E-Society and E-Democracy

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In cooperation between
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Before we start wearing our computers and digitizing our cities, can the generations of the early twenty-first century imagine the questions our grandchildren will wish we had asked today? (Howard Rheingold)

1 Introduction

This paper is about one question: What implications does the ever more rapid spread of the Internet hold for democracy?

More than one billion people worldwide are already using the World Wide Web. Within ten years we have learned to search, meet, date, organize, collaborate or shop online. Most real life activities already have an online equivalent, and the rapid adoption of online media leaves us with little time to think where information technology is taking us, our society and our democratic institutions.

With this shift toward living online and expression of the self in a virtual environment, new challenges arise: What relevance do our virtual bodies have? How do we deal with relationships which are less tangible than our real-life interactions? How do we build a reputation online, how do we find the right balance between openness and privacy in such a pervasive medium as the Internet?

Can Social Media such as Facebook, Twitter or Smartvote improve civil participation or will they rather breed superficial exchange and prevent serious deliberation from happening? Is the Web replicating social divides that already occur offline or does collaborative technology pave the way for a more equal society? Is power really shifting away from political organizations to one issue groups such as the Pirate Party or will spontaneous online associations remain an exception in a steady landscape of all-embracing political parties?

These and lots of other question arise when one starts looking at the intersection between Internet, society and politics – and while we tried to answer some within the last three months of our project work, we claim no completeness. This paper was written as a road map for those interested in the changes that Social Media bring to society - and the threats and opportunities that result for democracy.

2 Internet and Social Change

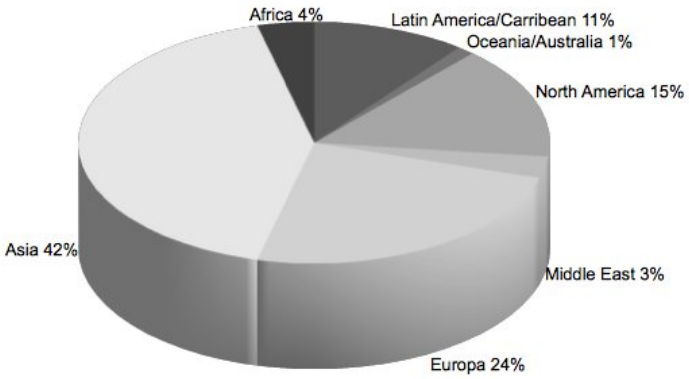
2.1 Growth of Internet Usage

Who is an internet user

In order to to give a concise overview of the Social Media spread and advancement, we first have to look at Internet usage on the whole. This poses an almost impossible-to-answer question: Who is an Internet user? Boiling the multitude of definitions down, an Internet user is an individual who (a) has technical access to the Internet and (b) has the basic knowledge to navigate in it, meaning that she knows how to receive E-mails, send E-mails and apply a Web browser and a search engine.

Internet users worldwide

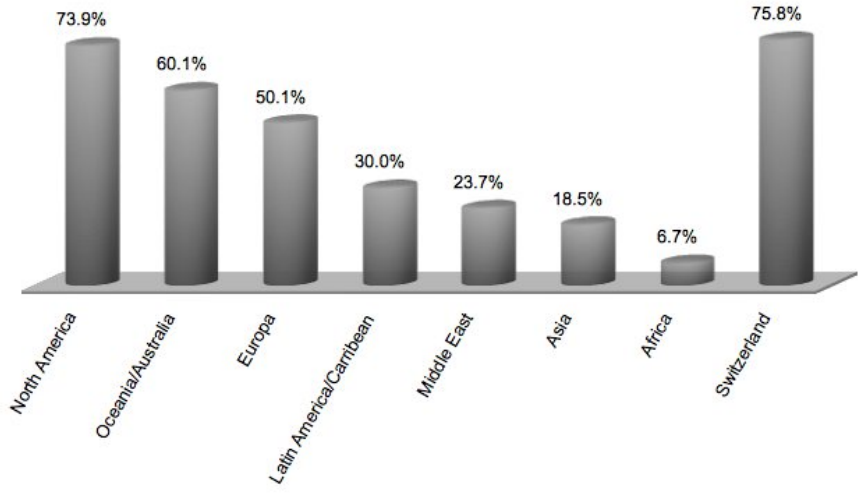
With this definition in mind we can now examine the worldwide spread of Internet usage. With an estimated world population of close to 6.77 billion, the "population of Internet users" has grown to close to 1.67 billion people (as of June 30, 2009), from nearly 361 million by the end of 2000 (World Internet Usage Statistics News and World Population Stats). This translates into a growth of roughly 362%. Of course, there are great regional disparities in both Internet access growth and penetration of the world's population.



Regional disparities of Internet access in % of the world's population

While the largest overall Internet population today lives in Asia (42.2% of all Internet users worldwide), only very small portions come from Africa, the Middle East and Australia/Oceania (3.9%, 2.9% and 1.2% respectively). Europe makes up almost a quarter of the World's online population, while North America accounts for 15.1%, Latin America and the Caribbean for 10.5% (World Internet Usage Statistics News and World Population Stats).

Given that Africa has an estimated population of over 990 million people, the Internet penetration rate is only 6.7%, by far the lowest of all continents. Although Japan and South Korea have long been major players on the Web world map and China has been experiencing a boost in Internet access over the last years, with only 18.5% Asia still lags far behind the West. Europe has reached an Internet penetration rate of 50.1%, while Australia/Oceania are already at 60.1% and North America leads this chart with 73.9% (World Internet Usage Statistics News and World Population Stats). Looking at the region this report aims at, Germany has a penetration rate of 67.1%, Austria is at 68.2%, Switzerland tops both with 75.8% of its population having Web access (European Union Internet Usage and Population Stats).

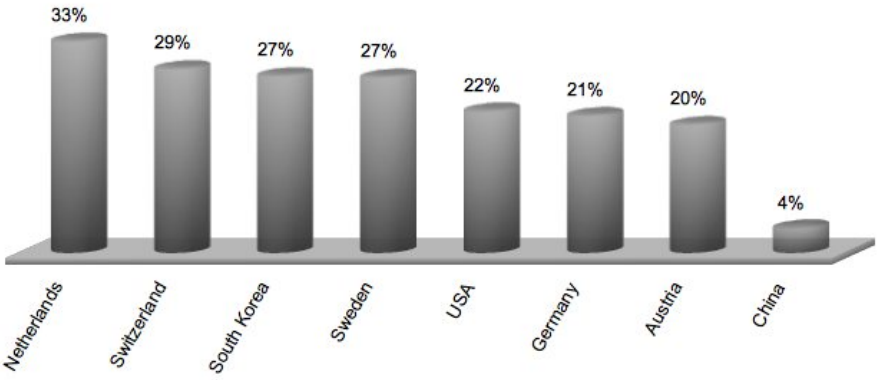


Internet penetration per region in % of total population

Broadband Internet is increasingly becoming the standard Internet connection type in the West. The reason why this type of connection is important for our findings is the speed of data transfer it allows for. It enables the user to send and receive large packages of information. Listening to radio stations or even to watch television online has only become possible because of Broadband connections. This means that it is directly connected to the Internet users' ability to gather information and to communicate via the Internet with other users.

In general the numbers for Broadband subscriptions run along the same lines of Internet connectivity in general. The West is also in this aspect far more developed than Asia and

Africa. Among the top twenty countries by subscribers in total, numbers in Western countries range from fifteen to just over thirty per cent of total Internet penetration. It is interesting to note that the United States range in the average of the West with 21.9% (2007) while South Korea (27.4%), Sweden (27.2) and the Netherlands (32.8%) range significantly higher. Although China takes the number two spot on the top twenty list with 48,500,000 Broadband subscribers, these represent only 3.7% of the total Internet users number in the country.



Broadband suscribtions by % of Internet users

Looking nearer again, in 2007 Germany had a Broadband penetration rate of 21.2% while Austria stood at 19.8% and Switzerland at 28.5% (Broadband Internet Subscribers - World Countries; for Austria cp. Europe Internet Usage Stats and Population Statistics#at). For more on regional disparities as well as a closer look at other categories like age, location and sex, see 2.2 chapter on the Digital Divide.

USA leading in Web services

For many parts of the digitalized world, it is safe to say that major impulses in the development of Social Media have come from the Internet hubs within the United States of America, namely the Silicon Valley. Out of the top twenty websites (traffic-wise, Alexa Top 500 Global Sites), only three are not headquartered in the USA and only five not located in California. Most of the Social Media websites which have had a major worldwide impact on Internet usage, or at least a mass-mediated and thus perceived international impact, like YouTube, Flickr, Blogger, Wordpress, Google, Wikipedia, Myspace, Facebook and Twitter are based within the US. Those large sites which are

not either based or have been conceived in the United States serve fairly closed markets with a large digital populace like China or India. This is best explained through the phenomenon of locally popular search engines. Some countries have their own popular search engines which seriously challenge Google's market share in these countries. South Korean Web users for example rely heavily on a search engine called Naver, which according to the New York Times held a market share of 77% in online searches, compared to Google's 1.7% in South Korea (South Koreans Connect Through Search Engine). In China, the most popular search engine is called Baidu, (Lee quits as president of Google China_English_Xinhua), in Russia, it is Yandex (Where Google Isn't Goliath).

2.2 Digital Divide

The Digital Divide is a metamorphosis of existing divides

Whether we are talking about a Digital Divide or a Digital Gap (which shall be treated as equal terms nominating the same phenomenon), it has to be acknowledged that other divides or gaps have existed before the digital one, rooting in the same inequalities. The Information Divide and the Knowledge Divide for example are very similar to the Digital Divide (Zillien 2006, 56). All of these divides exist because of unequal access to and/or availability of information, to knowledge or to the (digital) means to acquire said information or knowledge. These inequalities can exist within the borders of one country, but also cross borders, for example from industrialized nations to the so-called Third World. Very basically speaking, the Digital Divide is defined by Internet access, logistically and technically: Does one have online access at home, at school, at friends' places, be it Dial-Up or Broadband. But there are further layers of the Divide which build upon this first one.

2.2.1 The Digital Divide – a Matter of Class

Being online – a question of age, sex and location

In her study, Nicole Zillien comes to the conclusion, "that the usage of the Internet depends highly upon the socio-economic status" (Zillien 2006, V). The same goes for a more overall Digital Competency. While Zillien thus clearly states that Internet usage is a question of social class (Zillien 2006, V), we found other determinants when it comes to defining the Digital Divide: Internet usage also is a question of age, sex and location. Statistics on Internet usage still show that younger people are more inclined to go online than their elders and women are still slightly underrepresented in the virtual world (see below for numbers concerning Switzerland). As for location, Internet access and more

specifically Broadband access is still more widespread in urban centers than in rural areas. Zillien goes on to argue that the introduction of new media might lead to a greater exclusion of certain parts of society rather than spur widespread societal participation, thus hardening existing social inequalities (Zillien 2006, 3). Furthermore, those who do not have access to the Internet can not develop and practice the skills needed to navigate online, thus falling even further behind. Others, like the Digital Gap critic Benjamin Compaine, on the other hand state that technology-related gaps are relatively transient because people develop the ability to adapt to the challenges and changes brought by new media (Compaine 2001, xii). Compaine also argues that "perceived gaps are closing among various ethnic, racial and geographical groups in access to the Internet" simply due to decreasing digital communications cost as well as the general increase of use (Compaine 2001, ix). Although singular voices exist which proclaim that the Digital Divide is at least an exaggeration or simply does not exist, it seems, however, to be common scientific sense that the Digital Divide is indeed a reality.

It is important to note that it would be a crass simplification to break down the Digital Divide to a gap between those who have access to the Internet and those who do not. It is rather implied that there are various stratifications of divides. Kim and Kim for example differentiate between the Opportunity Divide (access or not), the Utilization Divide (acquired technological skills needed to use the Internet) and the Reception Divide (ability to judge and choose the right sources) (Zillien 2006, 99). Especially the third Divide in this model tends to be overlooked but is, in our eyes, utterly important. Clement and Shade, on the other hand, developed a rainbow model with even more dimensions: Type of access (Broadband vs. dialup), technological means (what device is being used?), software (browser, additional programs, encryption technology), content (is relevant content accessible?), provider (reliable Internet connectivity), (computer) literacy (media competency, access to technological support) and structural decisions (ability to help designing the technological infrastructure) (Zillien 2006, 101).

2.2.2 Switzerland and the Digital Divide

When looking at the various determinants of the Digital Divide and comparing them with numbers for 2008 retrieved from the Bundesamt für Statistik (Statistik Schweiz - Indikatoren), the Swiss national institute for statistics, we can conclude the following findings. 1.) The older the population, the less it goes online. Among those who use the

Internet more than once a week, the 14 to 19 year olds are the strongest group with 91.8 per cent, closely followed by the 20 to 29 year old group with 90.8%. Only 50.8% of the Swiss aged 60 to 69 are online regularly with the rate dropping sharply for those over 70 – here it is down to only 17.7%. 2.) Women are underrepresented in the online world. Of all Swiss men, 78.7% go online regularly, while only 63.5% women do so. 3.) Education is a key factor in Internet usage. When it comes to education, Zillien's theory seems to be confirmed: In Switzerland in 2008, only 50.3% of those with the lowest formal education (Obligatorische Schule) were on the Internet regularly. Those with a high school diploma (Matur) went online at a rate of 69.4%; 80.5% of those with a higher formal education were only beaten by those with a university degree: 90.8% of this group are online. 4.) The higher the income, the more likely it is one goes online. Online usage seems to be depending on income (remember, Zillien was talking of socioeconomic status). Of those earning 3,999 Swiss Franks or less a month, only 36.3% use the Internet once a week or more often, while those with salaries of 10,000 CHF and higher were online at a rate of 92.1%. These numbers contradict Benjamin Compaine's theory that with falling prices the Digital Divide will close by itself.

Regional differences in Switzerland – why is the Italian part lagging?

Another very interesting finding of the Statistics given by the Swiss Bundesamt is that when it comes to Internet usage of the three major language regions in Switzerland the Italian region lags behind the German and the French region by almost ten per cent. This might be explained by the fact that none of the major Swiss cities are located in the Italian part of Switzerland. But this is just a shot in the dark, those numbers would need to be investigated further.

2.2.3 How to overcome the Digital Divide

The Gap is closing, but remains

Katz and Rice, who have been investigating the Digital Divide since as early as 2002 (the term is dated back in various monographs until the mid-Nineties), then concluded that the Digital Divide is closing, but remains (Katz and Rice 2002, 65). This still seems to be true today. One part of the 2008 ACTA survey of the German Allensbach institute for example hints at a more rapid growth of Internet usage by older population groups in Germany (Süsslin 2008, 3ff), which still means, however, that they are only catching up, not drawing even.

Providing broad and open online access is merely laying the cornerstone for equality in a digitalized society (and probably is an easy way out of responsibility for governments). Furthermore, we see it as utterly important that state institutions put education onto their agendas. As Lisa J. Servon puts it in her book "Bridging The Digital Divide": "An access-focused policy works for the telephone, but is inadequate for the Internet" (Servon 2002, 77). What needs to be done is to enhance digital literacy, a somewhat complex mix of "professional knowledge, economic resources, and technical skills" (Kling as cited in Zillien 2006, 96) which enables the user to navigate through the Internet unharmed. National as well as supranational telecommunications institutions need to solve the problems of accessibility, while state (and international) educational institutions need to acknowledge the fact that the population (not just the young) needs to be educated in how to use the hardware and software and needs to be taught the necessary skills which enables them to navigate and to evaluate information drawn from the Web. Because, as Zillien puts it very correctly: The Digital Divide is not about how many per cent of a population have online access, it is about how many can profit from it (Zillien 2006, 85).

2.3 Rise of Social Media and Social Implications

2.3.1 Social Media Segmentation

Definition of Social Media

When it comes to societal and political participation on the Web, so-called Social Media play an integral role. If the Web can be seen as the communications hardware, Social Media are the corresponding social software. They do not only challenge traditional ways of networking, communication and participation, they reshape them. Therefore, governments and politics, for instance, must adapt to Social Media, not the other way around. We define online Social Media as a Web-based service which allows for users to create content and interact with each other through features like comment functionalities, or which allows for users to work collaboratively on content or project-related goals. This so-called user generated content can be anything from uploading a picture to the photo sharing platform Flickr to writing lengthy blog entries on blogging software like Wordpress to updating one's status on Facebook. Online Social Media are furthermore characterized by the fact that they involves very little cost, usually little time and few technical skills and that they enable the user to broadcast to many other users.

To gain an overview of the different types of Online Social Media we divided the Social Media sector into a wheel-like structure displaying some representative providers.

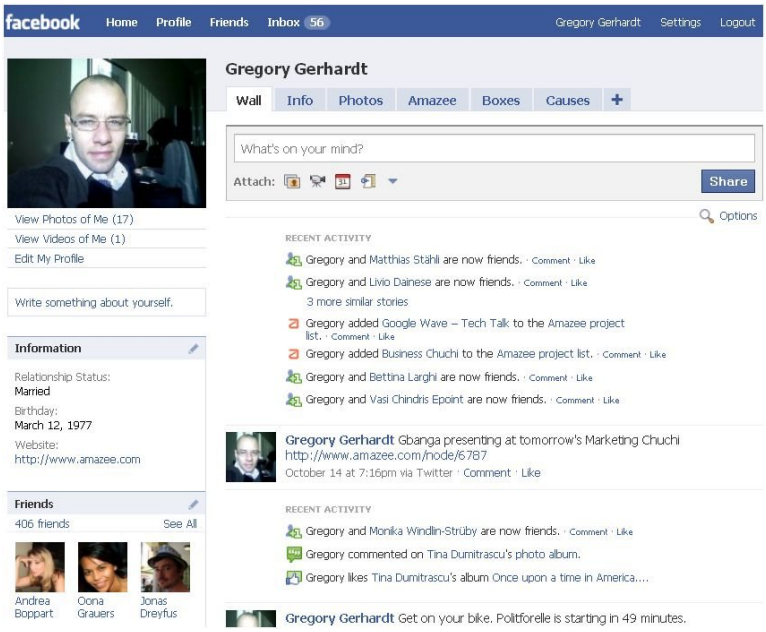
Overview Social Media

Social Media wheel. Graphic: Gregory Gerhardt

2.3.2 Identity and Identification

Writing ourselves into being

Since the beginning of their explosive growth in 2005, Social Media such as Facebook, Xing or Twitter have become hubs for *virtual* identity construction. Social Networking sites allow for personal self-expression and at the same time provide opportunities for connecting and relationship building (Stern 2008, 98). Whereas real-world identities are generally unitary and *socially* constructed according to institutional values – family, community, church, profession, nation and so on, (cp. Fraser and Dutta 2008, 33) cyber-space creates a wider horizontal space for the *personal* fabrication of identities (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 20ff) and allows for a cleaner segmentation of multiple identities. A Xing profile will usually represent the "professional" identity, a Facebook profile will show the "casual" identity and an Amazee profile the "socially engaged" identity.



source: www.facebook.com/home.php#/gregory.gerhardt?ref=profile

In more extreme cases the quest for uniqueness or confidentiality can also inspire highly imaginative and "false" forms of self-presentation, including fabrication, invention and identity theft (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 36). In the real world the self is presented; in the virtual world it can easily be invented (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 39).

Web identities are real identities

Whereas Fraser & Dutta claim that the online construction of *multiple* identities is becoming the expected norm, (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 32) our observation is the opposite. Of 1528 randomly selected Facebook friends 1486 (97%) used their true user name and only 42 (3%) used a pseudonym. Independent of identity experiments and the changing nature of personal and institutional identities, the Internet generation is increasingly using the Web to reflect a *unitary* identity using their real name. There are two reasons: First, *multiple* identities with multiple names are equal to a spreading loss in the daily human competition for attention, or in other words, the more I use the same name, the easier it is to build an online reputation. The Web is more and more turning from an experimental playing field into a system that is instrumental for maintaining a competitive advantage in most areas of daily life. Focused online interaction therefore requires a coherent "personal brand". The second factor that is driving the usage of real identities is the fact that virtual bodies are mostly embedded in social networks. This means that online identities are also governed and validated by other people and organizations that add their patches to our "social performance" (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 40), e.g. by pub-

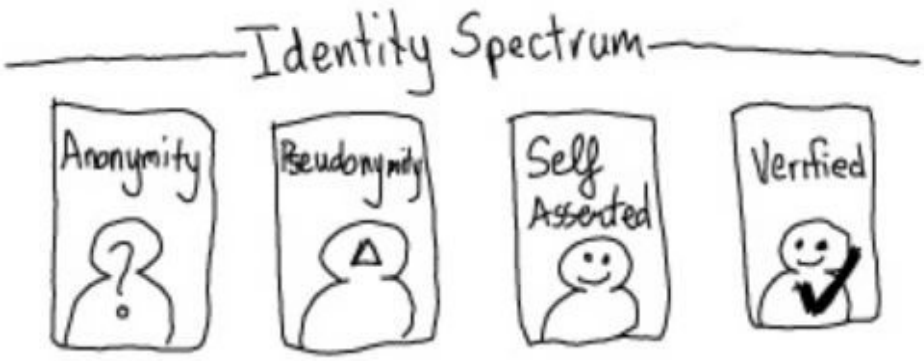
licly tagging and uploading pictures of other people or commenting on other online profiles.

Online identification and authentication

Identification is a basic prerequisite for social interaction. Identification allows a relationship to pick up where it previously left off. The word *authentication*, on the other hand, admits to a risk that a comparison might be inaccurate. When we authenticate somebody, we review his or her provenance, doing our best to make sure that specific person is the person he or she claims to be (Harper 2006).

Low-security interaction requires identification

Government-citizen transactions that require identification but no authentication/verification can be defined as "low-security interactions". They primarily have a service character. Imagine you are repeatedly visiting a government website. If you use a pseudonym or self asserted identity, the website will "know" it was you and help you resume your search where you left off the last time or provide you with information that could be of significance for your type of profile – just as Amazon does with personalized book recommendations (Hamlin 2009a).



Source: www.identitywoman.net

The Japanese and the U.S administration have already initiated significant steps for the adoption of open identity systems and trust frameworks such as OpenID and InfoCard. On 9 September 2009 the ten industry leaders Yahoo!, PayPal, Google, Equifax, AOL, VeriSign, Acxiom, Citi, Privo and Wave Systems announced that they will support the first U.S. governmental pilot programs designed for the American public to register and participate in government websites – without having to create new user names and passwords. By working with the private industry, the U.S. government will allow individual citizens to login to government websites with their existing accounts (Hamlin 2009b; Thibeau 2009; IDManagement.gov).

For "high-security" interaction between governments and citizens such as online voting or the signing of online initiatives, e-government will demand for systems that allow for the digital identification *and* authentication of participants (verified identity) or, in other words, an electronic equivalent to a signature. Several scenarios will have to be discussed by policy makers: Will private providers (with or without governmental certification) be able to verify identities or will identification have to be provided by governmental organs directly? Or may there be the opportunity to have selective disclosure to governmental departments combining anonymity with verified identity (e.g. taking a verified identity claim, then using cryptography to strip the specifics away and just have a claim which verifies that one is "over 18" or from a specific canton) (Hamlin 2009a)?

High-security interactions require authentication

2.3.3 Privacy

Trading privacy for convenience

For decades, people have feared the use of surveillance technology as a tool of repressive social control by totalitarian states – just think of Orwell's "Big Brother" in "1984" (Rheingold 2002, 186). Nowadays computing and communication technologies seduce consumers into voluntarily trading privacy for convenience. Social Media users are already living parts of their lives in public, creating vast lists of online "friends". Through Facebook, Twitter etc. they can learn of births, deaths, parties, new friendships, broken engagements and much more just by checking their activity stream, which consolidates all friends' online updates (Watson 2009, 81). No group has a more intuitive approach to this life in public than the so-called Digital Natives, the demographic slice of our society that is "net native" and has never known life without the Internet (Watson 2009, XV). Loss of privacy therefore is one of the most discussed aspects when it comes to the rapid spread of Social Media (Rheingold 2002, xxi): All information which has been fed into the Web is persistent (content is recorded for posterity), searchable (finding content is just a matter of keystrokes), replicable (content can be copied from one place to another so that there is no way to distinguish the original from the copy) and can be consumed by invisible audiences across all space and time (boyd 2008, 126)

People are becoming more open

The rise of Social Media has not only increased the scale of the public but also the *openness* of people, especially when it comes to the Net Natives (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 77). Indeed, online social interaction does not defer to conventional norms and notions of privacy. Most of us would never think of making the same gestures to mere acquaintances in the real world as we do on Facebook. The advent of Social Networking

sites has created virtual norms which no longer apply to previous notions of privacy (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 80). In the constant trade-off between privacy and the benefit of publicity, we often decide in favor of the benefits such as attention, access to information, new acquaintances etc. This explains why the Internet generation is being so indifferent to the reputation risk through self-exhibition. The Web has become the key medium for the presentation of self in everyday life. Second, behaving according to the norms of their peer groups, the loss of privacy goes at little cost; however, not being online does go at high cost. One thing is certain: the private self is shrinking, the public self is rapidly growing (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 81ff).

As online activities are woven into the fabric of our physical world, governments and especially corporations are gaining ever more power over our behavior and beliefs. Michel Foucault stated about the relationship of knowledge and power: "Knowledge once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations" (Rheingold 2002, 188). Their logos might look cuddly, but Social Media corporations such as Google, Amazon, Facebook or Twitter are evolving into informational superpowers.

2.3.4 Status

Dematerialization of status

Traditionally, social status has been conferred by institutionalized values based on ascriptive criteria such as wealth, education, title, rank and so on. From the beginning of human history, status has been socially organized as a vertical system of values – in most cases, in pyramidal form. The small group at the top enjoys a higher social status than the vast majority at the bottom. Status therefore is an attribute that confirms domination – and therefore is instrumentally linked to power (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 114). Even though the basic impulses of status attainment haven't changed, Social Media have brought one important change to the social *architecture* of status: In the online worlds, status is *dematerialized (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 122)*. Virtual environments create level playing fields where *material* attributes such as a fashionable handbag or a sizable car are regarded as inefficient and irrelevant (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 22).

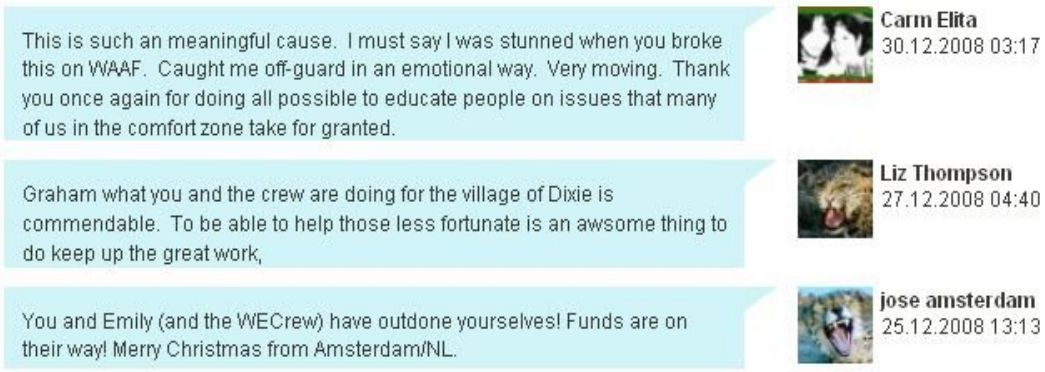
In cyberspace status is primarily conferred on the skill to verbalize standpoints, expertise and informational advantages and share and spread this content in a multitude of online formats. Trading know-how isn't new, but online the distribution of high-quality recommendations is probably the most prominent way to accrue social status (Rheingold 2002, 116). The more your content is being re-tweeted, the more viral your video becomes, the higher your name and your content ends up in a Google search query, the higher your status. In cyberspace, it is not what you *own*, but the relevance of what you *share*.

Twitter stream (Source: twitter.com)

Online status is furthermore measured based on the possession of social capital: In cyberspace social capital is reflected by the number of online "friends", blog views or Twitter followers. Social capital is the factor that defines how far your content travels and who you can introduce to whom; without "friends", nobody will hear you, even if you are an expert on a relevant issue. If you have lots of influential friends you will be able to reach "tastemakers" and "multipliers" and make yourself heard (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 126). In cyberspace, it's not who you *are*, but who you *know* (boyd 2008, 130).

Ten years from now, a new kind of Digital Divide will separate those who know how to use new media to initiate or lead powerful collaborative units from those who don't (Rheingold 2002, xix). Albert Einstein said that "Imagination is more important than knowledge." Leaders create things that did not exist before. They do this by giving their group, tribe or network a vision of something that could happen, but has not yet (Godin 2008, 116). The more of these networks will emerge as a dominant form of social organization, the more managers of hierarchical organizations will be replaced by leaders

who can lead from the "bottom" (Godin 2008, 24), people who can convince other people to follow their movements, flash mobs and "ad-hocracies". This power will be reflected in a third layer of online status: online leaders will enjoy a higher status than online followers.



Compliments to Graham Wallington (Source: www.amazee.com/user/3088/compliment)

Summing up, it can be said that, in cyberspace, real-world status oligarchies have been deposed by online democracies which base their status assignments on informational efficiency and effectiveness. Fraser and Dutta call this phenomenon the *democratization of status (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 114)*. However, since online networks are mostly replications of real life networks, there can be no dichotomous separation between an on- and offline status. "VIP"-Networks such as *A Small World* even base their business model on the replication of traditional forms of social organization, enforcing closure rules to create dense social interactions according to real-world status hierarchies (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 123). There is some evidence that, in India, members of the Orkut social network are organizing themselves along that country's traditional castes lines. In the United States, it has been observed that MySpace and Facebook usage mark class differences among America's youth. While Facebook tends to attract middle-class kids, MySpace seems to be more popular among teenagers from ethnic, working-class and other marginalized social groups (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 123).

2.3.5 Reputation

Reputation creates trust

Reputation and trust allow us to engage in basic activities in society. We depend on others to engage in transactions with us, to employ us, and to listen to us. As social activities move online they require trust- and reputation-building in the virtual environment. (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 6-181).

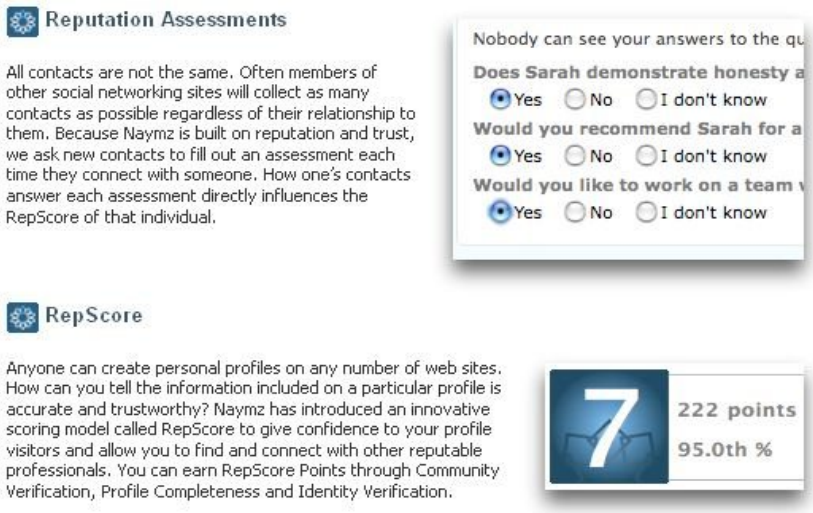
Real vs online values

In 2007, Britain's Information Commissioner estimated that nearly 5 million young people in the UK had online profiles featuring content that could, if consulted by universities or potential employers, damage their higher education career prospects (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 79; Information Commissioner's Office). This example reminds us of our responsibility to sensitize children and adolescents to the reputation risks of an online life. Much more though, it demonstrates the lag between the openness of the Net Natives and the privacy norms of the preceding generations whose social performance is mostly dictated by a cleaner, more conscious separation of the private from the public self. This lag between real and online values can still produce serious consequences – especially in the form of tainted reputation. Extensive narcissistic self-exhibition can make one a star on one's social network, but it can also damage one's standing in a professional environment (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 81). It won't be long, however, before most of us will have a digital trail in our past. When that day comes, a new generation of CEOs and HR managers, unburdened by outdated norms, will have a refreshingly different attitude towards recruitment, probably challenging those candidates that have a low search engine ranking and little information available online (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 91).

Reputation systems

The more online media empower Social Collaboration and civil participation between people who have never met before, the more computer-mediated trust systems will grow in importance. Google lists those Web sites first which have the most links pointing towards them – an implicit form of a recommendation system. Naymz.com is a professional social networking platform that allows users to network with other users and at the same time provides utilities for online reputation management. Other online reputation management tools include platforms like LinkedIn, reputationdefender.com, trackur.com, brandseye.com or google.com/alerts. Online brokers such as eBay already strongly rely on proprietary reputation systems to help their clients judge the trustworthiness of transaction partners (Rheingold 2002, 114f). eBay users "may never buy an item from the seller again, but if they share their opinions about this seller on the Feedback Forum, a meaningful history of the seller will be constructed (...) Through the mediation of a reputation system, assuming buyers provide and rely upon feedback, isolated interactions take on attributes of a long term relationship. In terms of building trust, a vast boost in the quantity of information compensates for significant reduction in its quality" (Resnick et al. as cited in Rheingold 2002, 125). Reputation systems require

three properties in order to function: First, the identities of the transaction partners must be long-lived, whether or not they are pseudonyms, in order to create an expectation of future interaction. Second, feedback about interactions and translations must be available for future inspection by others. Third, people must pay enough attention to reputation ratings to base their decision on them (Rheingold 2002, 126).



Source: www.naymz.com/about.action?section=compare

2.4 Online Social Networks

Complex social networks have always existed, but recent Social Media have afforded their emergence as a dominant form of social organization (after tribes, hierarchies, and markets) (Rheingold 2002, 57). According to Sociologist Barry Wellmann, it is easier for individuals to connect with multiple social milieus where people can change fluidly from network to network, using their communication media to contact the social network needed for each moment (Rheingold 2002, 195). As we have seen in chapter 2.3.2, the composition of our "friends" network has become a key identity signature. "It's a social barometer that validates self-esteem and confers status. It allows us – if we have loads of "friends" – to project ourselves into the cyberworld with greater self-confidence" (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 41). Indeed, in the virtual world, hyper-friendship inflation doesn't seem to have any limits.

Is there a maximum number of friends that any one person can reasonably claim to have? Yes, there seems to be a cognitive limit to any one person's close circle of friends. It's called Dunbar's Law – named after British anthropologist Robin Dunbar. In the early 1990s he calculated, based on a complex analysis of non-human primates and the

size of the human neocortex, that the maximum number of people with whom any human being can maintain stable social relationships is about 150; and that the core circle of friends with whom anyone can maintain "intense" relations generally does not exceed a dozen people (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 48).

Weak vs strong ties

If the differential between 12 and 150 separates close friends from acquaintances, what about those who belong in the group beyond Dunbar's number? Extending these categories beyond 150, as we shall see, has meaningful consequences, not only for individuals but also for organizations. We are referring here to the often-discussed distinction between "strong" and "weak" ties (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 49).

In his ground-breaking 1973 essay called "The Strength of Weak Ties", American sociologist Mark Granovetter argued that "weak ties" frequently play important social roles in our lives, even though, in many instances, we hardly know these people. Granovetter's definition of "weak ties" is social relationships characterized by infrequent contact, an absence of emotional closeness and no history of reciprocal favors. In other words, you know who they are, but you don't really know them. Granovetter's finding is that we rely on "weak tie" connections much more often than we think. Classic examples of these "weak tie" networks are "old boy" networks, alumni allegiances, secret societies and other loose-knit cliques (Granovetter as cited in Fraser and Dutta 2008, 49-50). Collecting online "friends" is therefore not merely a hollow ritual for the vain, insecure and narcissistic. Those who know how to tap into social network capital will gain advantages. Those who do not, will not (Rheingold 2002, 195).

2.5 The Diffusion of Power and Innovation

2.5.1 Horizontal Diffusion of Power

"Social interaction is not an end in itself. We socially interact to achieve goals. And the achievement of goals implies a power relationship. Traditional forms of power, especially in organizations, are exercised through centralized, top-down, command-and-control systems of domination" (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 23). The classic example of institutional power is the modern nation-state, formally defined as a sovereign exercising a monopoly of legitimate power over a defined territory (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 201). In the virtual world, power is shifting from institutions to networks, from hierarchies to heterarchies, from bureaucracies to individuals, from center to periphery, from bordered

territories to cyberspace (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 2). While institutional power is generally authoritative, intensive and exercised through coercion, network power is diffused, extensive and exercised through cooperation (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 200). This challenge to centralized organizations has well been demonstrated by Barack Obama and his team who used Social Media as an integral element of the presidential campaign: my.barackobama.com allowed electoral mobilization, fundraising and voter feedback to become more direct and effective. As we could witness, his team understood that power is shifting away from political organizations towards networked people (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 7).

There is no doubt that networked social power and the horizontal dynamics of the Web are challenging the archaic logic of vertical power structures. By drawing the parallel to medieval forms of social interaction and organization INSEAD researchers Matthew Fraser and Soumitra Dutta depict that the resurgence of networked power today comes after a long dormancy of several centuries during which centralized institutions have been the pervasive and dominant forms of social organization. In their view we are witnessing a critical "e-rupture" point in which neomedieval forms of networked loyalty and social organization emerge (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 10ff) – shifting power from states to local and global networks, namely to non-governmental organizations, foundations, religions, cults, mafias and so on. An interesting indicator that underlines this development is the fact that more and more companies, such as galaxyadvisors (www.galaxyadvisors.com), provide services based on the analysis of Social Networking structures.

2.5.2 Horizontal Diffusion of Innovation

Like power, innovation is evolving more and more from horizontal networks. Companies, governments and other organizations are increasingly using software tools like Wikis and polling systems to foster the formation of collective intelligence, open innovation (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 2, 247) and "entrench the values of democracy in corporate DNA – namely mechanisms for accountability" (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 253). Charles Leadbeater, an associate at the UK-based think tank Demos, writes in his book "We-think": "Our preoccupation in the century to come will be how to create and sustain mass innovation economy in which the central issue will be how more people can collaborate more effectively in creating new ideas." (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 247). The fact

remains that, despite growing enthusiasm about Web based peer-to-peer innovation, open innovation tools such as Atizo or Neighborhood America have not yet benefited from a widespread "buy-in" in most corporations and government bureaucracies. Fraser & Dutta nicely frame this dilemma: "In the short term, Web 2.0 will continue to be regarded in the same way that many contemplate heaven: everybody wants to get there, but nobody wants to die first. Social facts tend to race ahead of institutionalized values" (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 256).

3 E-Democracy – Definitions and Foundation

Decentralization of Sovereignty

The Internet can change democratic processes and institutions by overcoming physical distances, allowing for the virtualization of organizations, political networks and in general by facilitating the horizontal diffusion of power and innovation described above (Hofmann 2002). The monopoly of centralized states and parties on identity construction and social mobilization is being increasingly challenged by competing networks as new forms of networked loyalty and social organization emerge and take hold (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 16-35). With approximately 300 million users, Facebook's vast global population already surpasses that of the United States of America. And whereas the old media have contributed to the construction of a national identity, the new Internet based media significantly catalyze the creation of post national identities. The effect of the Web has therefore also been described as "decentralization of sovereignty" (Hofmann 2002).

Re-inventing representation

In the following sections we will analyze how political players are trying to harness this power shift and how governmental institutions are trying to counter the progressive abstinence of people from political processes by institutionalizing Web-based techniques such as e-voting, e-consultation, e-petitioning or e-discussion forums to (re)integrate the citizens into the policy-making process (Parvez and Ahmed 2006; Breindl and Francq 2008; Trechsel 2004). The often described lack of trust towards government and democratic institutions, the perceived isolation and unresponsiveness of politicians might indeed be countered with Web 2.0 tools. Coleman even points out the need of "re-inventing representation" as one of the most important functions of e-democracy with the implementation of a five-way information flow: Government to citizen, citizen to government, representative to citizen, citizen to representative and citizen to citizen (Stephens et al. 2006; Breindl and Francq 2008; Coleman 2003)

E-democracy offers new possibilities for governments to cope with the need of responsiveness and inclusion. However, this means that "government and elected representatives must not be outsiders to e-democratic initiatives. They should learn to understand them, participate within them and respond to them" (Coleman 2003, 154). Without this effort of engaging in an interactive communication citizens will not be encouraged to

participate. E-democracy should therefore create opportunities for all interests to be heard but also give voice to all citizens who normally would not take part in the political process. "There would be little point in utilizing new channels of communication in order to hear from the same people who have tended to be most vocal in traditional consultations" (Coleman 2003, 157). So it is not only about an amplification but more about an inclusion of those who have not participated at all before. The Obama Administration has successfully implemented this principles with shifting and complementing their policy-making into the online world. As we will be shown in a later section, the premise of interactive communication and integration of the various stakeholders into the political process for a transparent and responsive government has gone one step further with the platform my.barackobama.com.

Before we turn to the best practices, however, we will first take a look at the cornerstones of e-democracy.

Definition e-democracy

According to Trechsel et al. (Trechsel 2004, 31) we define e-democracy as the use of ICT which empowers citizens to hold politicians accountable for their actions and facilitates a way of communication between political representatives and citizens, thus making the representatives more responsive.

Depending on the aspect of democracy being promoted, e-democracy can employ different techniques for (a) increasing the transparency of the political process and providing informational openness, for (b) improving the quality of opinion formation by opening new spaces of discussion, deliberation and strengthen civic education and for (c) enhancing the direct involvement and participation of citizens.

3.1 Transparency and Information

Transparency leads to political engagement

According to Lauth (2004, 87), informational openness is a precondition for transparency. Information should be understandable, accessible and fast. Accessibility of information is crucial to expand governmental transparency and thus democracy (Breindl and Francq 2008, 17). Transparency ensures a sound basis for preference-forming of the citizens (Lauth 2004, 335). Furthermore, as some authors state, information about political issues leads to political engagement through enhancing political knowledge (Vissers and Quintelier 2009). Political knowledge again allows citizens to better evaluate political issues, candidates and the work of institutions (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Kim,

Scheufele & Shanahan, 2005; Pasek et al. cited in Vissers and Quintelier 2009, 3). Literature on the subject indicates high expectations for the media as knowledge transmitters. However, if unidirectional information is provided without letting the citizen take part in the political process, information alone will not increase citizen participation (Breindl and Francq 2008, 17).

Tightrope walk between accessibility and information overload

On the Internet, distribution of information is simplified. The premise of supplying fast and accessible information is theoretically fulfilled, thus there is a potential for e-democracy. Citizens can find political content on different resources such as party websites, platforms provided by the government, different news-sites or discussion forums. Furthermore, the Internet allows for publication of information from minorities or citizens which would not have the possibilities to utter their view in an offline public. Obtaining political information, however, requires efforts from citizens that should not be underestimated (see chapter 2.2 on the Digital Divide). As will be seen in a later section, internet-based instruments such as the Swiss voting advice application Smartvote help to inform citizens about the political landscape and thus contribute to the increase of civic literacy.

3.2 Opinion Formation through Discussion and Deliberation

As shown in the previous section, access to information is crucial for clarifying alternatives and forming preferences. Relevant information or issues will be taken up and discussed *before* the final decision-making (Bockmühl 2008, 127). In the ideal case, political decision-making relies very much on a *deliberative discussion;* an authority free discourse where everyone can participate as long as the discourse is based on rational arguments (Kriesi, 234). Normatively spoken, this is one basic premise which legitimizes political decision-making and integrates all citizen groups into the decision-making process. Important about this fact for democracies or political actors is that *all* inputs of different groups have to be taken into consideration for problem-solving. In particular, inputs from groups which do not belong directly to the established opinion leaders and decision-makers ought to be transmitted to the political actors. Therefore the deliberation process does give minorities the opportunity to discuss and articulate their interests as well.

Four conceptions of deliberation

According to Button/Mattson (1999, 613), deliberation can have different positive impacts. They define four conceptions of deliberation: Deliberation can encourage political learning; this simply by providing the citizens with information through public discussion. With deliberative discussions citizens and political actors can come to a consensus. Furthermore discussions of this kind can have direct political results such as holding politicians accountable for their goals. Deliberation in a fourth conception can also mean to overcome political disagreements or conflictual positions. As Button/Mattson point out, the political process is less defined as "mutual deliberation and public political judgement" by the citizens in *representative* democracies as it is in *direct* democracies. In representative democracies deliberation is likely to be entrusted to the representatives. However, some level of deliberation is also needed in representative democracies since citizens have to articulate their interests and concerns towards their representatives (Button and Mattson 1999, 1).

Internet as a new public sphere for deliberation

For modern societies mass media have become the most important form of public sphere replacing direct encounters as well as traditional discursive arenas. Actors of the civil society are dependent on mass media to publish their interests and concerns. They can only influence the political process indirectly by exploiting mass media (Zimmermann 2006, 23). Media therefore fulfill the functions of enabling deliberation (by providing a forum for discussion), of giving voice to public opinion and of controlling the political rulers (Graber 2003, 143). However, the entry barrier into the mainstream media for not yet established actors is quite high. Therefore the Internet and its different applications is often seen as a big enabler for these actors regarding the chance to gain a voice. As Breindl puts it: "For many optimists, the cyberspace constitutes a new public sphere where exchanges transcend geographical, social and cultural boundaries; a place, without central control, where any individual is free to express his opinion and thoughts" (Breindl and Francq 2008, 18). Various discussion forums on the Internet allow to debate on relevant political issues, such as for example in the online newspaper The Huffington Post (www.huffingtonpost.com). Furthermore, a variety of blogs and wikis incorporate this two-directional way of communicating; at least by providing the necessary toolset. However, although the theoretical inclusion of all groups to discuss politically relevant issues as well as the necessary provision of information to discuss is given by the Internet, the quality of discussions often does not fit the ideal type of a deliberative discourse. Furthermore, according to a rather critical view, the Internet can

lead to different segmented publicities ("echo chambers" (Sunstein 2007)) in which only certain people discuss certain topics instead of creating an open public sphere where all people take part in the discussion.

3.3 Participation and Online Decision Making

Political participation legitimizes democratic decisions

Political participation of citizens is crucial for democracies. It generates generally binding decisions and legitimizes democratic structures (Verba 1967, 56). Depending on the type of democracy the constituents have different opportunities to participate. According to Hagen (Hagen 1999, 74f), political participation consists of the collection of political information, discussion of relevant political issues, voting and political activities such as demonstrations, civic initiatives, participation in party activities etc. The political system frames (along with other factors) the opportunities of political participation. Participation in the political process depends considerably on people's resources and motivation as well as on the political structure (e.g. the existence of periodic elections) and the country's culture. Political skills, education and free information are a precondition for citizens to gain the necessary resources they need for effective participation (Verba 1967, 62). However, according to Bühlmann, Merkel and Wessels (2008), involvement in politics also fosters political skills and generates concern for collective problems.

Since the participation rate is rather low and diminishing in Western democracies, the possibilities offered by the Internet are seen as chance to reverse this trend (Breindl and Francq 2008, 16). As has been shown in the previous sections, the Internet can lower the barrier to search for information and start discussions with different political actors. Furthermore, Web 2.0 applications and platforms offer a variety of opportunities to facilitate participation, like engaging in communities, sharing information etc. Governments trying to take advantage of these new possibilities start to do so by providing e-consultation, e-petitioning or e-voting websites to foster citizen participation. However, it is not yet clear, if equal access (see chapter 2.2. on Digital Divide) automatically facilitates the inclusion of different people into the political process. It is often stated, rather, that only people who are already politically interested and engaged in their offline life will benefit and participate online (Milner 2009; Breindl and Francq 2008, 23).

4 Social Media and E-Democracy

Social Media empower political action

The overview of the Social Media segmentation (cp. Section 2.3.1) highlights the diversity and abundance of available Web 2.0 platforms and applications. Many of these Social Media serve basic purposes of e-democracy by enabling participative and political action as defined in section 3 of this paper. While some of them were built for exactly this reason, others do not specifically target a respective audience but are being used accordingly.

When examining the Social Media landscape according to its political potential, the relevant sites can be divided into two main categories: The ones that were built or owned top-down by governments or administration and the ones built or owned bottom-up by citizens or the civil society. In the following two chapters a few platforms are presented as representative fulfillers of the aspects of democracy as stated in section 3. Not all platforms serve all these aspects but most of them incorporate more than one of them.

Overview top-down vs bottom-up platforms. Graphic: Gregory Gerhardt

4.1 Top-down Platforms

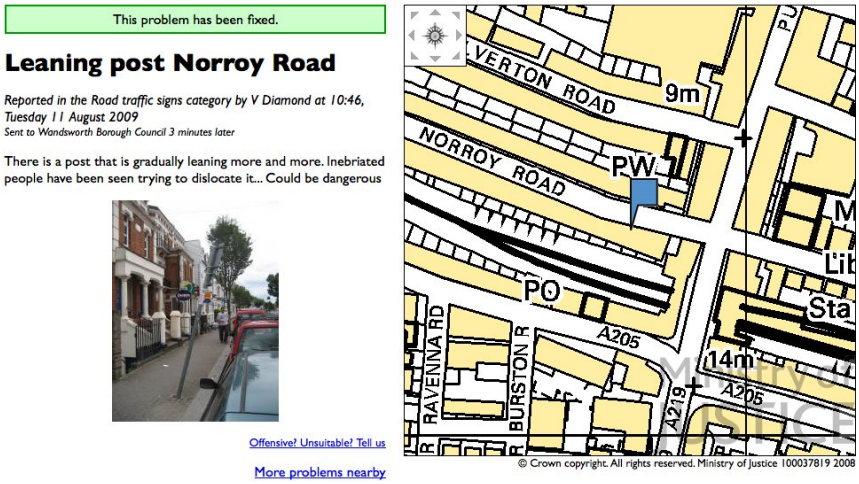
Top-down platforms are run by administrations

Since the emergence of Web 2.0 and the notion that e-democracy could improve the communication between citizens and their representatives, a lot of "top-down" political platforms, initiated either by politicians or governments, have gone live. Some of them have project character and are still to be improved while others are already fully functional and well established. Sites like epetitionen.bundestag.de or www.number10.gov-.uk show that politicians and governments are not only aware of the promotional power of online media, but also willing to provide citizens with more possibilities to hold politicians and governments accountable. What is remarkable about some of these top-down platforms is that they enhance citizens' involvement and participation by inviting

them to contribute to the policy-making process as well as to other forms of political action. These sites give voice to the citizens and therewith allow for open innovation and participation.

4.1.1 Reporting

Fixmystreet (www.fixmystreet.com) represents a type of website that enforces governmental accountability and responsiveness and at the same time enhances participation and transparency. On this privately run, but government funded platform, citizens can report defects in their neighborhood to the local administration by locating them on a map. Contributors can enter the issue directly on the website and track its status until the problem has been fixed by the municipality.



Source: www.fixmystreet.com/report/69193

4.1.2 Petitioning

E-petition sites such as epetitionen.bundestag.de or www.number10.gov.uk allow citizens to campaign for specific concerns and to mobilize other people for the cause. All petitions are listed on a website and taken up by the government. In the UK it is even possible to send petitions directly to the Prime Minister (PM). The government or in the case of the UK the PM provides a response to all e-petitions and, by doing so, increases the transparency of and information on the political process.

There are some remarkable cases where these online services managed to mobilize large masses: One of the biggest petitions in Germany, for example, has been entered online via the e-Petitionen website of the Bundestag (parliament of Germany). 134,000 people signed an e-petition against Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Wo-

men and Youth Ursula von der Leyen's law on Internet regulation. The mobilization of other people to campaign against censorship in the Internet was a signal of an evolving movement of "Digital Natives", ready to fight for a political cause with other instruments than the classical political ones. A movement that normally would absent itself from the traditional party-guided political process (Prüfer 2009, 13).


Petition: Datenschutz - Durchsetzung des Auskunftsanspruchs vom 12.09.2009

Petitionsdetails

Hauptpetent	Ende Mitzeichnungsfrist	Stand der Bearbeitung	Anzahl Mitzeichnungen Neue =	Forenbeiträge Neue =
Bergt, Matthias	18.11.2009	in der Mitzeichnung	1255 Mitzeichner Petition mitzeichnen	11 Beiträge neue Beiträge per RSS

Andere informieren

Source: epetitionen.bundestag.de/index.php?action=petition;sa=details;petition=7180

While Germany's and the UK's platforms for e-petitioning provide a top-down way of entering e-petitions, there are also a lot of Web 2.0 applications and platforms built bottom-up like care2 or change.org. Social movements and the civil society can be rather successful in using ICT to collect signatures and mobilize people for their cause. Nevertheless, as Trechsel et al. state in their report: "(...) there is no reason to believe (…) that e-petitions will become popular in countries which do not have a tradition of such political practices" (Trechsel 2004, 49). Two other important preconditions for mobilizing people online are issue awareness and timing. The emotionally driven debate to show solidarity with Swiss Federal Council Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf prompted 126,422 people to sign a petition online on the website of alliance F[1] within three weeks. On the otherhand, a debate driven by the Swiss Christian Democrats (CVP) concerning ICT-issues has only mobilized 1,500 signatures 900 of which were collected online (Studer 2008, 7).

4.1.3 Open Innovation and E-Consultation

As much as the Web is bringing a horizontal diffusion of power, it is creating a horizontal diffusion of innovation. It can be predicted that when Web 2.0 adoption reaches a tipping point, the major impact in corporations and governments will be a diffusion of power towards employees and consumers (Prahalad as cited in Fraser and Dutta 2008, 246).

1 Alliance of swiss women organizations

> *The most important feature of Linux, however, was not technical but sociological. Until the Linux development, everyone believed that any software as complex as an operating system had to be developed in a carefully coordinated way by a relatively small, tightly knit group of people. […] Linux evolved in a completely different way. From nearly the beginning, it was rather casually hacked on by huge number of volunteers coordinating only through the Internet. Quality was maintained not by rigid standards or autocracy but by the naively simple strategy of releasing every week and getting feedback from hundreds of users within days, creating a sort of rapid Darwinian selection on the mutations introduced by developers (Rheingold 2002, 51ff)*

Governmental institutions can increase public outreach, involvement and accountability with open innovation almost as easily as corporations or software developers. A good example is neighborhoodamerica.com's virtual townhall "Unify". This product allows governments to openly innovate with a top-down system that invites citizens to collect, group and rate ideas that are being submitted by fellow citizens. The services allow for a better understanding and insight into the community's preferences and ideas and at the same time increase accountability and identification. E-consultation platforms, as for example "ask Bristol" (www.viewfinder.public-i.tv/askbristol.php) can focus on very different issues and include different features for participation, like discussion forums, chats etc. Despite all technical progress it has to be noted that participation on the platforms provided is still at a low level and dominated by males and opinion leaders, regardless of the politicians responsiveness (Trechsel 2004, 48).

4.2 Bottom-up Platforms

Bottom-up platforms are run by civil society

Bottom-up platforms like Facebook or Twitter contribute to e-democracy by facilitating possibilities of participation, networking, collaboration and mobilization. As we have recently seen in Iran they allow for political exchange and propaganda, the organization of events, fundraising, goal-oriented networking and more. With a wealth of social functionalities such as wikis, discussion boards or polls these platforms can obviously improve the quality of opinion formation, deliberation and discussion. As discussed above, the potential of bottom up platform for e-democracy is beeing recognized by a variety of

politicians. Bottom up platforms do indeed host the lion's share of political exchange and interaction.

4.2.1 Party Communication and Campaigning

Channels for bottom-up communication can be rather traditional websites used by individual politicians, parties or governments. Their main purpose is to serve their voters and citizens with information.

Depending on the integration and aggregation of blogs and microblogs, Social Networking sites, commenting functionalities or polls, these political websites can grow far beyond an informational purpose. The richer they are, the more they tend to support participation and discussion and therefore clear the way for political deliberation. However, as Jackson and Lilleker show, political parties in Great Britain use the Web 2.0 for some kind of interactivity with their voters and citizens but it is still "low-level interactivity". They offer little space for discussion or the development of ideas. Instead, it seems that "[p]olitical parties still seek to a significant extent to control the communication process and to inform rather than interact" (Jackson and Lilleker 2009, 232-250).

Taking a look at Switzerland

These findings go along with a survey conducted in Switzerland in February 2009. According to a eDemokratie.ch blog entry, (www.edemokratie.ch/archives/717) Swiss Federal Government Parties have only just started to harness the potential of Web 2.0 applications and platforms (Schenkel).

The **CVP Schweiz** is represented with various groups on Facebook, but none of them is officially managed by the party secretary. One of the more popular groups consists of 321 members. Also, the CVP is the only Swiss Federal Government Party which has no official presence on Twitter.

The **FDP. Die Liberalen** are present on Facebook with 726 members as well as on Twitter www.Twitter.com/FDP_Liberalen, with 70 followers. Confusion is caused by the Twitter account www.Twitter.com/fdpschweiz which has slightly more followers but ist not supported by the FDP.

Source: www.edemokratie.ch/archives/717

The **SP Schweiz** as well as some of their parliamentarians are present on Facebook and Twitter www.Twitter.com/spschweiz.

The official Facebook-group of SP Schweiz has 782 fans and the most popular unofficial group has 787 members. The mobilizing potential of SP groups concentrating on specific issues, like the "Nicht mit meinen Steuergeldern – UBS Boni streichen!", which

Source: www.edemokratie.ch/archives/717

counts 7000 members, is also remarkable. On Twitter, the SP can only rely on 65 followers.

At the beginning of 2009, the **SVP Schweiz** has also opened a Facebook account, which is however not yet part of its official communication strategy. The secretary is still ana-

lyzing how to integrate Social Media communication into their communication strategy. For now, 685 members are part of the official Facebook group whereas the unofficial group "Für Anhänger und Sympathisanten der SVP" counts 2195 members. On Twitter the party has 82 followers, which is a plus of 68 followers since the last Survey on January 2009.

#Ranglisten

Top 50 Cities

1.	Zürich	925
2.	Bern	281
3.	Genève	175
4.	Basel	156
5.	Lausanne	143
6.	Luzern	59
7.	St. Gallen	58
8.	Winterthur	52

Top 100 Followers

1.	davos	1176625
2.	laufsportcoach	15814
3.	WWF	13669
4.	CERN	12367
5.	swissmiss	11006
6.	mirkohumbert	8845
7.	DavisSimon	8819
8.	YavinKrugier	8619

Top Applications

28.8%	web
10.3%	TweetDeck
9.8%	Tweetie
6.8%	twitterfeed
6.1%	TweetDeck
5.6%	Tweetie
3.8%	TwitterFon
3.5%	twitterfeed

Source: blog.swisstweets.ch/?p=25#Ranglisten

All Swiss political parties have increased their number of Twitter followers since February 2009, which now almost reaches the 200 mark. However, this amount of followers is still very low. A comparison with a ranking of the top 100 Twitter users as displayed on the swisstweets.ch blog (blog.swisstweets.ch/?p=25#rangliste) shows that the World Economic Forum Twitter account twitter.com/davos has over 1 million followers (Schweizer Twitter-Charts September 2009). This also shows that all Swiss Federal Government Parties are still at the beginning of employing Web 2.0 applications and platforms for their communication and have not yet adapted their strategy. Coupled to this is the fact that none of the parties has registered their trademark on Facebook which would allow them to create personal Facebook URLs and prevent registrations containing the same trademark.

Taking a look at Sweden and Australia

Contrary to these findings, Boyd states that new Swedish and Australian e-democracy parties not only offer an extensive "architecture of participation", they also use the "community's democratic structure" to involve the citizens and start discussions. These parties want to involve all citizens, not only party members, in the policy-making process and work out a collectively agreed agenda. Boyd (2008, 182ff) distinguishes two types of e-democracy parties: the proxy politician systems and the deliberative community systems.

The proxy politician systems involve the citizens mainly in the decision-making stage of the policy-making process. The notion that the public should make the final legally binding decisions is inherent to the basic orientation of such parties. As a consequence, the elected politicians act simply on behalf of the citizens, i.e. as proxy. These systems give citizens a variety of possibilities to participate such as e-voting tools and e-consultation tools which leave citizens with enough space to voice their opinion and discuss and decide on relevant political issues (Boyd 2008, 182).

The deliberative community system takes a more integrated approach. It involves citizens in all the different stages of the policy-making process such as the agenda setting, the decision-making stage and beyond. This furthers the active participation of all citizens and stakeholders in the policy-making process. In contrast to the proxy politician systems its goal is not that the final decisions are made by citizens, its focus is rather on deliberation and community building of the citizens. Discussion forums, virtual communities, e-panels, e-petitioning, chat rooms, suggestion tools for planning procedures, surveys and e-deliberative polling are the main tools provided on the platforms of this e-participation system (Boyd 2008, 183).

Taking a look at the US

US President Barack Obama too tries to involve the citizens. The platform my.barackobama.com uses different e-democracy techniques and Web 2.0 applications thus making a contribution to a variety of aspects of democracy. The website enhances participation by mobilizing people to join the platform, organize events and connect with other citizens. The government again, top-down, tries to connect people and decentralizes the problem-solving into the communities. Several best practices and helping tools guide citizens and show them how to engage. Contests like the actual health reform video challenge, for example, are an innovative way of mobilizing and engaging people.

Citizens are asked to speak up for Obamas legislation plan. They can do so by sending a video message or call representatives telling them their opinion. This reflects the responsiveness of the Obama administration towards their supporters. Also with tweets as "Congress knows where I stand. Now they need to hear from you: bit.ly/1a5uDl#hc09" they are taking the citizens seriously and mobilize them to sign online letters for local representatives to support Barack Obama's health reform.

A lot of information about the actual legislation plan, actions and important political issues are displayed on the website. Different representatives comment on the blog about news, campaigns and more. Citizens stay informed and administrations work seems more transparent. Of course the website is also connected to a variety of Social Networking sites and Web 2.0 applications like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, Digg etc. This signalizes the will to give all citizens different forms of participation tools to stay connected with the Obama administration.

4.2.2 Political Networking

An investigation into the traffic-reporting website Alexa at the beginning of September 2009 revealed that over the last three months an average of a little over 21 per cent of the global Internet users have visited Facebook at least once each day (Facebook.com - Site Info from Alexa). According to Alexa, Facebook is currently the second-most visited website on the Internet, just behind the search engine Google (Alexa Top 500 Global Sites). In July 2009 Facebook reported that its site had reached the number of 250 million active users, just after five and a half years in existence (Facebook | Timeline). Within Facebook we can find a variety of different groups, dedicated to mobilizing people for a political cause. A rather successful example from Switzerland is the "Bye Bye Billag" group, which wants to launch an initiative against the Billag AG, the agency empowered by the Confederation to collect radio and television fees.

The "Bye Bye Billag" group has more than 41,000 members. If each of these members collected only three signatures the popular initiative (Volksinitiative)[2] could be launched. But it is still not evident that people joining a virtual group would engage for their cause in the real world too. Remarkable about this example is the fact that political concerns and issues which are discussed online on different platforms can gain considerably more attention than on the "real" political agenda. However, the success still depends mainly on traditional political actors like, in this case ,the media, parties or the Price Supervisor (Preisüberwacher)[3] taking on the issue (nn 2009, 15). Founded in 2006,

2 "Citizens may request that the People decide on an amendment they want to make to the Constitution. (...) For such an initiative to be accepted, the signatures of 100 000 voters who support the proposal must be collected within 18 months" (Bund kurz erklärt 2009).

3 "The price supervisor can examine prices determined by cartels or companies with a strong market position to prevent and eliminate abuses. The price supervisor deals in particular with charges related to the supply and waste disposal system (e.g. power charges, gas charges, waterage, waste disposal fees, sewage levies and cable television fees), to the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, to the post office and telecommunications monopolies and to the healthcare system (e.g. drug prices, doctor's fees, hospital fees)" (www.ch.ch/private/00093/01611/01617/01674/index.html?lang=en).

the so-called micro-blogging site Twitter has developed into a key player when it comes to spreading news and rumors. In 140 (or less) character messages users can target a number of other users who have subscribed to these tweets. Having amassed quite a large usership, Twitter is now a Web service through which news travel fast, almost in real-time. Recent events in 2009 like the death of pop icon Michael Jackson or the emergency landing of US Airways Flight 1549 on the Hudson River in New York have almost instantaneously broken on Twitter, beating traditional media outlets, thus undermining their authority and contributing to altering the way in which news are published. The fast-growing trend encouraged more and more politicians to spread political news via Twitter. During political campaigns Twitter users from the political arena can increase their followers. Not only information about the actual campaign, but also "exclusive" information can be spread via Twitter. So did Tom Watson, former British "Minister for Digital Engagement", who announced his resignation on Twitter (Bieber 2009, 12).

Political communication through Twitter focuses mainly on national issues and is rarely transnational. Only a few projects concentrate on transnational European information for example TweetElect09 (Bieber 2009, 12). This platform collected Tweets about the European Parliament elections, its parties, politicians and generated statistics.

Facebook and Twitter represent two different types of Social Media which are relevant to the issues discussed in this report. While Facebook is a very classic social network which is mostly about staying in contact with friends, family and acquaintances, Twitter allows for a more anonymous approach to sending out messages to the World. The advantages of Facebook are 1) its far reach across the globe and across age groups and 2) the fact that most users use their real names and show their faces, thus potentially enabling Facebook profiles as some form of authentication tool in the future. The Facebook Connect application, which lets Facebook users login to other websites using their Facebook credentials, is already widely used, even by other major websites like the social news and bookmarking website Digg or commercial blogs like TechCrunch, The Huffington Post or Gawker, which require their users to be logged in to be able to comment. Twitter on the other hand has proven to be an easy-to-use media outlet which can reach large numbers of Internet users in a very short time, thus carrying a lot of potential among the white noise of rumors and gossip.

4.2.3 Social Networking and Media Sharing

YouTube enables its users to upload, watch, share and rate videos on its platform. Different categories allow visitors to search for specific content, like single videos or channels www.YouTube.com/channels?s=mv&t=m&g=0&c=29. Channels for non-profit activism or political channels have huge potential, considering the large usership of Youtube. These channels enable its administrators to inform the viewers about a cause or a political event and even mobilize people to support a campaign or person which is promoted on the channel. Angela Merkel, Germany's Chancellor, for example, informs her voters about important issues in a weekly videocast broadcast on Youtube (YouTube - Kanal von cdutv).

An interesting aspect of YouTube and other media sharing sites is the fact that any content found can be tagged and thus described with a few keywords. All resources tagged with the same keywords can then be searched and seen by other users. Breindl and Francq discuss an interesting point about this social indexing with regard to e-democracy: "(...) any Internet user can participate in the organization of knowledge on the Internet. This decentralized vision of Web indexing is thus comparable to the idea of e-democracy where, ideally, every citizen contributes to define the political priorities." (Breindl and Francq 2008, 21)

4.2.4 Spontaneous Social Action

Spontaneous Social Action evolves from networked power

Twitter, Facebook, Amazee and other Social Media can spontaneously mobilize Social Action with measurable utilitarian value. The Web lowers the bar for involvement, dramatically dropping the costs for acquiring potential contributors and supporters. Once a group comes together around a cause or goal, they are already wired for mass communications (Watson 2009, 37).

> *"New social tools are […] lowering the costs of coordinating group action. The easiest place to see this change is in activities that are too difficult to be pursued with traditional management but that have become possible with new forms of coordination" (Clay Shirky as cited in Watson 2009, 37).*

A new and interesting initiative, for example, are Carrot Mobs. Based on the site carrotmobs.com they organize a special form of so-called flash mobs. Carrot mobs take a non-institutional approach and mobilize critical consumers to explicitly buy from companies

which are socially, ecologically and/or politically correct. This organized mass buying is seen as a way to reward these companies instead of simply calling for boycotts on the black sheep in the trade.

Interesting about this site is the fact that although the idea was to organize single mobs for improving sustainability thinking, the site fulfills many functions which are important for democracies: Besides encouraging people to participate for a cause respectively mobilizing consumers to buy products in one selected store, Carrot Mobs further discussion and opinion formation. These mobs promote all aspects of democracy like the MyBarackObama platform, but they are radically organized bottom-up. The idea opens new spaces of information and discussion and holds the store owners accountable to invest the increased revenue (resulting from the additional buyers) for sustainable solutions. There are currently many regional Carrot Mob platforms on which local initiatives are prepared. Of course they also make heavy use of channels like Twitter and Facebook to push their cause.

The potential of new media to organize flash mobs and the impact of the latter on politics can also be seen in the recently organized flash mob regarding a campaign rally appearance of German Chancellor Angela Merkel: In the beginning there was a single photograph on Flickr depicting a campaign poster by Merkel's Christian Democrat party CDU with the announcement of the rally appearance of Merkel in Hamburg and a user who informed all his virtual friends via Twitter about this picture. The clue: The picture did not only show the official poster but also the hand-written supplement "und alle so: Yeaahh" ("and everybody goes like: Yeaahh") next to the Chancellor's official voting claim.

The popular German blogs Nerdcore and Spreeblick covered it and Twitter did the rest. A week later a mixed group of people would stand in the crowd of listeners in Hamburg shouting "Yeaahh" after each statement of the Chancellor. Of course these spontaneous performances have been videotaped and distributed through YouTube and other popular video platforms. And finally even the renowned German news show "Tagesthemen" aired a report about the "Yeaahh" meme.[4]

4 "The term **Internet meme** is a phrase used to describe a catchphrase or concept that spreads quickly from person to person via the Internet, much like an esoteric inside joke. The term is a reference to the concept of memes, although this concept refers to a much broader category of cultural information" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_meme)

Networked power requires collaboration to unfold

Spontaneous Social Action underscores a fundamental difference between institutional and network power (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 197). Networked power, however, requires collaboration to unfold. But how can cooperation emerge among "egoist" human beings without legal and centralized authority? What, for example, will keep us from flying on holiday to another continent, what will make us exchange our car for public transport or refrain from meat consumption to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and therewith slow down, or at least stabilize, the warming of our climate? American Economist Mancur Olson's notion of specific incentives is the key to answering this question (Rheingold 2002, xviii; Fraser and Dutta 2008, 207).

According to Olson, rational individuals on the one hand actively participate in collective action if there are specific incentives in the form of private benefits – in other words, if they are compensated; on the other hand they tend to do nothing and benefit as free-riders (Rheingold 2002, 32) if there is a rational interest to remain passive. This means that the bigger the group gets, the higher will be the costs and the lower the specific incentives are, thus making collective action less effective. This explains, argued Olson, why special-interest lobbies whose members have specific interests (big business, unions, single-issue groups) are generally more effective than widely organized common-good organizations (consumer and citizen groups). Consequently, the real danger to democracy, argued Olson, is not tyranny of the majority – but tyranny of the minority.

Olson's theory of collective action has obvious consequences for the themes explored in this paper. Since online social networks are, by definition, large and horizontally organized, the cost-benefit calculation does not, in theory, favor participation, cooperation and collaboration. Secondly, the high cost of socially organizing large groups would appear to be an obstacle to the mass collaboration benefits vaunted by Web 2.0 evangelists. If collective action is biased in favor of small groups, how can horizontal networks, complex organizations and democratic societies harness "collective smarts"? Why, for example, do some people devote so much time and effort to contributing long and well-considered entries in Wikipedia? And why are people willing to participate in social responsibility projects inside corporations despite the absence of specific financial incentive (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 207f)?

This is where the seemingly non-rational factor comes in. People cooperate with one another because they share common loyalties to their social settings – neighborhood, cor-

poration, legislature, democracy and so on. When social interaction among people is continuous over time, it reinforces a basic need for cooperation. In social networks, familiarity does not breed contempt, it reinforces loyalty – especially if we believe that we will continue interacting with these same people. Political scientist Robert Axelrod calls this the phenomenon the long "shadow of the future" (Fraser and Dutta 2008, 209). Traditionally this means that the importance of the next encounter between the same two individuals must be great enough to make defection an unprofitable strategy, and that the "players" have a large enough chance of meeting again. (Rheingold 2002, 36)

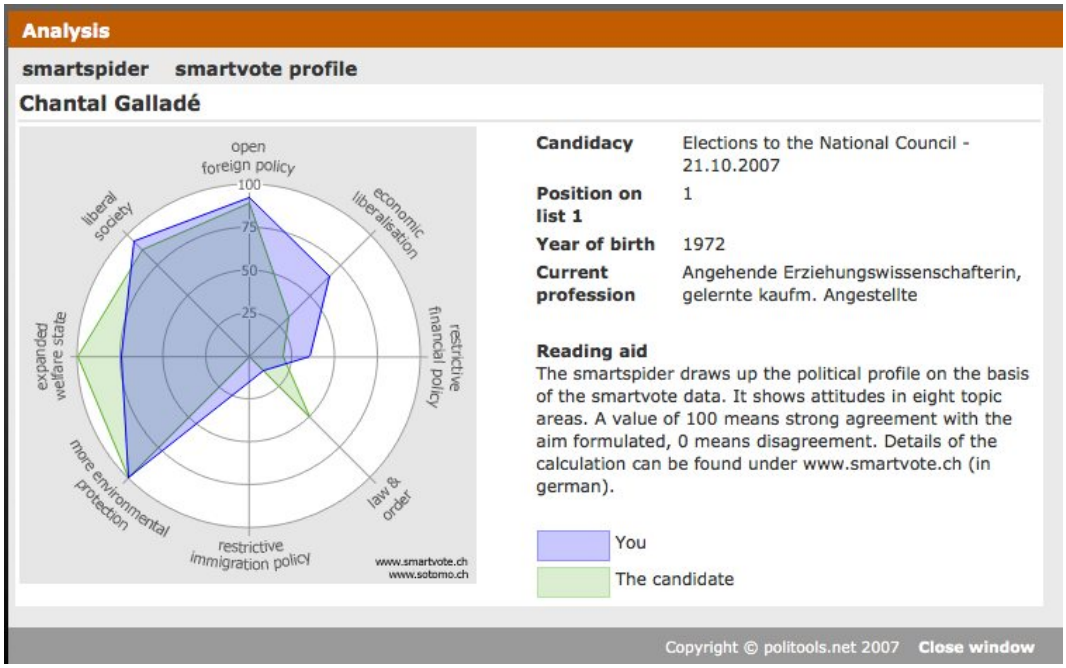
Cyberspace is bringing a new dimension to social behavior based on "bilateral pressure". All information that is being fed into the Web once is persistent, searchable, and can be consumed by invisible audiences across all space and time (boyd 2008, 126). This "digital trail" creates a new form of "pull effect" or in other words "peer-to-peer pressure" (Rheingold 2002, 37) in favor of collaborative behavior: Since everybody has a vote, reputation risks do not only become a growing preoccupation for organizations, but also for individuals. Like a corporate brand, personal "brands" can not only be damaged instantly and irreparably, but also built and improved proactively. Status and reputation on the Internet is a real-time, direct global democracy in action (Rheingold 2002, 127). Hence the online obsession with ratings, rankings and online reputation agents that sort out performing from non-performing, and collaborative from selfish actors. The concept of a personal brand is everywhere (Watson 2009, 18).

4.2.5 Voting Advice Applications (VAAs)

Platforms like Swiss-based Smartvote or Germany's Wahlomat improve civic literacy and provide information on politicians and parties running for office. These platforms serve as voting advice by giving voters some degree of orientation about the political profiles of each candidate and helps them to make their final decision about which candidate or party they should vote for.

To help the voters to their individual voting recommendation the platform Smartvote works with the "issue-matching module". To generate the political profiles each candidate running for office has to fill in a questionnaire of seventy questions about some of the important political issues. About six weeks before election day voters can login to the website and fill out the questionnaire. With the answers given, the system matches

them to different candidates which correspond best to the voters' political profile (Nadig and Fivaz 2009, 6).



Source: www.smartvote.ch

However, it is well possible that voters will still vote differently than the voting recommendation provided by VAAs or not vote at all. As the NZZ (Ladner and Fivaz 2006) puts it: crucial to the effectiveness of VAAs will be the implementation of e-voting. This would allow voters to transfer their online generated voting recommendation to a governmental e-voting platform and directly into a virtual ballot box.

4.3 Political Discussion

As stated in section 3.3, political discussion among citizens is crucial to legitimize political decisions. Although the Internet provides a lot of specific tools for political deliberation, such as politnetz.ch or wahlbistro.ch in Switzerland, these sites are not being used to their full potential. Looking at some bigger blogs and online media, there are some good examples where political discussion and deliberative exchange does occur. On DailyKos.com, firedoglake.com or the huffintonpost.com articles are often commented by hundreds of people. Deliberation is further spurred by the fact that here one can not only comment on the original article, but also on other comments. However, to keep up the quality of discussion, online reputation mechanisms will gain an important role in

the future. It can furthermore be said hat quality discussion hardly take place on platforms where boulevard topics gain the majority of interactions.

Perhaps the most cited example for discussion and deliberative exchange is Wikipedia. Charles Leadbeater argues that the power of Wikipedia is not in its content, but rather in the way it diffuses power: "As Wikipedia spreads around the world not only does it carry knowledge, it teaches habits of participation, responsibility and sharing. Wikipedia is not based on naïve faith in collectivism but on the collaborative exercise off individual responsibility" (Charles Leadbeater as cited in Fraser and Dutta 2008, 222).

5 Conclusion

The rapid growth of Internet usage and the rise of Social Media, from Facebook to Twitter and Xing to Youtube, has not only created new playing fields for communication and self-expression but also new forms of social behavior as well as societal and political engagement.

More and more people establish online profiles and interact on Social Networking sites. The digital trail that is created in cyberspace can be described as as a "digital body" which complements the physical one. Like in real life, it is assigned with most forms of social attributes we know from physical life.

More than in our physical life, however, online status is being conferred based on "immaterial" attributes such as expertise, information advantages or sizable and influential networks of online "friends". This democratization of status is being accompanied by new forms of privacy and reputation management.

Net Natives leave more and more of their personal information on the Web, shrinking their private self beyond the preceding generations. All of this public content is searchable and allows to draw conclusions on the person's or organization's reputation. The more online media empower Social Collaboration and civil as well as political participation between people that have never met before, the more online reputation, including the use of computer-mediated trust systems, will grow in importance.

Another finding is, that in the virtual world, power is shifting from institutions to networks and from bordered territories to cyberspace. As much as the Web allows to overcome geographical and hierarchical restrictions, it allows for a more direct communication between citizens and their democratic representatives.

The Internet allows for fast information gathering. This is important for political engagement as it can be assumed that political knowledge is an important prerequisite for political engagement. As much as society has to learn to find the relevant information and shelter itself from an information overload, it has to fight a Digital Divide by providing access and digital literacy to all walks of life. Actors from the political arena as well as national institutions need to engage in the fight to overcome the Digital Di-

vide, not only by providing widespread Broadband access, but also by increasing digital literacy.

Governments and democratic representatives especially will have to harness the opportunities of the collaborative Web and emancipate themselves from a old media to a Web 2.0 information policy. This can include the integration of Twitter or other microblogs, e-consultations, e-petitions and other forms of e-participation. The latter, however, is not just a question of technology but also about the shift towards a more open and collaborative culture. The more transparent online interaction will get, the more accountable politicians and governmental departments will be held.

It remains to be seen, how exactly the Web will change our democratic institutions and how Social Media can support policy makers in involving all those directly affected in online deliberation and decision-making. In this early stage it is also unclear if Social Media will create a more participative culture or if the pressure of information overload and the technology of the "instantly available" will rather create individualized and ignorant citizens incapable of commitment and deeper reflexion."

Would you like to contribute to our ongoing discussion? Please join our project on http://www.amazee.com/whitepaper-esociety-and-edemocracy.

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