

Knowledge is power: the Internet and the Kenyan public sphere

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The Internet is the fabric of our lives. If information technology is the present-day equivalent of electricity in the industrial area, in our age the Internet could be likened to both the electrical grid and the electric engine because of its ability to distribute the power of information through the entire realm of human activity. (Castells 1)

The Internet will ... serve multiple functions as the world's favourite public library, school classroom and medical database, post office and telephone, marketplace and shopping mall, channel of entertainment, culture and music, daily news resource for headlines, stocks and weather, and heterogeneous global public sphere. (Norris 6)

Introduction

The increasing utilisation of the Internet especially in Western societies has engendered the idea that it is an embodiment of the latter-day transformed public sphere. Although this idea is subject to contestations, the Internet's phenomenal growth rate and its use have stimulated serious debates and studies about its real and potential impact upon politics. While debates rage, it is increasingly being adopted for various uses by political actors like governments and their numerous bodies, political parties and politicians, political institutions, non-governmental organisations, and interest groups, among others.

Since the creation of the World Wide Web (WWW) in

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1990 by Tim Berners-Lee, a British researcher at the European Laboratory for Particle Physics, there have arisen numerous but somewhat grandiose claims about its impact upon various sociological phenomena.

Some of these include claims that the world is experiencing a social revolution; that the political process and communities involved are changing; and that state and its authority are in terminal decline due to the Internet (May 3). The validity of these claims is contentious and there are suggestions that many lack empirical grounding, and that they are exaggerated. In fact, in many parts of the world, the Internet's impact has been modest largely due to limited development, diffusion and utilisation.

Even though we can dismiss most of these claims as cyberoptimistic exaggerations, we cannot ignore them. It has become part of people's everyday lives, determining the way they work; the way they interact; the way they play. To ignore it would be perilous (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 7). But is this supposition true? Is it universally applicable? What of the billions of people in the world who cannot afford it? People who have never had the opportunity to interact with the Internet?

Despite its phenomenal growth, the Internet remains mostly a Western medium. More than a billion people now have access to the Internet. Most of these live in developed Western countries, notably North America, Western Europe and parts of Asia (Global Miniwatts Marketing Group <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>). Even with this dramatic growth, billions of people in Africa and Asia remain unconnected and locked out of cyberspace.

Based on the above premises, this article will argue that although it is the modern representative of the public sphere, the Internet has failed to expand the political space in Kenya, because of its limited development, diffusion and utilisation in the country. I will posit that its ability to decolonise or indeed democratise the sources of information has been beneficial to the bourgeoisie in Kenya and thus cannot be representative of a transformed public sphere. First, I will

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attempt to define the public sphere and draw its genealogy as a basis for further exposition and justification for the description of the Internet as a public sphere.

The public sphere, its expansion and transformation

The concept of the public sphere was introduced by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who observed that it is a 'sphere which mediates between society and the state in which the public organises itself as the bearer of public opinion, accords with the principle of the public sphere – that principle of public information which once had to be fought for against the arcane policies of monarchies and which since that time has made possible the democratic control of state activities' (50) and generally refers to a 'notional' space which provides an 'autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate' (McQuail 157). According to Habermas, the growth of the public sphere occurred in the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century with the widening of political participation and the crystallizing of citizenship ideals. He observes that this eventuated from the struggle against absolutism aimed at transforming arbitrary authority into rational authority subject to the scrutiny of a citizenry organized into a public body under the law. Before its transformation, the public sphere was accessible only by the bourgeoisie composed of narrow segments of the European population, mainly the educated and propertied men who conducted discourse not only exclusive of others, but prejudicial to the interests of the excluded.

However, Habermas thesis seems to have come under scrutiny. Most recently, Alan Downie has criticised Habermas's thesis that the public sphere first emerged in the 1700s, as a 'conclusion driven by a thesis rather than one drawn from the available evidence' (60). Due to its apparent historical inaccuracies, Downie regards Habermas's findings as 'misleading' (77) and even goes so far as to call his work a 'polite fiction' (74). However, while Downie's somewhat harsh criticism correctly highlights some of the weaknesses of Habermas's theory, it does not negate the cogent arguments

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about the effect of public opinion upon the political process. It is true that Habermas's chronology of the emergence of the public sphere needs to be revised, but the fact that something like a public sphere did emerge in the eighteenth century, and subsequently expanded, appears to be beyond debate.

Over the years many articles have appeared linking the media with the public sphere. It has been posited that the media of mass communication which are the 'technocultural sites for the creation of the public sphere – providing a framework within which the public issues of the day are discussed' (Green 116). As sources of information, a platform for debate and a channel of communication, the media, especially in Western 'democratic' countries, are considered vital to the political processes.

However, reality seems far removed from these somewhat 'fallacious' arguments. In most parts of the world, the media is often accessible to a select few only, particularly the elite with access to both economic and political power. The commodification of news and information, the commercialisation and domination of the media by elites have caused serious doubts with regard to its efficacy as a true public sphere. It is for this reason that 'recent' information communication technologies seem to have captured the attention of political actors who seek ways of enhancing public debate and participation. 'User-friendly' and 'user-controlled', the Internet thus emerges as an alternative to the traditional media controlled by the political elite and middlemen who seek to control and manipulate information production and dissemination. Decentralised, flexible, and user controlled, it seems to have convinced many political actors, social commentators and scholars like Lawrence Grossman, Brian Loader, Roza Tsagarousianou, Kenneth Hacker and Jan van Dijk, among others, that it is highly effective in the development of democracy, particularly because it is capable of promoting free expression, access to public information and as a public arena or forum for political discourses.

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The Internet as the 'true' public sphere?

Recent developments in information technology, specifically the Internet, seem to have changed the way people communicate and fundamentally loosened the grip that the political elite in society appear to have on the traditional media. This has not only provided opportunities to challenge the monopolistic control of the powerful media of mass communication by the elites, but somewhat decolonised and democratised information sourcing and dissemination.

Commentators such as Elberse, Hale and Dutton believe the Internet eliminates economic barriers created by conventional media, 'such as the prohibitive costs associated with TV advertising' (130), thus enabling more candidates to reach a wider audience and increase public access to high quality information, and in the process nurture greater interest in politics and political discourse. Besides, the Internet increases the scale and speed of information provision, giving people more control over their 'information diet', arming them with the information they need to participate in political activities. In contrast to other media where the information flow is mostly uni-directional, especially from the top to the bottom or, more specifically, from the government to citizens, the Internet allows for a two-way communication, giving a chance or platform to 'anybody and everybody, the shy, the disabled' and other socially disadvantaged groups by offering them both a platform for political voice and opportunities previously impractical and include them in the process of democratic participation (Tsagarousianou 6).

It is no wonder then that political actors, from individuals to governments, civil societies to political parties and even terrorist organisations see the Internet as profoundly useful because it can be used to mobilise, encourage or lobby people to support causes, political activities, campaigns, protests, referenda, voting, among numerous other activities. But especially important is the ability, capacity or potential of the Internet to open up the public space to the common man and woman actively to engage in politics and

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other social activities.

Thus arguments abound that cyberspace gives rise to new 'forms and expressions of governance' which Loader (1), for example, sees as marking the 'demise of modernist forms of governance based upon territory, hierarchical managerial control or populations, and policing'. To some it is the best form now of the modern public sphere as it opens and widens the public space to 'anybody and everybody' – the leaders, the elite, the common man and woman – and enables them actively to engage in political and other discussions and in the process enhance their civic engagement. 'The Internet as a new form of the public sphere,' says Dahlgren (75), 'is becoming a vital link and meeting ground for civically engaged and politically mobilized stratum of the polity and that this somewhat fosters the emergence of mini-public spheres.' The accessibility and interactivity offered by the Internet means that it presents people with opportunities to reconnect with politics. It fits the bill of how the 'real and true' public sphere or the public arena, the marketplace of political information and ideas ought to be.

These arguments seem too optimistic and somewhat utopian, however, as they ignore important factors like the global and even national digital stratifications. The digital stratification of communities into the information-haves or information-rich, the affluent who utilise and benefit from the 'luxuries' provided by technology, and the information have-nots or information-poor, the poor who struggle daily to make ends meet and do not have access to the Internet because they cannot afford the equipment and Internet services, makes it difficult to support fully such optimistic arguments. Indeed, as scholars like Pippa Norris, Jan van Dijk and Barrie Axford and Richard Huggins acknowledge, the widening gap between the information haves and have-nots in the digital ages threatens to become a serious destabilising factor in the political life, more so the democratic life, of many around the globe.

Compounded by apathy, suspicions and cynicism towards politics and politicians, the people seeking political

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information on the net and indeed other media, for example, is relatively small. That many people use the Internet for purposes other than serious political discussion and access to political material is in little doubt¹ and there are suggestions that it has failed to enhance political participation even in the West where its use is widespread. Indeed, there are convincing arguments which maintain that the Internet appeals mainly to those already converted, the privileged insiders, politically active members who seek to enhance their involvement in political activities. These are also the disappointments and drawbacks raised by other authors, such as Steve Davis, Larry Elin, and Grant Reeher in their book *Click on Democracy: The Internet's Power to Change Political Apathy into Civic Action* in which they discovered that 'true believers in the Internet's power ... were disappointed to find that most frequented sites featured the day's weather and that one of the most popular search topics was 'Pam Anderson', the buxom former star of TV's Baywatch' (29).

Political participation

Classical political thinkers like David Hume, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau² and John Stuart Mill believe that participation lies at the heart of political and democratic

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processes. Their positions are rooted in the belief that the ultimate authority in any state rests with the people and that their participation in the political process is required to fulfil the 'social contract' drawn by both the citizenry and elected government.

Democracy is dependant upon effective participation. The failure of many countries to democratise is premised upon the preclusion of the majority from the political process by an elite bent on maintaining their positions in power or because of their believe in the minimalist democratic approach in which their positions are sanctioned by minimal acts of citizen participation.³ But the consolidation of democracy cannot take place in an environment of minimal participation, or the disenfranchisement of some people. Besides, participation and inclusion are the main ingredients of democracy, perhaps the most sought-after but somewhat 'elusive' mode of governance.

In the modern world in which democratic leadership is determined through the ballot box, the participation of as many people as possible is the hallmark of legitimacy, openness, fairness and effectiveness of the electoral and indeed the democratic process. The domination of Internet by a few (the bourgeoisie) in most parts of the world and especially in the Third World has constructed an elitist present-day public sphere in which the urban, propertied and educated elite 'gather' and exclude the majority of the rural poor.

What are the implications of this situation? What does this say about the Internet, the medium which cyberoptimists believe will revitalise and transform the public sphere? There are many consequences of such an exclusive political arena. Democracy and participatory politics become a victim of this

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¹ In a report, *2005 Digital Future Report*, based on a research conducted by the University of Southern California's Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future, the top 10 Internet usage in 2005 were: e-mail, general Web surfing, reading news, shopping, entertainment news (searching and reading), seeking information about hobbies, online banking, medical information (searching and reading), instant messaging, and seeking travel arrangements and travel information. See highlights of the report at: <http://www.digitalcenter.org/pdf/Center-for-the-Digital-Future-2005-Highlights.pdf>. This is a fifth report in a project that started in 2000. See the previous reports at: http://www.digitalcenter.org/pages/site_content.asp?intGlobalId=20. Websites accessed 31 March 2006.

² Locke, John, Hume, David and Rousseau, Jean-Jacque. *The Social Contract: Essays by Locke, Hume and Rousseau*. London: Oxford University Press, 1947. Rousseau's treatise *du Contract Social* was first published in 1762 and is translated in this volume that contains the three versions of the social contracts by Gerald Hopkins.

³ In the democratic elitism theory, as expounded by Schumpeter, Joseph. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. London: Harvester and Wheatsheaf, 1942, for example, enlightened leadership in which there is minimal participation by the masses is the best way to maintain order and political stability.

environment and become a preserve of the rich. Control, manipulation of information and public opinion becomes not only deleterious to an open and transparent political and democratic process. Inevitably, the Internet is seen as reminiscent of the bourgeoisie public sphere and there have been criticisms especially by cyberrealists and even cyberpessimists who perceive it as another form of technology and an extension of the conventional or traditional media. Besides, the disparities, the digital divide, exist not only between developed and developing nations and between the poor, illiterate and marginalised and the affluent in each society begs the questions: does the Internet afford people the opportunity to engage in open and free debates? Can it provide sites for the creation and expansion of a 'true' public sphere? Does the Internet exemplify the complete transformation of the public sphere?

Although cyberoptimists believe that democracy, or cyberdemocracy as it is normally referred to, has benefited immensely from the Internet, cyberpessimists express doubts about its real contribution to democracy. Sardar is in fact outrightly dismissive of the Internet's contribution to democracy. To him, cyberdemocracy is illusionary and misconceived and he calls it 'lynch law' that 'fosters delusion of the frontier that you can get the laws you want' simply because of access and use of the Internet (32). His position is that Internet does not make people more democratic, responsible or accountable and that democracies and political processes will not change simply because of the Internet (32). Indeed, this is a plausible argument and one which is wont to attract widespread support as democracy requires much more than just the presence of technology. As pointed above, interest and commitment to politics is considered paramount to democracy and the Internet and other media of mass communication, even though critical to civic engagement are insufficient to engender political change. This is perhaps the point that Sardar raises in his argument:

The Western democracies are not lacking

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in public feedback; what people lack is faith in politics, politicians and political institutions. Would electronic democracy make politicians more upright, more moral, more conscientious, more responsible? Would Cyberdemocracy make the Pentagon more open and accountable to the public? Would CIA operations be open to public scrutiny? What electronic democracy offers is more of the same: more instantaneously mushrooming pressure groups, more fragmented politics, more corrupt public life (31 – 32)

Sardar thus raises fundamental questions and in fact casts doubts about the optimistic views presented on the political impact of the Internet on democracy. Although democracy is just one aspect of politics, it is wont to raise other doubts about the findings that sound too utopian and these, as acknowledge, above seem to be prominent among the majority of the existing literature.

Besides other doubts that are now emerging about the cybercommunities or online communities and their role in politics, Barber presents what he considers to be a serious setback in their role in the development of democracy. Although he sees them playing a role in democracy, he is sceptical about their overall effect on democracy (268). Barber points out that, 'there may be some new form of community developing among the myriad solitaires perched in front of their screens and connected only by their fingertips to the new web defined by the Internet. But the politics of that 'community' has yet to be invented' (268).

The Internet and the Kenyan public sphere

In Kenya, as in the rest of the developing world where there is a growing use of the Internet, it is possible that it could become a major tool by which citizens exert political influence

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and revitalise public debate. Although at this point it is not clear what real impact the Internet has had on Kenyan politics because of its limited diffusion, empirical fieldwork research indicates that there is a rising institutional and individual utilisation of the Internet for political communication.

The Internet first emerged in Kenya in 1993, growing slowly due to various reasons, especially poverty and poor telecommunication infrastructure, such that by 2000 only about 30,000 people had access to it (Mweu http://www.itu.int/africainternet2000/countryreports/ken_e.htm). Official statistics indicate that over 1.5 million out of the 34 million Kenyans - or 4.4 per cent—have access to the Internet⁴, even though most of this access is limited to urban areas where the infrastructure is more developed.

The growth of the Internet in Kenya took off after the dissolution of the Kenya Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (KPTC) in 1999, following pressure from international donors and financial institutions, specifically the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The dissolution under the Kenya Communications Act of 1998 led to the formation of three separate entities – Telkom Kenya (telecommunications); the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK), the regulatory body; and the Postal Corporation of Kenya (postal services).

The dissolution of the KPTC and the growth of the Internet in the country marked a turning point for Kenyan politics. By 2002 major political actors, including political parties, the government, politicians, non-governmental organisations and a sizeable number of ordinary Kenyans had embraced the Internet as the new medium for political communication and in the process significantly altered Kenya's political communication landscape leading to speculations that there has been an expansion and transformation of the Kenyan public sphere and the political process. These ideas appear to have emerged because of the belief that Kenya's urban youth, who are apparently the most politically motivated section of

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society, had taken to the Internet and were increasingly utilising it for various political activities, especially for the dissemination and reception of political information as well as for political debates.⁵ This is evident from Mashada.com, an online platform where political discussions carry the day. At any one time, there are more than ten thousand political postings discussing various political issues in Kenya including democracy, good governance, and corruption among others.

After the resurrection of multi-party politics in Kenya in 1991, the twin political concepts of participation and inclusion became not only common political buzzwords, but vital ingredients in the cultivation of a democratic culture. Indeed, the emphasis placed on participation and inclusion in the political and democratic process means they are absolute prerequisites for an infant pluralistic society like Kenya. The attendant result was the demand and indeed desire by many Kenyans to enhance their participation and inclusion in the political process, actions they considered vital prerequisites for the consolidation of democracy after many years of autocratic or personal rule, a common feature not only in Kenya but also in many African countries, especially from the 1960s to early 1990s. This desire symbolises the commonality of interests, especially those arising from the political doldrums they have found themselves in over the years. But the desire alone cannot effect change unless accompanied by active demands for change and the availability of facilities that can be used to drum up support for various causes and enhance their participation and inclusion in the political and democratic process.

The Internet seemed to have come in handy at these times of need. Even though limited in its reach, it seemed to provide people with opportunities to engage with their leadership. Even the government now appears convinced that an online presence would help reengage with the people. Through its website (www.kenya.go.ke) the government seeks to expand the political space, enhance

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⁴ Statistics provided by the CCK public and media liaison officer Christopher Wambua at a personal interview in Nairobi in March 2005.

⁵ Based on a fieldwork research conducted in Kenya in February and March 2005.

communication between those in power and those governed, 'promote people to people dialogue... [improve] effectiveness, efficiency, service delivery and to promote democracy... to provide investments that are needed in people, tools, policies, processes, engage citizens, and provide government services.'⁶

The civil society in Kenya also seems convinced that the Internet has expanded the political space and will expand it even further when universal access is achieved. Their convictions are based on the capacity of the Internet to provide faster means of communication and its ability to hold archives of information vital to their work. For example, John Kipchumba of the Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Change (4Cs)⁷ believes that the Internet has greatly enhanced communication among the civil society organisations and the grassroots. Basing his argument on work done in 2004 and the early part of 2005 especially in trying to lobby for the adoption of a new constitution⁸, he says their operational capacity would have been greatly hampered without the Internet.

In February 2005, for example, Kipchumba and other civil society activists lobbying for the implementation of a new constitution organised an urgent meeting using email which he believes were more effective with regard to both cost and exchange of information. Attaching documents to emails, they were able to send off large files and other information that ultimately contributed to making the meeting a 'success'. Essentially, they were able to maximise on time, space and communication and organising costs. 'It took us just a short time to organise the meeting... and this was very effective,

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faster and cheaper.'⁹ Kennedy Masime, a local nongovernment organisation executive and a participant at the meeting, testifies to the efficacy of the Internet in the political process. 'Within a short time we found a way forward. This proved to me that we have at our disposal the means to engage in meaningful and important discussions without the need for physical meeting. This is fast, effective and cost-effective,' says Masime, the chief executive officer of Centre for Governance and Development (CGD)¹⁰. 'We don't even have to call workshops now to discuss some of these things. We use the Internet to deliberate, to discuss on issues we think are important to this country.'

For a majority of Kenyans residing outside the country, the Internet is an indispensable part of their communication process, acting as a channel of easy, affordable and effective source of information and medium of communication, through emails and very soon voice over Internet protocol (VOIP)¹¹. Inevitably in the process it has decolonised the public sphere and expanded the political space in Kenya, providing people with opportunities to disseminate and share information. According to the editors of three Kenyan leading newspapers with online presence – the Nation, The Standard and Kenya Times – millions (although they were unable to give the exact figures) of people around the globe rely on their newspapers for Kenyan news and information, inevitably contributing significantly to political communication process and expansion of the political space. Lucy Kirauni, the Standard online editor, believes the number of people accessing

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⁶ Republic of Kenya. E-Government Strategy: The Strategic Framework, Administrative Structure, Training Requirements and Standardization Framework. Nairobi: Cabinet Office, Office of the President. 2004: 1

⁷ Kipchumba, John. Personal Interview. 3 March 2005. See the 4Cs website at: <http://www.4cskenyatuitakayo.org/> and their discussion forum at: <http://www.4cskenyatuitakayo.org/forum/default.asp> although it does not seem to have attracted much activity. Both websites accessed 21 September 2005.

⁸ The referendum to vote for or against the adoption of a new constitution will be held on November 21 and there have been numerous political activities including rallies, meetings and campaigns by parties for and against. The Kenya Constitutional Review Commission (KCRC) website at: <http://www.kenyaconstitution.org/index.shtml>, explains in detail the process of attempting to review the country's constitution in Kenya and has many documents detailing contributions, minutes among others. Website accessed 21 September 2005.

⁹ Interview with Kipchumba

¹⁰ Masime, Kennedy. Personal interview. 21 February 2005.

¹¹ After a long and protracted battle with Internet service providers, The Kenyan government has recently agreed that they can introduce VOIP as part of their services. This allows people to make telephone calls over the Internet and is one of way of enhancing Internet diffusion in Kenya.

their online sites is a reflection that the Internet has become a major platform for political discourse and an 'effective' channel of political communication.¹² 'The Internet offers more freedom to people to engage in the political process. It allows people to participate in politics, through their contributions to the political process. When we give people the forum to contribute to debates, we are expanding the political space which is critical to the political process,' Kirauni says. Churchill Otieno¹³ believes the Internet is now the most reliable, affordable, quick and effective form of unmediated communication which makes it more attractive to those actively engaged in political activities and interested in Kenya's political process. 'As a media organisation with an online presence, we provide a platform for political discourse which is important for any country. And I believe this shapes the political process in any country and Kenya political course,' Otieno states.

Kirauni, Otieno and Enock Wambua, the managing editor of the Kenya Times, exude great optimism about the transformative capacity of the Internet and expansion of media outreach, even though they seem ignorant of the digital divide that exists in Kenya especially between urban and rural areas where about 80 per cent of the population lives. In fact, there are concerns that the limited diffusion of the Internet precludes many of the country's people who live in rural areas from the political process. This limited diffusion diminishes the hopes of those seeking to expand the public sphere in Kenya among them various civil society organisations like non governmental organisations and the media. Some in fact consider this reason enough not to take the Internet seriously. Their argument is that politics and democracy is about numbers and without the ability to reach many in the country means its impact as an open space for political debates is in doubt.

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Conclusion

This article has examined the issue of the Internet and the public sphere and argued that the Internet somehow represents a 'transformed' public political space where people can engage in political discussions and activism. Based on the premise that cyberspace, the computer generated public forum, is the 'new public sphere' or what Dahlgren calls the 'vital link and meeting ground for civically engaged' (75) and Rheingold the 'electronic agora' (XXX), where people engage in open and vital political debate, the article has argued that the Internet has encouraged political interactions and enhanced political participation.

However, the stratification into information haves and information have-nots continue to dog assumptions that the Internet is the 'new' public sphere. The limited diffusion of the Internet in Kenya further casts doubt about its ability to expand the political space especially when evidence indicate that it is the bourgeoisie who congregate most in cyberspace. This excludes the majority from this 'new' public sphere and raises numerous and serious questions about the use of the Internet in the development of a democratic society based on free, informed and quality information and consensus arrived at after inclusive public discourses.

In fact, many of the arguments that the Internet will transform or that it is the embodiment of the public sphere, are not new and seem to follow similar patterns of technological inventions. Many of the technological innovations, from films, to telegraph, radio, television and the fax machine spawned similar utopian notions. In 1995, when the WWW was a few years old, Nicholas Negroponte, one of the leading gurus of the Internet development and a diehard cyberoptimists, portrayed the Internet as the centrepiece of a democratising digital revolution, declaring that the 'information industry will become more of a boutique business ... the customers will be people and their computers agents' (57 – 58). He went to predict that the public would pull what it wanted from the Internet rather than what was pushed at it by the

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¹² Kirauni, Lucy. Personal interview. 18 February 2005. See also *The Standard* website at www.eastandard.net.

¹³ Otieno, Churchill. Personal interview. 16 March 2005. See also *The Nation* website at www.nationmedia.com.

giant media organisations. Mark Poster, another Internet guru, concluded that we were entering the 'second media age' in which monopoly would be replaced by choice in which the distinction between senders and receivers would become obsolete and that the ruled were being transformed into rulers. Some of these wild claims have raised serious concerns among discerning scholars, social commentators and cyberrealists, who believe that they are devoid of not only empirical support but also reflect lack of critical analysis and reflection on technological determinism. Hacker and van Dijk among others have raised concerns about what seems to be lack of serious reflections on historical consequences of technology upon political and indeed other sociological phenomena. To them, the claims are a manifestation of utopian and even naïve 'oversimplistic assumptions' that seem to pursue technological innovations (2).

Thus, even though it has been recognised that the Internet has the capacity, unlike other traditional media, to transform the public sphere, it would not radically alter the way people do things. Besides, a lot is needed especially in Kenya to tackle poverty, provide affordable computers, training, and improve the telecommunication infrastructure as way of spreading the use of computer and Internet technology.

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