (Fifth off-ramp)

The chat-room environment in a cyberspace context is unique. Participants usually are heavily engaged in social interaction that are not face-to-face contacts as in everyday life, but completely or nearly completely anonymous. The central research questions in this study were twofold:

- Who are legally responsible and accountable for chat-room proceedings?
- Who are morally responsible for social interchange (or exchange) and outcomes with undesirable consequences?

The situation in practice is quite complex. All in all five parties are involved in chat-room presentations during attempts to research this phenomenon. The first accountable and responsible party is the IT host which may be a radio station, a national or local newspaper or a media service provider. The second party is the provider of the Internet service that has contractually been commissioned by the IT host to provide an Internet facility. The third party is the communications authority that provides telephone lines and wireless signals to Internet providers and who makes connection to global world-wide networks possible. The fourth party of course is the chat-room participant. In the case of behavioural research the participating and observing researcher is the fifth responsible and accountable partner. This labyrinth of interested and accountable parties need to be considered in issues of cyberspace ethics.

f. Sampling (Sixth off-ramp)

Sampling required upfront inputs with regard to sample size for research purposes, and an appropriate sampling frame for probabilistic and non-probabilistic selection of chat-rooms and the actual sampling of chat-room protocols within the respective chat-rooms.

g. Representative sample (Seventh off-ramp)

Representivity of the sample was important for four distinct reasons. Was the sample that was actually taken representative of South African Internet users? How did the South African population compare to the global Internet population? How certain was the researcher that the Generation X population was part and parcel of the South African population of Internet users? What confounding role did the presence of and contact with other subcultures and counterculture groups have in the assessment of the Generation X segment?

h. Internet Cyber population (Eighth off-ramp)

A research step that is linked up with the representivity of the sample is the issue of the relevance of the sample as mirror image of the South African population of Internet users, particularly Internet users from the Generation X subculture. Because of the unique set-up and characteristics of the chat-room cyberspace sampling was not done by hands-on procedures but rather by procedures at arm's length, that is by procedures requiring action from a distance which is an unique approach to participant observation as an important prerequisite for qualitative research.

i. Cyberspace culture (Ninth off-ramp)

The final issue focused on analysis of symbolic cyber action and cyber behaviour that enabled the researcher to draw inferences and conclusions with regard to moral regeneration, cyber attitude, cyber values and group cohesion. These issues redirected the focus of the research activities that were necessary to obtain the stated research objectives and provided the outcomes that constituted the main thrust of the research activities that contributed to the compilation of this thesis.

From the above description it is obvious that these digressions be made timeously and that careful consideration be given to each of them in terms of the profound impact that they might have on the researcher's research processes and activities.

12.6 Limitations of the survey

As is the case in any other research project, the limitations of this particular study could be summarised as follows:

- The existence of important counterculture groups within .co.za-borders that fell outside the scope of the current set of scientific research objectives.
- Unclear ethical principles guiding Internet research methodologies, resulting from the multitude of questions related to ownership of chat-rooms, possible abusive behaviour that could only be traced electronically to specific individuals, abuse of recognition of human rights as well as the electronic interface between the researcher and the researched. Who is responsible for and maintains moral discipline in a chat-room environment?

- Another limitation was being a passive observer of on-line behaviour.
- Although use of the 'virtual' version of the Johari-window was exciting knowledge of its impact in cyberspace is still lacking.

Each of these limitations is set out in more detail.

a. The existence of counterculture groups within .co.za-borders

Although the aim of the survey was to focus on Generation Xers, results indicated that not all South African Internet users and chat-room participants fitted the profile of a typical Generation Xer and that they might be seen as members of other counterculture groups. More specifically they were individuals who propagated homosexuality, drug addiction and even racism. Aggressive individuals often attempted to break down on-line group cohesiveness and harmony by their pleas for tolerance towards fellow members of countercultures and their preferred personal lifestyles. They did not have a respect for diversity, nor did they share in Generation Xers' broadminded view of the world in general. Instead their own needs for power and control over on-line group members were evident in the pseudopersonalities they created, as well as their on-line behavioural patterns. When these individuals entered a chat-room, flame wars often erupted and in many cases the on-line conflict situations were not resolved. This group of people as well as the dynamics of their behaviour need to be researched and further explored in future projects.

b. Unclear ethical principles guiding Internet research methodologies

This study illustrated how quantitative and qualitative research methodologies could be combined when a complex phenomenon such cyberspace culture is explored but it could not report convincingly on clear indications and directions that researchers need in terms of the ethics surrounding Internet research. In this survey chat-rooms within the public domain were chosen contexts and this by implication meant that participants were unaware that someone was viewing their postings. Although the ethical code of conduct in normal social research clearly prescribes that participating individuals' identity not be revealed without their prior consent, it was unclear whether or not the same principle applied to the identity of websites hosting these chat-rooms. Since the answer is unclear, the researcher decided not to reveal the names of the websites that hosted the chat-rooms that were included in this survey. Problems pertaining to the implementation of ethical Internet research practices could be explored further by other researchers.

c. Limitations of being a passive observer of on-line behaviour

In many cases senseless chatting characterised chat-room conversations. The researcher decided on a passive observer role which implied no contact with chat-room participants during and after conversations. The limitation imbedded in this approach was the loss of valuable information on chat-room participants and chat-room behaviour. If a researcher could partake in conversations he or she could post specific questions or make remarks that could motivate group members to increase participation and in doing so provide richer data for content analysis.

d. Limitations of the 'virtual' Johari-window concept

The normal or so-called off-line Johari window aims to describe the process whereby *group cohesion* is improved by sharing more information about oneself with others, thus trusting others enough to develop stronger interpersonal relationships with group members. This underlying principle was lacking in the investigation of the 'virtual' Johari-window since the aim now became an attempt to describe the influence of personal power on group interaction. Furthermore the role of the group moderator in contributing to the process of enhancing group cohesion, not always visible in or during participation in chat-room discussions, was also left out of the equation. It could also not provide answers for other group processes such as the impersonalised interactions that did take place during computer-mediated communication. This concept and how it influences on-line group cohesion still needs to be explored and developed in more detail.

12.7 Views on future research possibilities

Scientific research will lose its excitement and appeal if researchers do not discover new paths and venture on new research routes along the way. The CEMDA research process recommends or even demands that new hypotheses based on current research results be formulated in order to ensure that the research cycle is kept alive, continuing its exploration for new frontiers in future research by asking more questions and by generating more knowledge. Resulting from this particular study the following hypotheses were formulated:

- The body of theoretical knowledge around Cyber-Psychology needed to be expanded on all three levels of the Internet experience. The applicability of existing psychological knowledge needed to be tested, adapted and new theories developed based on the limitations of existing knowledge. Further research on this is a necessity.
- Specific 'personality types' have been identified in this study namely:
 - a. Bullies
 - b. Concerned taxpayers
 - c. EMENM-wannabee's
 - d. Informed realists
 - e. Leisure-time experts
 - f. Sex traders
 - g. Society misfits
 - h. Wallflowers.

These specific personalities and their personality traits needed future exploration by means of standardised personality tests in order to draw valid and reliable conclusions about the presence of common or differential personality traits.

- Issues pertaining to the 'Digital Divide' within South Africa as well as in other developing or Third World countries could be explored further. Within .co.za-borders the issues around the 'have' and the 'have not' groups regarding Internet access should be monitored closely, continuously evaluating the impact and success of efforts to bridge this gap. Research on Internet usage and its dynamics in developing countries or Third World countries is limited. Valuable insights can be provided when Generation Xers residing in different Third World countries could be compared with each other.
- The phenomenon of the .co.za-voter and .co.za-culture within the .co.za-borders needed more exploration. Since politics will always be an important building block of South African society, emerging .co.za voters represent a challenge to and a change in the way in which political leaders and the public view them, their cultural rights and their unique and outspoken but constructive political needs. Multidisciplinary research teams could provide valuable insight into the dynamics behind .co.za-voters' perceptions, attitudes and behaviour.

- Sexuality was one of the themes that dominated on-line conversations because chat-rooms are perceived as a 'safe space' where individuals can address unresolved sexual conflicts. Since sexual research is sensitive and a difficult phenomenon to explore, psychologists with an interest in sexuality could use on-line chat-rooms as an effective medium to reach and interact with people with cyberspace versions of sexual problems. The anonymity of on-line participants and the use of pseudopersonalities motivate people to be more honest and open regarding their own personal feelings, attitudes and views on sensitive topics such as this.
- The phenomenon of 'transnational' families, that is families with members that are living on different continents, and the importance of Internet communication in their lives to rapidly cross geographical boundaries could also be explored further.
- The .co.za-dictionary shed some light on issues surrounding 'e-literacy'. Valuable insight is needed into the relationship between traditional literacy and 'e-literacy'. E-literacy, of course, is also decidedly linked to good verbal and neurophysiologic skills, non-verbal skills such as perception of symbols and multilingualism.
- The 'virtual' Johari window addressed the issue of personal power and control in cyberspace. Within this specific theoretical framework various research themes could be explored such as:
 - a. The psychological profile of the cyber-criminal
 - b. The positive and negative effects of the 'hacker' subculture within .co.za-borders
 - c. The prevalence of Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) among chat-room participants within .co.za-borders. This theme was also not addressed in the present study.
- Although on-line focus groups were not popular within .co.za borders, in future more research could be directed towards the effectiveness of on-line self-help groups during psychological therapeutic interventions. Many .co.za chat-room participants favoured self-help groups to discuss problems, receive help and interact with 'others like me'.

12.8 *The Internet chat-room as research tool*

The chat-room as research tool, equivalent to an on-line focus group is a 'foreign' concept to local researchers. These researchers thus still prefer traditional face-to-face focus groups, even when targeting .co.za-tribal members. Few traditional researchers will see it as a necessity for innovative local research projects. Comments by cyberspace researchers operating in the local research market suggested that the '.com-research toolbox' is a nice-to-have tool but is expensive and difficult to implement. They also felt that it was an appropriate methodology in research aimed at a specific captive Internet audience or where international clients insisted on its use. The majority still felt that crucial information on non-verbal behaviour was lost whilst e-groups did not effectively project emotions and other non-verbal gestures. Authenticity and representivity of on-line samples are still being questioned due to the lack of appropriate measures and infrastructures to implement valid and reliable cross-checks.

The '.com-research toolbox' currently fails to reflect true real life experiences of South Africans (Is real life experience equal to cyberspace life experience?). E-mail surveys generally have a very low response rate, and many times, on-line questionnaires are printed and sent back to the researcher via the traditional route such as fax machines. Ethical Internet research practices remain a proverbial hot potato since the majority of the .co.za-tribal members still do not trust website owners with personal information such as account details and ID numbers. In fact, the debates around ethical human-electronic interface have been heard in many academic circles, but there still is a reluctance to test these theories in practise. There is still a long way to go before the '.com-research toolbox' is accepted by the .co.za-tribe. However the possibility does exist to use the chat-room as vehicle for establishing on-line self-help groups since .co.za-tribal members feel comfortable under the protective cloak of anonymity provided by on-line chat-rooms for open discussion of personal and other problems, destructive behaviour as well as dependencies. In summary the on-line chat-room will remain an important medium where minority groups in society can voice opinions lost in the voice of society as a whole as expressed in other forms of mass media.

12.9 *Concluding summary*

Although this is the end to a specific research project with specific objectives that had to be addressed, the researcher hopes that she has provided useful information that would stimulate further discussion and debate around the continuous presence of cyberspace in this digital era, making cyberspace a noteworthy electronic reflection of the way some segments of populations wish to communicate, interact, share and arrange their lifestyles.